



Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Hansard Verbatim Report

No. 44 – January 5, 1999



Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

Twenty-third Legislature

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS
1998**

June Draude, Chair
Kelvington-Wadena

Ned Shillington, Vice-Chair
Regina Northeast

Rod Gantefoer
Melfort-Tisdale

Jack Goohsen
Cypress Hills

Jack Hillson
North Battleford

Walter Jess
Redberry Lake

Mark Koenker
Saskatoon Sutherland

Violet Stanger
Lloydminster

Andrew Thomson
Regina South

Grant Whitmore
Saskatoon Northwest

Public Hearing: Health

The Chair: — We have a quorum here and we have a lot of officials here that look like they're ready to get going giving us lots of answers, so we'll start out by asking the deputy minister to introduce the officials with him this morning.

Mr. Hnatiuk: — Thank you, Madam Chair, and Happy New Year to all.

I have with me this morning my associate deputy, Steven Pillar, to my left; and next to me, acting assistant deputy minister Carol Klassen; and Rod Wiley, our executive director of finance and admin; and Barry Lacey, director of the integrated financial services unit. And behind me is Gord Nystuen and Shelley Lipon from SHIN, Saskatchewan Health Information Network agency.

The Chair: — Thank you very much and good morning. I think our Provincial Comptroller has additional people.

Mr. Paton: — Thanks, Madam Chair. I have with me today Lori Taylor, who's a manager in the financial management branch, and Lisa Healy, who's an analyst in that same branch.

The Chair: — Good morning, ladies. And also our Provincial Auditor has some people with him.

Mr. Strelieff: — Good morning and welcome to everyone.

With me today again are Fred Wendel, the assistant provincial auditor. Mike Heffernan, who leads our work in the health area. Bob Black, who tries to keep track of our work with this committee. Glen Nyhus, over there, he's going to be discussing our work on the SHIN projects. Jane Knox, who's going to be discussing our work on performance indicators and resource allocation within the department.

Lorianne Earis is over there, who by the way is moving to Humboldt soon to work with Schulte Industries, and she's going to be talking about our work in the district health board community. As well as Leanne Forgie, who's sitting over there as a new person in our office from Regina, a University of Regina admin grad and is in the Certified Management Accounting program with our office. That's all.

The Chair: — Good morning. Good morning. That's nice to hear this lady is moving to Humboldt because when you're working in Schulte's you're in my area.

Before we proceed, I'm going to read this statement by the Chair to the witnesses that are sitting here today.

Witnesses should be aware that when appearing before a legislative committee your testimony is entitled to have the protection of parliamentary privilege. The evidence you provide to this committee cannot be used against you as a subject of a civil action.

In addition, I wish to advise you that you are protected by section 13 of Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms which provides that:

A witness who testifies in any proceedings has the right not to have any incriminating evidence so given used to incriminate that witness in any other proceedings, except in prosecution for perjury or for the giving of contradictory evidence.

A witness must answer all questions put by the committee. And where a member of the committee requests written information of the department, I'd ask that 15 copies be submitted to the Clerk, who will distribute the document and record it as tabled.

And please address all your remarks through the Chair.

As we go further this morning the Provincial Auditor will give us an overview both of chapter 4 and . . . no, 5 and 6. And we'll work with him together, and then we'll give the deputy minister an opportunity to respond before we go to questions from the members.

Mr. Strelieff: — Thank you, Madam Chair, and members and officials. As you can see from chapters 5 and 6, our office has done a lot of work in the health sector. As you know it's a major part of what government does — 1.8 billion of \$9 billion of spending that government organizations do is carried out through the health sector.

Chapter 5 deals with our work focusing on the department. Chapter 6 deals with our work focusing on district health boards. And you'll see a variety of presenters come forward in the next few minutes to present an overview of our conclusions, findings, and recommendations. The report encompasses in chapter 5 the department focusing on the department's financial management systems.

On SHIN, the health information network and the corporation, we looked at the project management practices being put in place to guide SHIN. Then we move to the framework being used by the department to select performance indicators for Health. And the last part, "Part D" of chapter 5 deals with an audit that we're doing right now related to the process used by the department to allocate resources among health districts based on provincial health needs.

Chapter 6 deals with our work on district health boards and reporting the results of our work on primarily what we call our integrated audits. This report you can see as focusing more of our efforts on what the department is doing compared to what district health boards are doing.

Now, Mike, Mike Heffernan is going to begin the presentation focusing on the department. Mike.

Mr. Heffernan: — Madam Chair, members. "Part A" of chapter 5 covers pages 71 to 83. Bob Black has handed out to members a brief summary of our recommendations; it's a three page document. It shows our 13 recommendations and the progress that's been made. Recommendations 11 and 7 are new. These recommendations relate to the need for La Ronge and Uranium City hospitals to ensure their information systems and equipment are Year 2000 compliant.

That's all I was going to say on "Part A" since most of this

information the committee has dealt with in past meetings. I'm now going to turn it over to Glen Nyhus who will discuss our work at the Saskatchewan Health Information Network.

Mr. Nyhus: — It's going to take a few minutes just to put this on. How's that? Okay. Our audit objective was to determine if the corporation has adequate processes to manage the project. We report our findings using the three elements of a strong project management climate. These are: one, management commitment to the project; two, project based on business needs; and three, good project management systems and practices.

Commitment. Senior management commitment to a project is essential. Why? People with a common focus and working together is the most important part of a project. Commitment must be obtained at the start of a project and it must be maintained to its end.

We examined the processes the corporation uses for building and maintaining commitment. We concluded the processes were adequate at the time of our audit. As a result, we make no recommendation.

In our findings we point out some of the key challenges the corporation faces in maintaining management commitment. Also we point out that the corporation must: one, constantly monitor the commitment to the project; two, watch for new threats and risks to commitment; and three, take quick action to maintain the commitment when required.

A project driven by business needs is a second element of a strong project management climate. We recommend the corporation should prepare a development plan for each phase of SHIN that shows the benefits that will be achieved for the money spent.

SHIN's development is expected to span many years. When IT (information technology) projects span many years, there are added risks. Technology may change and/or users' needs may change. As a result, each phase of SHIN needs to be driven by a development plan that clearly sets out what will be achieved for their money spent.

This is required in order to: one, ensure management, users, and the government know what is planned; two, ensure user needs are met; three, maintain management and user commitment; and four, justify the funds being spent on the project.

The third part of a strong project management climate is good project management. Good project management requires a project team and good project management practices. We make three recommendations under this area.

First, the corporation should clearly set out when its development partner is to meet its expected performance, obtain an independent assessment of the development partner's performance, and ensure differences, if any, between the expected and actual performance levels are remedied.

The corporation set the performance level of the development partner in the contract. The corporation needs to know if this performance level is being met. This is important as the

development partner performs its services on a cost-plus basis. Therefore the corporation needs to know if the services are being performed efficiently and effectively. This requires an independent assessment of the development partner's performance.

Our second recommendation in this area is, the corporation should obtain an independent assessment of the project's risks.

Risk management is critical to the success of IT projects. The corporation needs to know that project risks are under control and if any corrective action is necessary.

We note that the corporation and the development partner do perform risk management. However, the corporation should obtain an independent risk assessment. This is required in order to confirm the accuracy and completeness of their risk information and risk strategies. We note that corrective action costs far less and results in a higher quality product when it is taken early.

The third and final recommendation in this area is the corporation should obtain progress reports from its development partner that provide more measures on the status of the project.

The corporation does receive progress reports from its development partner. These reports are important to the corporation in managing the project. We recommend that these reports provide more information on how efficiently the work is being performed.

And that's it.

Mr. Strelloff: — Thank you, thank you very much, Glen.

The next part of our work relates to performance indicators and resource allocation. And Jane Knox is going to provide an overview of our conclusions, findings, and recommendations.

Ms. Knox: — Thank you, Mr. Strelloff. Madam Chair, members, officials and guests. Performance reporting is really a new name for an old responsibility. Some of the members, Madam Chair, are looking for papers. You have a handout in front of you if you wish to use it. We're talking about chapter 5, section C.

I think elected officials have always expected managers to keep them informed about revenues and expenses, actions and results. Governments are now trying to report this type of information routinely.

The trend to performance reporting creates many challenges for governments. One of the most difficult challenges is selecting useful information to report. The study reported in part C of chapter 5 recognizes the Department of Health and its leadership in this difficult area. The study's objective was to compare the department's framework and selection criteria to best practices for selecting performance indicators.

One of the greatest challenges in reporting government performance is to show how actions contribute to results and whether the users and other stakeholders have been satisfied with the services that they received.

The Department of Health designed this framework to help the department and health districts select indicators of performance in three areas. And on your left, yes on the left, the framework highlights the steps to good care — in other words, the processes, the actions that are taken in the health system. On the right, the results that come from those actions. And at the bottom, the satisfaction not only of the client, but also of the service providers and the public in a general sense.

The department's framework allows for analysis of the impact of changes in the process on the results that are obtained, and makes it possible to analyze relationships among all three areas. This framework provides an excellent foundation for performance reports in the future.

More specifically, best practices in selecting indicators must lead to performance indicators that are relevant, measurable, and useful. We're pleased to salute the Department of Health for its leadership in guiding the selection of indicators to ensure that they are relevant to the department's long-term goal of improving health; they are measurable in a reliable, valid, and timely ways at a reasonable cost and are useful to enhance understanding of performance and to make improvements.

We hope that this study will promote discussion and increased use of carefully selected performance indicators for reporting by all Saskatchewan government agencies. The support of legislators is particularly important to encourage and request this type of information.

May I move on to the second part? Thank you.

Part D of chapter 5 in the Fall Report Volume 2, reports on an audit in progress. In 1997 we reported how districts allocated resources based on health needs. The districts told us they depended heavily on the department to identify provincial priorities and allocate resources to help districts improve health in priority areas.

Allocating resources for Health requires a complex matrix of decisions and is a long-term process. In 1998 we began examining how the department accomplishes the difficult task of allocating over 1 billion among health districts each year.

Our objective is to assess whether the Department of Health had adequate processes during the planning cycle for 1998-99 to allocate resources among health districts based on provincial health needs. This brief presentation simply highlights the criteria we are using to make this assessment.

Our criteria are set out on page 115 of the *1998 Fall Report Volume 2*. These criteria are all essential parts of a decision-making process but they do not necessarily occur in a tidy sequential order. In a large government department information is often cumulative from year to year and project to project, and yet changes in the Health situation may require new analysis of old information or a different approach to an old problem. To put it simply, resource allocation for Health is dynamic and highly complex.

This report presents a brief summary of the activities we anticipate that the department undertakes when it makes resource allocation decisions or recommends them to elected

officials. The department is aware of hundreds of health needs. We anticipate the department will use its own expertise and available external experts to decide which of those health needs are the very highest priorities.

For example, priorities may be those which result in avoidable health care costs or preventable suffering or death. We anticipate that the department will prioritize health needs by analysing the significance of different health needs, selecting priorities and then validating those priorities with stakeholders, including legislators.

For the very highest priorities, we anticipate the department will set goals or objectives, and these objectives will show districts the degree of effort or resources that should be invested to improve health in priority areas in the immediate and the intermediate future. Once again a process to involve stakeholders is important as is communicating objectives to all stakeholders.

The third criteria anticipates that the department will find ways to select approaches which will achieve their provincial objectives. They will be identifying options we presume. For example, deciding whether it is necessary to do more research or to find resources for service delivery. We anticipate the department will analyze those options and again consider ways to get stakeholder comment or the views of experts.

Fourth, when the department assigns resources among districts, they anticipate they will need to identify which districts are their partners for particular priorities. There will be several districts perhaps who will have needs in one priority area, and other districts will have greater concern in other areas. Together the districts and the department identify required resources and the department allots resources among districts.

Finally, we anticipate the department will monitor resource allocation to achieve its provincial objectives. Identifying a process to monitor achievement of objectives in itself can be a challenge. And then there is a need to collect various kinds of data and information and to evaluate not only the dollars spent, but also the impact of the resources on the department's objectives. Reporting the impact of resources that have been allocated to achieve objectives in areas of priority health needs, may be one way of gaining commitment to further action.

In summary, we anticipate the department will set priorities for health needs for the province as a whole. It will set direction for the highest priority needs, select approaches and assign resources to achieve those objectives, and to monitor resource allocation to achieve objectives, always remembering that this is not a linear or even a circular process. It's one of those things that happens sometimes by serendipity.

The department plays a critical role in allocating resources for health, whether it allocates resources directly, or provides information and recommendations to elected officials. Resource allocation, based on health needs, is important to the long-term well-being of Saskatchewan people.

We look forward to continuing our work with the department so that we can report to you how this complex process works in Saskatchewan. Thank you.

Mr. Strelieff: — Thank you, Jane. That concludes the chapter 5 of our work focusing on the department. Lorianne Earis is going to discuss our work at the district health boards next.

In chapter 5 we just went through four sections. The first section deals with our work focusing on the department's basic financial management practices, and our findings suggest that the information going to senior management within the department is improving, and then we identify areas where it could be strengthened.

The second area was focusing on SHIN, the health information network. This is our second audit of the management practices surrounding SHIN, and we're focusing effort on this system development project because of the obvious sensitivity to health information that exists in the province, and because most large scale information technology projects cost more than anticipated, don't deliver what people wanted to be delivered, and are often late. So we're looking at SHIN's project management practices.

You might have noticed in our report on SaskPower. We're also going to look at the project management practices surrounding SaskPower's Delta project, which is their internal information project.

The third area focused on the framework used by the department for identifying key performance indicators . . . an important part of health management but also an opportunity to share thinking and practices with other organizations throughout the government system on how, how best to select carefully selected performance indicators. And the last part focusing on the Department of Health, Jane discussed an audit that we're doing now which relates to the resource allocation processes used by the government to allocate resources to districts.

Now Lorianne is going — Lorianne Earis — is going to review our work at district health boards. Lorianne.

Ms. Earis: — Okay. Thank you, Wayne. Madam Chair, members. In 1997/98 we began auditing district health boards on a rotational basis and that is that we're auditing 10 a year instead of all 32. This year we audited the two largest districts, Regina and Saskatoon, and because of their size we plan to audit them each year. We also selected two mid-sized districts. There are four districts that we classify as mid-sized. The Battlefords and East Central were audited this year. Moose Jaw-Thunder Creek and Prince Albert are also considered mid-sized and will be audited in future years.

We also select six smaller districts. For 1997/98 we audited Living Sky, Pipestone, South Country, Swift Current, and the two new northern districts which are Keewatin Yathe and Mamawetan Churchill River.

We audited Regina and the two northern districts directly and relied on the work of appointed auditors for the remaining seven. The two northern districts were not done in time to be included in this report so they will be reported in the spring 1999 report. Also this year is the first year that we identified the districts that were cited for each recommendation in our report.

I've handed out . . . or Bob has handed out a table listing the 10 recommendations that we make in this chapter. The districts' progress with regards to those recommendations and the Public Accounts Committee's previous response to these recommendations. There are only two new recommendations that haven't been addressed in previous reports. Those issues deal with the need for a Year 2000 plan and a need to obtain approval for planned operating deficits as required by The Health Districts Act. The Public Accounts Committee has agreed to all the remaining recommendations in previous reports.

One important challenge the districts must meet is their legal responsibility to report to the Minister of Health and the public on the health status of their residents and the effectiveness of their programs. This is important. Boards and management need this information to manage their districts. We recognize it will take some time to address this issue. The districts and the department have been working towards this goal for several years. The department has issued guidelines for preparations of districts' annual reports and preparation of three-year strategic plans.

The department is also preparing a framework to help districts select performance indicators. This is the framework that Jane discussed a few minutes ago. Significant progress has been made in some districts. Saskatoon for example has prepared a report on the health status and needs of its children and youth population. This report contained outcome performance indicators and targets for measuring and reporting on improvements in health of their children and youth. Other districts are working on similar projects and we commend the districts for the work . . . the progress that they have made. Wayne.

Mr. Strelieff: — Thank you very much, Lorianne. In general, over the last few years the department and districts have made considerable progress on making sure that they have the information required to manage their programs and resources. What we're doing to help the future is to try to encourage the department and districts develop more specific program performance information and report back in a public way. And that concludes our overview of our work for this last year. Madam Chair.

The Chair: — Thank you very much, Mr. Strelieff. I think that the committee would also like to commend you and your staff for all the work they've obviously put into preparing not only for today but for making sure that the public is aware of what's going on in this department. And we can see that everyone is very committed to this job so we thank you.

And I ask the deputy minister if he has any comments before we go to our members.

Mr. Hnatiuk: — Just very briefly, Madam Chair. I want to say that we're relatively pleased with the audit reports that we're discussing here today. We generally agree with the recommendations made, have acted or are taking action in all the recommendations and continuing to work very co-operatively with the Provincial Auditor's office and appreciate the help and assistance that the auditor's office gives us in assisting the health boards to perform their functions.

That's my opening comments and I'll answer questions.

The Chair: — Thank you very much.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Madam Chair, and welcome to Mr. Hnatiuk and all his officials.

I would like to start, if I could, with asking you to update us on the current discussions with CUPE (Canadian Union of Public Employees).

Mr. Hnatiuk: — Madam Chair, I'm not sure . . . Well, what I can do is I can answer that question very generally. The discussions of course, negotiations, are handled by SAHO (Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations) who is the agent for the health employer for the district health boards. And currently negotiations are underway with the assistance of a conciliator. The reports that I've heard are that there is progress being made and they are continuing to work along on a very, very difficult set of negotiations.

This perhaps is the most complex set of negotiations in the history of the province. For example, within CUPE itself, there's about eight agreements that now need to be melded into one agreement as a result of the restructuring of health care. And so if one can just contemplate for a second, taking eight agreements and lining them up, and taking any one item — for example, vacation leave. You would then look at vacation leave in each of the eight agreements and how do you bring them together to achieve equity and parity and so on and what would that cost? And disability and various other forms of leave, pay rates, hours of work.

So they're working through that process with the help of a conciliator and the latest report is that progress is proceeding albeit it is not easy work to do, and hopefully they will achieve a negotiated settlement in the very near future.

Mr. Gantefer: — I understand there has been a strike deadline that is fast approaching us. Has the department in conjunction with the district health boards prepared a contingency plan if that eventuality may come to pass?

Mr. Hnatiuk: — Yes, there . . .

Mr. Shillington: — Madam Chair, I'd like to raise a point of order here. Witnesses are required to answer questions put to them by members before this committee. Therefore I think members need to be very circumspect in the questions they're asking.

I wonder, Madam Chair, about the appropriateness of these questions when there's ongoing labour negotiations. I think this puts the officials in a really difficult position to answer questions about things such as contingency plans in the event of a strike. Answers to these questions can affect the negotiations and I wonder, Madam Chair, if you might give some thought to the position I think we're putting these officials in.

The Chair: — Okay, I do agree that we want to make sure that there won't be some problems once people would be aware of what's going on. I think that the deputy minister can answer questions that he feels isn't going to jeopardize anything, just

more of a general basis but maybe . . . We all understand what's happening out there and we want to make sure that we don't cause any further problems for the people of this province.

So I guess direct your questions in a way that you feel it won't jeopardize everybody in the future.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Madam Chair. And I do appreciate the concern and I wasn't looking for specific and intimate details of the process. I think though that there is a general public concern in a general sense that plans have been put into place in the eventuality that negotiations — difficult as I recognize that they are — may come to an impasse. And I think that we're talking about a critical issue in the province and I certainly do accept that if the deputy minister would answer in a way that he feels comfortable in terms of not jeopardizing the process.

Mr. Hnatiuk: — Thank you. Madam Chair, the SAHO as the employer agent is coordinating, amongst the district health boards, contingency planning, and planning that in consultation with the union as well.

I think all parties want to ensure that patient and people safety in health is a first priority. I think it's everybody's concern. And so contingency plans are being made for the eventuality, the details of which would be . . . there's a purview of each individual district health board being coordinated by SAHO and the boards working co-operatively together.

It's important to note that not all the district health boards would be affected the same way in that different health boards have different unions. So I believe the current negotiations are affecting about 10 district health boards.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you. I would like to turn now if I could to the SHIN project and ask for an update in the status on where that project is at.

Mr. Hnatiuk: — Okay, I'm going to ask Gord Nystuen, the CEO (chief executive officer) to come forward and give us that update.

Mr. Nystuen: — Madam Chair, if I might, for sort of the completeness of the discussion, give a little bit of a history of the development process and that probably best takes us to the status report, if that's all right.

In August of 1997 the government announced that it was beginning the development of a SHIN project. And what it did at that time was it created a Crown corporation. That agency is called the Saskatchewan Health Information Network. Also at that time it had announced that Science Applications International Corporation had been selected as the IT development partner to undertake the work with regards to the SHIN project.

From the period of August through to the end of May 1998, the most significant part of the project that was under way was the building of a requirements, or what's the first thing to do — a prioritization document, or at least a planning stage piece of information.

Through the period of October, November, December, January, the IT development partner had gone out through all of the health districts and had interviewed and largely created a current status report on what is the health information technology status; what are the applications that are currently running; and what are the uses that are being . . . the current uses of that software out in the field.

The second layer of that process was to begin the development of, for loss of words, maybe could describe it a wish list. What are the things that you think you should have, and what are your priorities with regards to future information technology developments.

That process went on, as I said, from the fall of '97 in through the spring of 1998. The requirements list was a document that had something like 300 items identified that the health sector felt were important and would help in the delivery of care with regards to health care in Saskatchewan, and that should be in some way, shape, or form, part of the SHIN process.

The second stage past that was a meeting that was held in Regina in the spring of 1998, in April I believe. It was called the provincial planning group. And what we did at that forum was bring together a sample from all of the districts, all of the disciplines, professional disciplines of the medical association and nurses, lab technicians, pharmacists, and so on — and go through a process where they sorted through the topics and issues within that requirements list to determine what are the priorities that we should be moving forward with with regards to SHIN.

In other words, what are the items that have the capacity to be, let's say relatively easily moved forward on, that have general application across the health sector and have some significant step forward in this.

The process largely revealed four key findings and those key findings or observations of the participants are largely outlined in these four statements.

The first statement was that when people leave their home communities and go to regional and acute centres, it is often difficult for the care providers in the home community to know what is transpiring while they're on their acute stay. Okay? So while they're away, the people who are responsible for care at home don't know what's transpiring. It was an important piece for them to say if SHIN could do that for us, that's knitting the health care system and how we have structurally organized it together.

The second observation was that after a person has that acute stay, transfers back into the community, often there is a gap of information about what the community should do next. In other words, when someone's loved one comes back to the community, where are we supposed to pick up the ball now? What are the treatment plans? And all of those issues that go along with that.

So it's what happened while they were there and then what should we do once that person comes back into the community, okay?

The third item that was identified by that group is that there is a vacuum with regards to information needed in emergencies. So individuals show up at an emergency room somewhere; they may be conscious but don't know what medications they're on, if they have any allergies, if there are any pre-existing medical conditions.

So the capture of that kind of information and making it generally available across the system so that an individual can show up in Saskatoon or Regina or Melfort, not necessarily in their home community but that the care providers in that emergency situation can still have the best information available so that they don't have to make decisions without full knowledge of information with regards to that patient.

The fourth item that was identified by the group is that there's a belief that there is some duplication of lab tests that occurs in the health system today. The discussion that the group carried on about that is often a person in their community will be under the care of a primary care physician. The physician may carry out some certain tests in order to draw a conclusion about the nature of the illness.

That individual might be referred to a specialist or might be referred to an acute centre for further treatment. At that point, often lab tests begin again. There is a belief by the system that in some cases we might be doing duplication of that work that's not necessary.

However, the system that currently exists is that those lab tests are often in paper files, are not easily accessible at the secondary location whether it be the acute centre or the consulting physician, and as a result, the test process begins over and over again. Again the group had said if we can create a structure that minimizes the amount of test duplication so that the amount of testing that goes on is only the testing that is appropriate given medical circumstances, not merely the discovery of information that may have already been captured in the system although not distributed within the system.

Those were the key priorities that the group had looked at, saying if you can build the system that helps to accommodate those sorts of answers, that is a big advantage for the health system in our next step forward. Okay?

From that process that sort of scoped out the intellectual context of what do we want this system to output in its first stage of development. The developer then went through a process of saying, okay, well this is sort of the content, but you still need to have a structural enterprise or system in order to go out into the field and really start to deliver these goods. So through the summer of 1998, SAIC (Saskatchewan Applications International Corporation) had gone through a design part of the project that really established what are the components that you would have to have with regards to central system, remote computing, network communications, in order to give function to this kind of content that we're speaking about. And then past that you have to look at what is the kind of database that you would have that would store this information that would then allow it to flow on this network. Okay?

So we went through that design phase in October of 1998. We began our initial deployment of computing and network

infrastructure in the southwest. We have currently seven sites operating. Those sites include the Shaunavon health centre, Climax health centre, the Eastend health centre, and I think four physicians' offices in and around those communities. Okay?

So what we have done to date is built a central computer system in Regina that allows for this communication to occur. We have computing sites in each of those seven locations. We've done all of the training and background to introduce people to the very beginning of network. That beginning of network involves word processing, spreadsheet analysis, scheduling components, and the communications tools in order to deal with each other. Okay?

The next step with regards to this process is going from beyond those seven sites to deploying probably an additional 30, 35 sites in that southwest corner of the province. What we are effectively doing is creating a region that will have a free flow of information among the health care providers within that area.

One of the parts that we have not been developing, or I shouldn't describe it that way, have not gone through the process of configuring and developing is the electronic health record. The electronic health record will effectively be the vehicle at a later stage in the process that would act as the conduit or it's the central place where you would go to look up this information whether it would be about a person's drug history or other emergency circumstances, or a lab test.

But there's a few things that are, let's say, stopping us at this point. One is that there's a huge amount of configuration work and agreement work across the health professions in order to get to build the data table and have everyone say, well I agree that the address code for, let's say, certain kinds of medications should be 14 digits long, okay. And what are the standard data capture methods and so on. So we're going through a work group process that defines those sorts of information bits that will become part of the table. But until you've got agreement across the professions and the people who will use the system, you can't go out and start to engineer this large data base. Okay?

So that process is going on. We have been undertaking that probably since September of this past year and we have broken up the different work groups into contexts of consults. In other words what do those consultation reports look like and what would the standard form be and what's the information that should be in them.

Secondary is registration. When you register a patient into a facility, what is the requisite amount of information that you must capture and how must it be captured.

Information with regards to lab tests — what are standard lab tests. Is there such a thing in Saskatchewan; what a standard lab tests are. What are the components of those tests. How should the information bits be captured and passed on.

There's a fifth — the fifth area is deployment. And that really is when you go from the test area and start to march it out across the province, what's the appropriate way to do that. How would you attack that.

I think maybe that covers the current status or sort of where we've been and where we are today.

Mr. Gantefer: — Yes, thank you very much. It's certainly I think easy to understand. It's a massive undertaking and full of all kinds of challenges. Are we at the forefront of implementing this type of technology? Are there any models or any learning that can be done from any other jurisdiction anywhere?

Mr. Nystuen: — Are we at the forefront? I think what is probably the best way to capture this is that western Canada from a jurisdictional standpoint is at the forefront of undertaking this kind of endeavour. Okay? And let me compare what we're doing in Saskatchewan — but similarly in Alberta, and Manitoba, and British Columbia — that is different from most jurisdictions.

If you take a look at the United States, medical care is delivered through facilities. Okay? So in certain locations they'll have a number of hospitals that are competing for the customer base. Well because individuals have insurance that insures them they can often show up at any of those facilities to get their care. When you have that kind of structure what happens is that the care delivery mechanism has to become very focused on how do we internally create our systems or our processes to effectively deliver care at a price point that the amount that we get in insurance, what we pay our staff, and our goods that go into the care, we come out with some money at the end of the day. Okay? So they're very focused on that facility — how you make that work.

In Saskatchewan and all western Canadian regions, medical care is delivered or health care is delivered on a jurisdictional basis. So the funding mechanism is concerned about all aspects of care not just what occurs within any defined facility. And because of that through health reform we've really moved to a more client-centred — so in other words the issues that are important to the person in their care, regardless of where they get that care, is important. Okay? That is a very different way of looking at it. In our States' model it's focused on we're providing care in this hospital. How do we do it? The patient may come to us, may not. But once they come to us then we're worried about it, not worried about the moralistic view.

So in that kind of context it's a very different kind of look at the system. And to the answer of that, yes, western Canada is far at the front of trying to deliver care that is centred around all of the person's needs because we are responsible for all of the person's needs — not just when they show up for care. Okay?

Further to that though, effectively what you start to do is to go across the continuum of care, not just the acute or primary care scenarios but also I guess more social issues about how does that person live in the community. What are the services available in the community. How do those services affect other care decisions that are made. And how does that entire thing operate as a network.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you. I guess what I was getting at is it . . . And I'm pleased to hear that you say that for example the four western provinces seem to be moving in a similar direction with similar sets of criteria and facing similar issues. It strikes

me though that perhaps what we have is four parallel projects going on here where there might be some synergies arrived at if we sort of did some co-operation.

For example, if you're developing a certain form set and certain criteria for entering drugs and all those sorts of things, it would strike me that it would be very beneficial if that same type of criteria development would be implemented in all four provinces. Because while people are . . . you know, move around very much within the province, they also move interprovincially. And so that standardization of some of those issues, I would think, would be a good thing and potentially could result in some development savings if it was done in concert.

Has there been any work done in terms of working together with the other western provinces as an example?

Mr. Hnatiuk: — Madam Chair, I'll start to respond to that one and ask Gord to supplement the response.

The answer in short to that is yes. We have a lot of consultation that's going on between the four western provinces today, more so perhaps than we've had in previous years. And one of the areas that we've highlighted as a priority area is the development of information technology in the health care system.

Our minister is considering inviting the other provinces to a joint consultation, Saskatchewan taking the lead role, and we're exploring that possibility over the next few months to compare where we're all at, what our priorities are, what have we all learned, what are we learning, and how is it that we can integrate or work together. So that's first.

Secondly, we are asking the federal government to assume what we believe to be an appropriate federal role in health care in helping to develop a national infrastructure. And we would like to be, as a region, foremost in developing and demonstrating what is possible.

So what we envision probably in Canada is in each province there will be a system but that those systems will be connected through a national system. Of course developing . . . (inaudible) . . . in a national basis is always very difficult. Much more chance of developing or addressing that issue on a regional basis like the western Canadian basis.

And we're very, very pleased with the progress that we're making on a very difficult issue like waiting lists, where the four provinces are working together to deal with waiting lists in six different areas in developing appropriate protocols and standards and clinical practice guidelines, and looking at the science behind this, what resources are required, what information systems would back these up.

And this involves the major research agencies from the four provinces. It involves the medical associations. The Canadian Medical Association is very supportive of this initiative. It involves funding from the federal government and it involves the participation of the tertiary health centres from B.C. (British Columbia), Saskatchewan, Alberta, and Manitoba as well. So they're progressing. There's a timetable of two years to get this

job done, but it's perhaps the best example of western Canadian co-operation.

There are some other areas like pediatric cardiac care where we're not all repeating the same thing. There's more co-operation than there's been in the past between Winnipeg, Saskatoon, and Edmonton. But obviously one of the key areas for us to co-operate and participate in together is in the area of information technology.

Gord, you may wish to add some.

Mr. Nystuen: — I think there's a couple of observations that I would add further to that. One is that in each of the western provinces we all have a project team that is very, very similar in nature to the one we have in Saskatchewan.

We have been meeting quarterly since probably April of last year and in that process one of the things that we're trying to do is to get to common understandings of certain items so that we don't have to rebuild a number of things. Some of those understandings involve the issue of security. How do you do encryption? What are the processes so that we can have some standard security across the system? Okay?

The other is with regards to standard approaches to data. If there is anything that has been a challenge in the information technology industry over the last number of decades it has been getting to standard data formats for packages of information that can be understood by many different kinds of systems.

And it appears as though we're all agreed to move forward on an information protocol called HL7, or health level 7, which is a kind of coding in information. And so indeed in the future if an individual lived in Regina, moved to Calgary to take up different work, the health information . . . (inaudible) . . . is captured here and is relevant to be moved forward. It can be moved to the system that is operating in Alberta and it would be captured in their data table and sorted out.

So those are the things that we're trying to look forward to do. Most certainly the kind of oversight and sort of larger regional strategy that Con alludes to is very important to all of these projects moving along in that kind of fashion as well.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you. In terms of a development budget, I believe there was a figure of \$40 million initially used and if that's not correct, please correct me. What I'm interested in is, how are you monitoring that? Does that look like a target that is attainable? These types of things are perhaps very difficult to keep a handle on. An update in that regard.

Mr. Nystuen: — The \$40 million budget, when it was originally announced, was funding that was to occur over two years of development, okay? I think when the project was originally scoped, that it depends on sort of whose number you use. It was arranged from sort of \$70 million maybe to a high of \$150 million to do anything and everything that one might wish in the health sector.

With the beginning time of August, '97, when you start to map that time frame over the fiscal years, it will likely . . . the \$40 million in our estimation will probably be enough funding on

the project to take us to a period that looks like March 31, 2000. Within the fiscal year ending March 31, 1998, the resources used were about \$6 million, sort of from August through to that period. Within 1998-99, so the fiscal year that we're in, we've used about a further \$9 million to January 1. So we're sort of on target to that kind of mapping with regards to resources and so on.

Clearly with regards to information technology development, one of the tasks that is always difficult is, because technology changes, the day that you start the project things that were impossible are now possible on sort of year one. And you have to be very cautious not to start to change and say, well now that we can do this, you know it's technologically possible, let's try to do that and add it to your list of things to do.

I guess what I would say so far is that we have been consciously not doing that to date and because of that, the resources that we've used and how we've progressed so far we think have been cautious and the balance of the resources that we have will carry us to that period and also should give us some substantive connectivity or network that allows people to communicate with each other across the province.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you. Finally on this issue, have you developed an estimate of the cost implications to, for example, district health boards or to doctors' practices and things of that nature. It would strike me that there would be at least hardware and software training costs that are going to be incurred at that end and is that part of your development cost or is that going to be another cost centre?

Mr. Nystuen: — The process that we have been going through so far in the south-west has been a process where we have indeed put the equipment in the field and SHIN has been responsible for paying for that and has been responsible for paying the telecom costs and also has been responsible for paying the training costs of the individuals involved. Okay? So the outlay to date in each of these locations largely has been borne by SHIN.

There's a few reasons why we've tried to do that. One is that because part of this roll out process is learning, understanding what it takes for a physician or a health centre in order to bring themselves to the network, we didn't believe it was appropriate at the stage of learning that we were at to say, well you know, give us your chequebook and we'll start writing the cheques as we need the stuff in your facility. So we've been responsible for covering off those costs.

Most certainly there will be decisions that will need to be taken in the future. I don't believe that it is a likely decision that SHIN will end up being responsible for all of the systems, for all of the equipment that will occur across all of the health districts in all of the physicians' and pharmacists' and chiropractors' offices in the province. But what we're trying to do is to build the methodology so that it's very predictable about what it takes for you to get up and running.

The other part to that is that we are really trying to map very closely to the kinds of system technology that individuals would normally have in their place of work with regards to communicating over the Internet. Okay? So we have been

sticking very closely to the Windows 95 environment. We have been sticking very closely to sort of the probably about a hundred and fifty or 200 megahertz processor. Those sorts of things.

So effectively having a scenario where when SHIN opens itself up and says, okay, now we're ready to accept new people beyond the test environment, that you probably already have much of the equipment that you would require in order to fit into the network.

We're trying to be very cognizant of that because it certainly is not, from my view, in the public interest for us to take a strategy, adopt a methodology that all of a sudden shows up and says, well it requires \$50,000 of capital on your behalf in order to come in. I think that most individuals would say, well, I'm going to pass for awhile until it comes down. So we've tried to map very closely to that so that there would not be a huge amount of additional investment on that level.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you. Finally, do you have a time line in terms of when you see this as, you know, from now till when it's fully implemented?

Mr. Nystuen: — I think within the current scope and priorities set forth, we will have a significant contribution made to those priorities. Okay? Information in emergencies, reducing the duplication from diagnostic testing, information back to communities and information on acute stay, by the end of our budget period. That's the strategy that we are currently working on.

The challenge that exists today is that the level of information technology development across the province is not level. We have two large health districts, Saskatoon and Regina, that are very mature in an information technology environment. We probably have another 8 or 10 that have a good start. Well that leaves us with a huge number of health districts that really have very modest information technology resources and employment so far.

So, if the question is how long before anybody and everybody has the kind of environment that Saskatoon and Regina have in their home communities, my expectation is that it would be quite some time.

The question that I think comes back to policy makers is . . . Is that a prudent use of fiscal resources? Can you get 80 per cent or 90 per cent of the value from bringing the most significant, acute care facilities within the network and do they cover off those highest priority needs of health care.

And I think that that's the benchmark that we need to be very mindful of as we move forward.

Mr. Gantefer: — So back to the question. When is this going to be fully implemented? I mean, I guess the problem is I understand there's going to be some districts maybe not. But by the four criteria you laid out as desirable objectives, when for example are they going to be able to in Tisdale hospital be able to call up the status of a patient in Saskatoon or Prince Albert or Regina and do those four things. When is that going to be at least technically and operationally feasible. And I understand

that there is a requirement in the local level to then buy into it. But when is it going to be possible?

Mr. Nystuen: — If I could describe it maybe in this kind of context. By the end of March 31, 2000, okay — so it's the end of next fiscal year. So when our resources are complete, we should have in place an electronic health record that has the capacity to capture diagnostic data from those systems that currently exist. So Saskatoon has diagnostic lab tests that can capture information. Regina does. I believe there's some in Prince Albert. There's about eight or ten other acute facilities that have some type of diagnostic testing that captures electronic information. To have that stored centrally in a electronic health record and to have it widely distributed, we should be at that point.

Now the question that becomes very difficult is, yes, but we think it should have all of the information. Well then that requires a much longer period of time. But if we're looking at current information that is already within information systems somewhere and centrally locating that for the use of care providers, I think it's a very reasonable expectation that by the end of the 40 million that that will be captured and potentially distributed widely.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you.

Mr. Hnatiuk: — I think, Madam Chair, another just a complimentary comment. The Provincial Auditor in his introductory remarks raised a significant issue around systems development and that was that large systems rarely come in on budget, they rarely come in on time. It's a very rapidly changing field. The changes over a three-month or six-month period in information technology are so profound that what looks like the state of the art today becomes obsolete tomorrow.

No one had imagined a few short years ago the issues with Y2K (Year 2000), for example. As of New Year's Day, Y2K is dominating all the documentary and news channels, and it's caused my wife to say this morning, I think I'm going to go out and start stocking up on supplies. But that's the kind of thing that happens in the information technology world.

What we have done here is we've been very cautious. As you know the other provinces, our neighbours, have announced a lot more resources; they committed at least in principle, large . . . many more dollars than we have to information technology development. I believe Manitoba identified 200 million and Alberta was, I believe, 500 million.

What we want to do is ensure that what we develop is (a) affordable and (b) sustainable. So that if what we can afford is 40 or 60 or 70, that is what we can afford and what we develop is usable and sustainable at that point. You don't have to have the full meal deal to make use of what you develop. And that's an important principle. We want to make sure that we're spending the money, get the maximum use out of the dollars available; that it is affordable because obviously this competes with other needs in the health care system.

So if one looks at what the other provinces are doing versus what we're doing, that is a significant difference between the way Saskatchewan has approached it versus the way other

provinces have approached it. So when you asked a question about when will Tisdale have that kind of functionality, we want to make sure that at least Tisdale will have the minimum kind of functionality that Gord described without having to spend \$500 million.

Mr. Gantefer: — It begs a question though. Your example of \$500 million being spent in Alberta. Why don't we just let them spend it and then go and buy the knowledge that it acquires.

Mr. Hnatiuk: — Well we've sort of doing that. But we can't just wait . . . We are learning from others.

It's the same with the Y2K. We find that there's a lot of tertiary centres have found new ways of addressing these issues. It's not to wait until you're absolutely the last one. But it's to be cautious and to learn and to be working with them in concert. Of course they're a much larger system — many more tertiary facilities, very large facilities, a much larger population.

But that's the approach that we're taking. In a sense we can't stop and do nothing because we have needs today. We can't wait until everybody else develops it and then we just go and borrow it. But we are taking advantage of what other people are doing and working co-operatively as best we can.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Whitmore: — Thank you, Madam Chair. I first want to congratulate the department and the districts on the progress that has been made since from previous reports by the Provincial Auditor in terms of meeting those requirements set forward . . . those recommendations. I think there's been a great deal of movement there, and it's a learning curve in terms of everybody not just the district but the health board . . . or the Health department in terms of dealing with the districts.

I think an area though that is I think really a good news story in terms of outlying by the Provincial Auditor is the area of performance indicators, and the area also of resource allocation and how the department is meeting those things. I think too an example of that, and I would like your comments in terms of that, is the waiting list study that has been undertaken and not just, quote, to deal with the specific problem of waiting lists right now but the long-term needs out there in terms of measurement stick or drawing that line, beginning line of where we start there.

And I wonder if you wouldn't mind on behalf of the committee outlining the criteria of that committee, where they're going to be going and where you see it down the road in terms of how it fits into the future in terms of health care in the province.

Mr. Hnatiuk: — Well thank you very much. Madam Chair, I'll start to answer that. I don't have the specific terms of reference with me but I'll ask Ms. Klassen to assist me because she's I think more familiar with the detail.

What we're hoping with the task force which is headed by Dr. Stewart McMillan and supported by Dr. Mark O'Grady, and Dr. Barry Maber from Saskatoon, this three-person committee, will be reporting by February 28. And what they will be looking at is the question of is it possible to have a waiting list that is

standardized and that everyone understands and can utilize so that there is equity in services? And that we also know what it would cost and what it would take to manage the delivery and access to services appropriately.

Now some may interpret that exercise as the attempt to abolish all waiting times. That may not be the case, but it's deciding or helping us to decide how it is most appropriate to give access to people to services.

One of the problems is, is that right across the country there are no common definitions used for what is elective and what is urgent and what is emergent. There is no common criteria for when waiting time starts. In other words, does it start when you first go to see your family physician, does it start when the family physician refers you to the specialist, or does it start when the specialist acknowledges that the specialist has received a referral. So that has to be sorted out so we'd all have a common understanding.

The second major problem is that people don't know where they stand in the system. So if I go see my physician, my physician tells me he's going to . . . he or she will refer me to a specialist. I may be under the impression that I'm already referred. And I've started waiting. That may not be the case, the waiting may not start until the specialist assesses the information that was presented and accepts me as a referral. But I don't know that and there's no feedback to me. So second major issue is what kind of system can give people the knowledge and information as to where they are in the system.

The third, of course is the rationale for where someone is in the system. And that's the other weighting and that's the w-e-i-g-h-t-i-n-g, weighting — the relative value of or importance of one kind of procedure versus another; some things are more urgent or more important than other things and what is the common criteria and what is the practice guidelines that we use to do that.

I think the fourth is how will we support all of that in terms of having information, the feedback loops and so on.

So those are some of the challenges that the task force is going to be addressing. We don't mean this to be in place of the western Canadian initiative. Just the western Canadian initiative is going to be two years down the road. We believe that we can make some gains or address some of these issues on a shorter term basis, and that's why we've picked Regina and Saskatoon where there is the most critical need for having this sorted out. And if we sort out Regina and Saskatoon it naturally flows to benefit all of the other health districts because most of the speciality services are in these two tertiary centres.

I'll ask Ms. Klassen to add any additional comments.

Ms. Klassen: — I think the deputy minister has provided a very good overview. At the end of addressing the key elements that he has described there will be plan presented that in fact will create a provincial approach to a system with respect to the waiting times.

In addition to that, there will be implementation steps. So that would be the only aspect that I would add and all of that will

address the broad elements that have already been described to you.

Mr. Whitmore: — I guess the other area that we talk about the gathering information regarding SHIN, the question of the measurement of resources and performance, and in doing that within the Saskatchewan perspective, is that looking from my perspective there was an opportunity there for health care research within the province to measure certain things that are going on, either from a social standpoint or from a direct acute care health standpoint, a research component by which we could build on in terms of measurements nationally and even possibly internationally within the boundaries of this province because of these kinds of things that are being set up and part of that.

Do you see a role for the Department of Health down the road in the area of research allocation in terms of research projects or initiatives either through post-secondary groups within the province and outside the province in those areas?

Mr. Hnatiuk: — Yes, Madam Chair, absolutely we do see a role. When we meet with our colleagues from the other provinces and with the federal government, we ask that the federal government play a stronger role in this particular area. It's one that's clearly of national importance and a role that is important to all of us, and one that does not interfere in the direct delivery of services but is very necessary to establish what are the best practices, what works, what doesn't work, where do we get value for money, how do we treat certain kinds of diseases, how do we prevent certain things from happening.

And I think that right across the country, in terms of our national health care system, there's a growing recognition that from the mid-90s when there were severe budget reductions in the transfer payments, that what in fact happened, it caused a depletion of what I might call intellectual capital. And it is time to begin to rebuild that intellectual capital. And I'm pleased, I'm personally pleased with what I hear from my federal colleagues about what they intend to do in this particular area.

Obviously our universities and our health care system and the quality of our services depend on good research so we need to rebuild that intellectual capacity to which research is a major component.

I think we've also demonstrated by sort of the applied research that the Health Services Utilization Review Commission has been undertaking, that there is tremendous value for money. When you can eliminate unnecessary tests and not negatively affect the health of people, you then have resources to redirect into another area.

So we would hope that we continue to move to enhance research funding collaboratively; that secondly it does create the opportunity for people to work in Saskatchewan. It does create economic spinoff and benefit as well. But thirdly, it contributes to the overall health and well-being of our population — I think not only in Saskatchewan, but can contribute, and Saskatchewan has been a leader.

I think that the other advantage that Saskatchewan has is that we have been working perhaps earlier and harder, perhaps

because of economic necessity and for other reasons — we're small so it's easy for people to talk to one another — in looking at how policies integrate or relate to one another.

So that the real value or the real benefit in terms of health or well-being is not necessarily from spending just in the Health department or money that comes from the Health department to district health boards for delivery of health care services. It has to do with what we do with housing and employment and all of the other issues that contribute to the positive quality of life.

For example, if our children are well fed and well nourished, they'll have fewer health problems in the future. If we can get people to exercise more, if we can get them to have fewer sins so to speak, then it minimizes the cost to the health care system into the future. But these are the kinds of things that research can demonstrate.

And it's the research in the area of children that has enabled us to produce things like the children's action plan and develop more integrated services. That research was done in other places. I'm hoping that we'll be able to do more research right here in Saskatchewan in the future.

Mr. Whitmore: — Thank you. I'm done with my question, thank you.

Mr. Koenker: — I have a more narrow question that pertains to health services provided by the health districts, and it pertains to attendant care services and the grandfathering of these services as they were provided prior to the health boards taking over.

It's come to my attention through a constituent casework that there really is no provision for new cases of private care attendants other than those provided by home care. And this comes through . . . This is really a social service, a social service policy that refers attendant care not as a social service but as a service provided by the health districts.

And this individual who is a 43-year-old quadriplegic man who is now living independently makes the case that for him to be in an institution would cost the government in excess of \$3,000 a month, that home care would likely cost about 2,000, over \$2,000 a month at prevailing rates given the hours he requires, and that personal attendants would cost approximately \$1,300.

He lives in a building where two other individuals are receiving personal attendant care, having received it prior to the formation of the health districts. So they're covered very nicely by grandfathering. And he points to the fact then that there's a double standard here in terms of health services available to people with the same conditions.

He's not in a nursing home. He's been there; he's done that. He doesn't want to be there. He doesn't feel he needs home care. He can get along quite well with just attendant care, but there's this problem of the grandfathering.

I'm wondering if you can comment on how we might address this problem. It disturbs me because, I think not just because of the need in this case but because there's the issue of really a double standard by virtue of the grandfathering.

Mr. Hnatiuk: — Madam Chair, I . . . (inaudible) . . . Actually you're reminding me of my previous position in Social Services where that was a Social Services program I believe, the attendant care program prior to . . . that was in place. And I believe it was funded on a pilot basis by the federal government, a self-managed care program.

Two issues. The first one in this specific case I'd be more than happy to follow up with you after and look at the individual case outside of this forum to see what may be done. But on a more general note you're raising a very . . . an issue that's very difficult to address. Because if you move into the area of expanding what is a kind of privatized attendant care — and in this particular case there may be a rationale that costs are much less — there may be the possibility to provide home care at the same cost as an attendant would provide, depending on the hours and the kinds of services and so on. So we need to look at that.

However, if we were to move into fully funding individualized and otherwise go to an individualized funding model that allows individuals to hire their own care, we have a very, very different system that we're getting into. It becomes a privatization of these precious public services and begins to move into the area of two-tiered services. So those who can pay, they obviously will be able to pay. What do you do in respect of those who can't pay? Then you need to have some other form of payment, which means either increased rates of pay through a welfare kind of program.

It raises some very serious, very serious problems and dilemmas. I think that when we have looked at self-managed privatized care of that kind, we find that it in fact to be much more expensive than the organized home care that we have and does not provide the kind of equity and access.

Notwithstanding that when you move into a program or a project like the attendant care that you described and you stop it, you grandfather some cases, you end up having people being treated differently. That's always the problem with grandfathering.

And I think that the solution to all of this is to look at what the needs of these people are and ensure that they are met in the existing programs or services. So the answer may not be attendant care; the answer may be something else.

But thank you for raising it and we will . . . you know, when we get more information from you we can look at this individual case.

Mr. Koenker: — I'm not suggesting, just to be clear, that attendant care is necessarily the solution. I'm suggesting that the problem of a double standard with the grandfathering does need to be addressed in terms of bringing equity and universality to the health care system. And it's especially glaring when you have people in similar circumstances living in the same building with very different circumstances in terms of the public resources that are available to them.

So I'd commend this to your care as a point of policy or principle.

Mr. Hnatiuk: — Okay. Well thank you very much, Madam Chair, for having this raised. And we'll do some follow-up on this.

Ms. Stanger: — I just want to say, Con, to you and the department, you're certainly following up on many of the auditor's suggestions and have worked closely with them. I'm really pleased to see the work you've done, particularly in the waiting list area and also in SHIN, because this is emerging technology.

And I know I was asked by a person I happened to meet on the airplane . . . It's amazing. We meet; works for IBM out of Regina. And now I have an answer for him. Because he said, I can't see why they're wasting so much money developing four different systems when you could be all on the same system.

Well he may be . . . I couldn't answer the question for him. But I can now. He may be a computer expert but he does not understand the intricacies of the health system. And after your explanation today I can just take it out of Gordie's explanation today. I can just take it out of the *Hansard* and send it to him.

Anyway, but there is an area that I'm concerned with, and this keeps coming up more and more and more not only in family circumstances and friends, but constituent circumstances. Somehow there seems to be a lack of coordination in our system. This is a broad generalization. But it seems to me where the difficulty seems to break down, the difficulty isn't they're satisfied with the physicians and the care, it's when you begin transferring people or trying to get a diagnosis where there seems to be a breakdown.

I'm wondering, in the Department of Health, what you folks are doing to try and encourage health boards to refine the coordination. I'll give you an example.

I had a physician tell me — it's not bad enough that I have all these other problems, but when I go to the doctor, first I have to listen to his complaints about the health system. Then we finally get to me. I just about lost it last time. But I was patient because actually he was giving me information that other clients have been giving me, and constituents.

He says as a general practitioner he doesn't receive the information from when a patient is released, he doesn't get the information from the specialist. When he contacts the health board they say sorry, we're not going to do anything about this because we don't have the resources. Just a blank wall.

Now in our districts, in Lloydminster, it seems to me, I don't know why, but the rural health districts try a little harder. Maybe it's because the people that live there and work in the rural health district are also friends with all the people and they try a little harder. When you get removed to Lloydminster, it gets a little more offhand again, not trying to help these people when they're moving from facility to facility.

What is the Health department doing to try and encourage health districts to coordinate information so people, when they're moved from facility to facility have some . . . You see, what they are is insecure. They're getting to the point where they don't believe the system is working well. Oh, I think

everyone's trying hard in the system but somehow the information or what they need to know isn't being passed on.

Mr. Hnatiuk: — Well, Madam Chair, thank you, first of all, for the very positive support of comments. And I'm not sure if I should say thank you for raising an extremely difficult question. I'll try to address it but you do raise an issue that . . . And probably because of all of us who sit around this table occupying positions of public service, we hear the complaints first. And there obviously are things, and many things, that can be improved.

In my experience in the health care system I'm sometimes amazed that anything works, given the complexity of the system. First of all, there are about 25 or 28 different professional bodies so you have many professions with somewhat different values and standards and approaches and views all trying to work together.

Secondly, there is no end to what one wants to do for one's patient or one's client if you're a general physician or a specialist. I think it's inherent in a nurse or a doctor or a health care provider to provide the absolute best help and the best that you can do for that person. Well the best may always mean that it would be nice to have more resources than are available, so the common complaint will be that we could use more resources.

The third common complaint is that we're all overworked and we're all working very hard. Now I think that relates in part to we're still recovering from what happened in the early '90s to mid-'90s in terms of managing the fiscal situation. We haven't fully recovered from that.

I think that, fourthly, we've undergone tremendous amount of change right across this country. Everybody's attempted to decentralize some of their services or to regionalize their services to make some kinds of changes.

But the other thing that's changing is the rate of change in terms of science and technology and information. The number of people in Saskatchewan that now have access to a computer Internet which gets them into a web site that tells them what the latest and bestest drug is for a particular condition, allows them to find that information, and then want it, and make demand for that service or that drug or that treatment.

And so people are much more knowledgeable. With knowledge and information, there comes much more debate about the system. Because we're much more transparent, I think it causes much more debate.

Now that doesn't explain all of the reasons why there isn't better coordination and better communication. What are we attempting to do about it? Well, a number of things. On a regular basis the minister and I meet with the Health District Advisory Committee — these are representatives from the district health boards — where we can talk about major policies and major issues that come to their attention and to our attention.

Secondly, on a regular basis I meet with the CEOs of all the district health boards. And it's a very large forum; there's many

issues. We attempt to do more standardization and to bring issues to their attention.

For example, we give them feedback on the kinds of complaints that we would receive about services, about what are people complaining or concerned about. I don't mean to say just complaining, but what are people concerned about. We share that with them.

We work together with district health boards in a whole variety of task forces to try to solve some of the problems that I identified.

We also have recently assisted in the formation of the chiefs of staff organization. Historically in a health care setting you have an administrative component and you have a medical component. And if we go back to the old days where the hospital administrator sort of ruled, there was one person in charge. It was the hospital administrator, and the hospital administrator seemed to bring everything together. At least that's what we thought.

Some would argue that the doctors would do what they wanted to do anyway; the administrators would do what they wanted to do. But in reality there's the administrative arm and there's the medical arm. It's not just the doctors. It's all the other health care providers. And this has to be brought together.

And the more that they communicate . . . And some of the chiefs of staff have said to me over the last number of months that all of them who become chiefs of staff in an organization, none of them have received any training to be chiefs of staff. They've trained to be family physicians or specialists or surgeons, but no one has trained them how to administer and do the administrative part of the medical services.

So they have formed an organization that we're very supportive of, along with the Saskatchewan Medical Association and the college of physicians and surgeons, where they can get together regularly to discuss issues that are in common and meet on a regular basis with the CEOs, with the administrative arm of the health care system. Now we hope that that will show improvement.

The other thing that we hope is that we can continue to work at stabilizing the system, that as you have more stability, physicians staying in the communities for longer periods of time. I think you identified correctly that in smaller communities where people know one another, they find ways to solve the problems by talking to one another very directly.

As you get to a larger community, there is more anonymity and there is less sort of knowledge about what happens and there is more reliance then on different kinds of mechanisms and vehicles for communication and coordination. And these sometimes break down and sometimes they're not working as well as they should.

So we know that when someone needs a procedure in respect of cardiac care, the services are excellent in this province. And we receive very few complaints about what happened to me when I got a heart attack or when I needed an angioplasty. We seem to be getting that right. Some of the other things that are less

critical and immediate, we seem to have a few more concerns about.

I think that the answer to the question is that we need to be open; we need to be not defensive when we hear of criticism and concern, but we continue to look at mechanisms to jointly solve these problems. And I believe the communication is a very large part of it. I think that secondly, is continuing to work on the kind of things like best practices, so that we continue to standardize at the highest best practice level possible.

Ms. Stanger: — Well thank you. I know that I'm not thinking of, when I asked the question, of the expectations which I think in some ways are right out of whack. I mean doctors aren't gods. And some of the expectations of the medical profession are unreal right now.

Now that, I think, as I told my doctor, that's self-fulfilling. You guys put yourself on that pedestal, with a lot of other things, and the expectations of the medical system are unreal. But I'm not talking about that; I'm talking about practical ways that we can better coordinate the things that are good and are happening.

And the other thing is I think there should be some education — I don't know if that's a responsibility of the Department of Health or who — some education on diagnosing. I think in our system that diagnosing is the most difficult thing. I know the specialist I went to here in Regina tells me that there are only two or three procedures once you diagnose. To diagnose is the most difficult. He said, that's why I spent a lot of time when you came in here initially, because diagnosis is difficult.

I don't think the average person understands that. I think they watch *ER* and think that you're going to be rushed in there and the doctor or the specialist is going to diagnose you immediately and then he's going to give you treatment. Well it isn't that simple. And I don't know how you get it across to the ordinary person that maybe hasn't even had health care for 20 years and all of a sudden something happens and they think it's the system or the doctor to blame when they can't diagnose it immediately.

I'm finding diagnosis is really . . . How can you educate the public to realize this is complicated? The more the doctors know, the less they know in some areas. My in-law is a neurologist. He's a foremost authority on MS (multiple sclerosis) in Canada — Dr. Seland. He tells me that — and he's 57 years old, just came home from Stockholm, a conference on MS — he says he knows far less about MS than he knows . . . there's far more to find out than what he knows.

So I think that somehow we have to get this across to people, because while they're intelligent and more knowledgeable and they're on the Internet, they're not thinking straight about what medicine can do. I don't know who's created the myth that it can solve everything. And I believe that if we spent every dollar in our budget in Health we'd still have people dying every day.

Mr. Hnatiuk: — I'm not sure, Madam Chair, how to respond to that other than to take the comment seriously about the difficulty and the need to continue to improve in the area of diagnosis.

I think that the role here again of the College of Medicine and the college of physicians and surgeons and the SMA (Saskatchewan Medical Association) and all of us working together . . . and continue to have ongoing education. I think that the addition of CT (computerized axial tomography) scanners and new MRIs (magnetic resonance imaging) will certainly contribute to that. I think that when Gord described SHIN in terms of coordination and access will facilitate the diagnosis and the communication coordination.

So there are a number of things at play but this is an area in which you continually strive to be better and never reach the ultimate goal, because I think you've adequately described how new information and new signs create so much more to know that the more we know sometimes the more difficult it is to . . . the more knowledge we have to manage. So I'll take those comments advisably, thank you very much.

Ms. Stanger: — That's just what the ordinary person out there is thinking. Thank you.

Mr. Hillson: — Madam Chair, and good morning. I didn't want to cut you off. I was finding the member's line of questioning quite interesting. Are you finished?

Ms. Stanger: — Oh I'm done. I said thank you.

Mr. Hillson: — Okay.

Ms. Stanger: — Can't you tell my pauses?

Mr. Hillson: — Okay. However continuing somewhat in that vein, I'd like to go to the issue of the waiting lists, and the hip replacements especially, and I realize that we have a study group looking into that. I think we're all pleased with that.

But may I offer the comment that the problem, at least from my standpoint as an MLA and I'm sure all of my colleagues, is not just the waiting of and in itself, which I think we all recognize we want to get that down but requires resources, but the problem that I'm seeing with the people coming to me is that they simply have received no information.

And of course when you've been put on a list months ago and you've heard nothing for several months, you are forced to conclude that the system has forgotten about you.

And if I may say, I disagree a little bit with my colleague across the way in that most of the people that come to see me are understanding of the fact that there's going to have to be waits and that there may be people more critical than them who will have to come before them, and so I don't think they have unrealistic expectations of the system. Most of them appear to be surprisingly understanding even those who are in discomfort.

But what's happening with people who are coming to me is that either they've been told it's six months and now it's 10 months and nobody's contacted them, or they simply haven't been told what to expect at all and so after six months they wonder why nothing has happened. And if they had been told in the first place, well unfortunately it's 12 months — well I'm sure nobody around this table is happy about 12 months — but if it's 12 months, it's 12 months and people will at least understand

they have to live with that.

So I don't want to impose more paperwork on the department, but I see you nodding your head. Is there some way just simply to give the patients a realistic understanding as to when they can expect to receive treatment?

You told us earlier, Con, that there's no in the green just when the waiting period starts. Is there a need to set times in the system? Say well you have now been approved for hip replacement. Under the present timelines we anticipate that you will probably be called for surgery around such and such a date. As I understand it, that's simply not happening now.

Mr. Hnatiuk: — Madam Chair, I perhaps wasn't very clear in my description earlier of the criteria that we've asked the task force to address in addressing the issue of waiting lists. And one of the criteria — and I'm sorry if I didn't indicate that earlier — is to address that very issue that the member just described and that's the issue of the feedback in communication. And if you can get when waiting starts, then that's good because then you know when waiting starts. But it's important for you to know where you are. You've adequately described that.

That is a problem. There is no system to do that right now. We're going to have to . . . And the task force has been asked to look at that — how is it that we could inform people where they are on the waiting list or how long it will be and what's happening to them.

But the other important part is the maintenance of waiting lists. Because sometimes people's conditions change and it's important for people to know that they need to contact their family physician or their specialist if their condition changes. So maybe they choose not be on the waiting list. Because the other problem that happens, people may be on a waiting list and because it takes a certain amount of time, their condition may change or they may change their mind about having a procedure. They've now decided that they can live with the discomfort as opposed to having that particular procedure or surgery.

So communication both ways is going to be important. And I think that we can expect more people to communicate more if we communicate back to them, sort of the reciprocal mutual responsibility between the system and the individual. And that's one of the criteria that the task force has been asked to identify — is how is it that we can systematize it so that the individuals know where they are in the waiting period.

Mr. Hillson: — Okay thank you very much. And may I just add this one additional comment that sometimes when I've made inquiries on behalf of patients, I have at times felt that the system has perhaps resented it and felt that the patient is trying to use political pressure to jump the queue or some such thing, where this whole unfortunate scenario could have been avoided if the patient had simply received a six-month letter saying we haven't forgotten about you, we hope to have you in by such and such. And I would hope that that can be done without simply burdening our health officials with more paper.

Mr. Hnatiuk: — Madam Chair, the other interesting part about all this is that the waiting time also varies by specialist or by

physician, so that oftentimes the wait is very short if you're willing to go to see a particular physician with a short waiting list. But there are physicians or specialists that get known well by a particular community, want that particular specialist, and therefore that particular individual ends up having a very long waiting list.

So we have a number of situations and we asked the task force to look at this as well. Is there a way of informing the public at large as to what the waiting lists are for various specialties or procedures or even individual physicians. Now that could get to be a little bit of a thorny issue, but we've asked the task force to look at that as well.

Mr. Hillson: — Okay. So there may also be an issue there that if patients have a way of finding out and they've got a choice, well, if I went to Prince Albert instead of Saskatoon it would be half the waiting list.

Mr. Hnatiuk: — That's right.

Mr. Hillson: — Okay.

The Chair: — Can I just interrupt you for a second? Mr. Deputy Minister, I realize that we had told you until 11 o'clock and it looks like we haven't quite finished yet. I have talked to my colleagues and it looks like perhaps in a half an hour we could be finished up, and if that would be all right with you, we'd ask that you can stay for awhile.

Mr. Hnatiuk: — We would prefer to finish up rather than having to come back at another time. Sure, we'll stay for another half hour.

The Chair: — I appreciate it. And for the rest of the members, if we have to leave the next one off our agenda for awhile and just go into the 11:30 one then we'll come back to Labour later on. Okay.

Mr. Hillson: — When you were with us just before Christmas, you gave us quite a lot of information on health districts and where they stood in deficits. And since then I have more information that some of our health districts have, the past two years, been living off reserves but those reserves are now pretty well depleted.

Is there any ongoing strategic plan about what happens when the health districts are in, if I can use the term, real deficits as opposed to paper deficits? I think we did have some discussion. Maybe paper deficits isn't a good way of describing, but I think that some of the discussion before Christmas is some of these deficits are paper deficits. But as I understand it, they're quickly going into real deficits.

Mr. Hnatiuk: — Madam Chair, what we're doing is we're currently in the budget process for the next fiscal year. So all of the fiscal situations of all of the district health boards are being reviewed as we develop our budget. And all of this will be examined as we develop our budget for the next fiscal year.

The second thing that we're doing is we are asking health boards to develop three-year plans, so that we could have a longer range look at what their plans are and then match up the

fiscal planning to the planning.

Of course we're also waiting to see what will happen with the federal . . . you know, there's lots of discussion about the CHST (Canada Health and Social Transfer) and whether or not there'll be additional health care funding available and that will help to determine how much we can do in terms of funding the health care system.

But the health care boards do provide their audited financial statements. They do present their plans and their plans are approved each year by the minister. The minister needs to approve their plans.

So that if a health board has what you would call a real, as you've described it — I understand what you mean by meaning a real deficit, in other words they don't have reserves or anything else in which to offset that deficit — then we will be working with that board to ensure that there is a plan to be able to manage that. And so we'll be working very closely with them and engaging in a new budget process over the next couple of months.

Mr. Hillson: — What indications are you getting from Ottawa? We are of course reading in the paper that there's likely to be an improvement in the CHST. Will that come in the form of strings attached and new initiatives or will that come as simply new resources available to fund the programs we've got?

Mr. Hnatiuk: — Well it's really difficult to know. I think there's two categories of responses. One category is what we think is most likely to happen and the other category is what we hope will happen.

What we hope will happen is that there'll be a commitment to restore the CHST to its full amount with some escalator to it over a shorter period of time — and shorter period of time, I think that the media has reported the potential of \$2 billion a year over three years. Now that, when you add inflation and you add increased acuity and you add increased costs for issues like Y2K across this country, then it still does not bring you back to a level playing field.

So it would be nice if it was more than \$2 billion a year. If it's less than that . . . Saskatchewan gets about 3 per cent of what the federal government offers to the provinces.

What we don't know is how that plays off against any tax changes that the federal government may make in its next budget. So that transfer payments and the tax regime will also play — and equalization formulas — will also play into the resources available to the province. So one needs to look at all of these elements.

Mr. Hillson: — May I interrupt, just a second please?

Mr. Hnatiuk: — Sure.

Mr. Hillson: — You said 3 per cent?

Mr. Hnatiuk: — About 3 per cent.

Mr. Hillson: — I thought we were 6 per cent of the national

population.

Mr. Hnatiuk: — No, I think that historically our funding that we get is about 3 per cent, 3 to 4 per cent of anything that we get in these kinds of payments. I'm not sure what we are as a percentage of the population. So because the formulas relate to equalization again, you have to look at all of these formulas. When you add it all up, we may be 6 per cent but I'm talking about what we would get in the CHST. That's my understanding. I could be off by a little bit.

Mr. Hillson: — Okay.

Mr. Hnatiuk: — Nonetheless when you look at what we've had to replace by the previous cuts — and we've replaced all of those losses, but we've had difficulty adding over and above what we've lost in the transfer payment — it's created a tremendous pressure in the health care system.

The other question that you raised about is it unconditional or is it conditional is the subject of debate in a number of forums, one being in the social union forum as well where first ministers are attempting to sort out, through their Council of Ministers responsible for this forum, the appropriate roles and responsibilities of the two orders of government. And so we can only guess at this point of time. We've been asking for non-conditionality because the circumstances differ in each and every province. We know that we need more resources to meet increased acuity, increased costs of doing business, and to address some of the issues like waiting lists that we've been discussing. It's a resource issue in large part.

So we're hopeful, and we'll have to wait hoping we're going to get more information soon. But I can't give you a definitive answer as to how much it would be and whether there would be conditions or not. One of the speculations is that there would be some unconditional and some conditional. And I don't know what that would mean.

Mr. Hillson: — Okay. I'd like to turn to the hospital foundations and the share of break-open tickets. I understand that when the present agreement was entered into with the hotels association, break-open ticket revenues were shared with just two foundations, the two large cities. And so Nevada ticket sales revenues were given to, or are presently given to just Regina and Saskatoon hospital foundations.

I understand that is up for renegotiation. I wonder if now there's any thought of a more equitable distribution among all the hospital foundations of the province, outside of just the two major cities? And of course I use it as example and illustration only, but for example, The Battlefords Health District.

Mr. Hnatiuk: — Madam Chair, I believe that the member is correct in describing the current arrangement as being a sharing with the two large district health boards and isn't broader. I'm unable to answer that question. I would have to go to Liquor and Gaming corporation to answer, to get more response then.

I understand that the revenues from that particular sorts . . . source may have changed. But I don't know to what degree or how much or whether it's gone up or gone down. And I don't know what the impact would be if it was distributed, whether it

would have the kind of impact it was distributed more widely. But I'm sorry, I'm just unable to answer that question. I don't have the information.

Mr. Hillson: — My understanding though was that it was Department of Health that was negotiating. And I mean you are correct that break-open ticket revenues have declined since other forms of gaming have expanded, but still apparently only being shared with just the two foundations and no other foundations.

Mr. Hnatiuk: — Yes, that is, that is the current arrangement.

Mr. Hillson: — Okay. And you're not able to say whether that arrangement may be moved to something more equitable.

Mr. Hnatiuk: — I'm not at this time, I'm sorry.

Mr. Hillson: — Okay. And sticking with hospital foundations, are there any guidelines into the sort of areas they should be in? And what I mean by that is I think the anticipation of the public would be that foundations are doing the extras in our health care system, and foundations and private donations should not be used to finance what our tax dollars are supposed to be doing. And yet I hear of foundations doing things such as purchasing lights for the operating room. And this sounds like, this sounds like basic service that's coming out of the foundations that we really thought was coming out of our, say, our tax dollar.

Are there any guidelines to see that, as to what the difference between what Saskatchewan Health and the health districts ought to be providing, and the little extras that can be supplemented by foundations?

Mr. Hnatiuk: — Madam Chair, the purpose of the foundations historically has been to raise funds and provide largely for equipment that was over and beyond what was provided as what you would describe as a tax-funded, health care system. And it was largely attributed to the larger tertiary centres, which would have additional and new equipment that provided for the more specialty services.

I'm unaware of . . . I'm not saying that it hasn't happened that foundation money may have been used. I am aware that some of the health districts have actually negotiated with their foundations for a temporary period of time to borrow some money from the foundation — there are some guidelines around that — and have replaced that money in the foundation so the foundation would be used for the purpose for which it was intended, and that's for the purchase of equipment. I'm aware of, I think, one or two cases like that.

But historically that's what the foundations were. And that's why they've been focused on Regina and Saskatoon, because those are the tertiary centres that have had the very expensive equipment.

I'm being passed some information here that says the department does provide specific identifiable capital funding to health districts. Sorry, this is not helpful to me.

So the historical arrangement has been for foundations to provide additional equipment primarily to tertiary centres.

Mr. Hillson: — Is there or could there be developed a set of guidelines so the public would be told that the publicly supported system will provide the following? And then it could be understood that this is what we can anticipate our tax dollars will do. And, if we as a community are prepared to raise the funds, we can do extra.

But it does seem to me there's a blurring of lines as to what we can expect the publicly funded system to do and then what the community through its own efforts can supplement with.

Mr. Hnatiuk: — Madam Chair, I think the suggestion about developing those kinds of guidelines so the public is clear is an excellent suggestion and we'll certainly take it under consideration. I'm informed that some of the foundations have also moved beyond equipment into funding research.

So it probably is time to take a review and communicate more clearly to the public about what the role of the foundations are versus the role of the publicly funded health care system.

Mr. Hillson: — And one final question, Madam Chair. I'm told that close to 80 per cent of the break-open tickets in the province are purchased in the rural areas, but at present, you say, we've been talking . . . only the two cities receive the charitable portion of the revenue. And do you consider this a Health or a Liquor and Gaming issue in terms of who I should be talking to in having that changed?

Mr. Hnatiuk: — Madam Chair, I think it's both. Obviously Health has a role to play here.

I think that the rationale for that was is that the rural people also benefit from these tertiary services. These are services that are not available in the rural communities. So that when we look at Regina and Saskatoon, they don't just provide health care services to those cities; they provide . . . I saw, and I don't have the information with me, but Saskatoon is an example. I was quite surprised to see the percentage of their clientele that they draw from the south-west corner. Now that probably has to do with travel patterns and the way the highways run and so on.

But the tertiary centres are exactly that. They are provincial services. They aren't just Regina and Saskatoon. So therein lies the rationale for who benefits. And so that even though the money goes to these two tertiary centres from the break-opens . . . I think that's what they're called. Are they called break-opens?

A Member: — Break-opens or Nevadas.

Mr. Hnatiuk: — I experienced it once when I worked at bingo for my son's hockey team. It was a unique experience.

But people from across the province do use these services, and that's the rationale for the money going. They are provincial resources.

Mr. Hillson: — Well I think we all understand that certain specialized services will only be accessed in Regina and Saskatoon. However, as Ms. Stanger has already eloquently argued, in so far as is possible we want the basic primary services available in the home communities. And surely it's

only fair that hospital foundations and other communities get a share of these Nevada ticket sales.

Mr. Hnatiuk: — Madam Chair, thank you very much for those comments. They're very helpful as we look at this issue.

Mr. Hillson: — Nothing further. Thank you.

The Chair: — I did hear you comment that you might be checking with Liquor and Gaming to give you further information. So if you do get that, maybe it's possible to give the committee a copy of that information.

Mr. Whitmore: — Just to note, Madam Chair, Liquor and Gaming will be coming to the committee I do believe tomorrow, and there'll be an opportunity for committee members to ask Liquor and Gaming about that very question so it's no problem for the committee.

The Chair: — Okay, thanks.

Mr. Hnatiuk: — Madam Chair, if it's permissible, we will talk to Liquor and Gaming today so they can carry on this conversation with you tomorrow and advise them that they'll be providing more information on this matter here tomorrow.

The Chair: — That's great. We're all working together here like *Sesame Street*. I've got Mr. Shillington, Mr. Koenker, and myself.

Mr. Shillington: — I don't believe I'll take a long time. The first section, section A in the Provincial Auditor's report deals with financial management. Most of the recommendations . . . In large part I think the recommendations were previously concurred in by the committee. And I think without exception the department is working towards or has at least made some progress in meeting those.

So I think nothing more need be said about that except to congratulate the department on their progress in meeting them, with perhaps one exception and that was the Y2K problem. I was out for 10, 15 minutes and if I missed this I invite you to just say so and I'll review *Hansard* but . . . First of all, let me say I agree with your comments that the Y2K matter is becoming something of an obsession.

While it clearly is a problem we should take seriously, I do not believe that we ought to be laying by stores of food and water for one month as I heard somebody on one of the news channels say this morning. I just cannot believe the world's coming to an end at that time . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . That's right. That's right. Some of us might get down to fighting trim in about that time if we never had another calorie . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . That's right. That's what we need, perhaps, to recover from Christmas.

When you were here in the fall there was an extensive discussion about the Y2K problem. I don't want to repeat it. I think you gave us some relatively satisfying assurances with respect to the department's progress in meeting . . . the end being Y2K compliant as the language now is.

You had heard from some of the districts who were working on

it. And I think as I recall the conversation, some of the districts had not yet responded. I wonder if you can update the committee on that.

Mr. Hnatiuk: — Yes, Madam Chair. At that time we'd indicated that a number of districts had responded and some had not. We've had more districts respond now. There's still a few that have not but the target is . . . I believe it's the end of this month, February 1. We will have a complete inventory in the next few weeks from all of the districts in terms of all of the equipment and what is compliant; what isn't. And then we will be reviewing that and working with them.

What we will be doing is ensuring that . . . Or our objective is to ensure that at very minimum we have the assurance that we will have a health care system that's fully functional on January 1, 2000 so that we don't need to have absolutely everything compliant.

We also have a lot of equipment that does not have imbedded chips so we not need worry about that. It's the more recent equipment. And of course the largest issue is in the two very large tertiary centres and they're advancing quite well and already have orders for new equipment where equipment can't be made compliant and is necessary. Others have plans and they're working on making their equipment compliant. So we're feeling relatively confident but want to remain continually vigilant.

And we're also in touch with the other provinces so we can learn from them. And we might find some shortcuts or find some things that they have done that would be beneficial to us as well. We have a clearing house that we participate in with the other provinces in exchanging information and updating each other. So we're feeling relatively confident but will remain vigilant on this issue.

Mr. Shillington: — In part C, in the . . . shining through the cautious language which is typical of an auditor's report and I may say quite appropriate — I'm in no sense being critical, it's quite appropriate — but shining through that was a relatively positive report on the department's success in developing performance criteria and a system for reporting. I thought it was quite complimentary.

And I suppose perhaps that bespeaks some confidence that perhaps the health care system is improving through all the dust, confusion, and noise that goes on and in spite of some harsh critics which just remain wilfully obtuse about the whole thing.

I'm wondering if you're in the position where you can share with the committee, as I understand the process, what one is attempting to do is to develop some objective criteria by which we can measure whether or not the health system is better or worse.

I'm wondering if you — and I think what the Provincial Auditor gave you was high marks on the process which was thorough and inclusive, I think, of the stakeholders — I'm wondering if you're able to share with us any results. The point where we have . . . Are we able to draw conclusions from the criteria which we've formulated? And I know that we've got

some of that. The waiting lists, I think, are perhaps one indication of that.

I'm wondering if you have sort of comprehensive conclusions based on the performance material?

Mr. Hnatiuk: — I'm going to make just a preliminary comment then ask Ms. Klassen to expand on that. I just want to say work is underway now to facilitate release of information and resource package of core indicators for the mothers' and infants' population group.

Now over the next year we'll be putting out more work and more indicators as we complete this work. So that as you get these indicators out and as you begin to measure the performance, we want to tie that into our annual reporting and build that right into our annual reports. I think the Provincial Auditor has given us high marks in the past for changing the format and moving towards a more useful results-oriented annual report. We want to be able to tie this work right back into our annual report when . . . as we progress through this process.

I'll ask Carol to add some additional comments in addition to one.

Ms. Klassen: — Thank you, Madam Chair. What I would add to this is because of the importance of using this information for planning and decision making, what we've been doing through a very collaborative process, which involves HSURC, or the Health Services Utilization and Research Commission, as well as health districts and the department, is not only identify what the core indicators will be — and we're doing it by population groups which is why as the deputy minister indicated, we've started with mothers and infants. There is work going on around children and youth as a broad population group. There'll be a group which is adults and as well seniors. And we're looking in all of those areas in terms of what there might be in terms of core indicators.

For each of the indicators that are selected, what we're doing and why it's taking some time is putting together important background information which will describe why that indicator is important in terms of planning and decision making and will include a fair bit of detailed information on the data.

So it will have a historical profile if you like, in terms of age and sex where appropriate, and comparative analysis, if we can, even on an interprovincial basis. So we'll provide some very technical information about the methodology underlying the collection of information so that it's comparative information, and as well we'll talk in terms of factors that can contribute to that indicator result.

Let me give you a couple of examples of the indicators for the mothers and infants group. Some of these obviously are often discussed and will appear very logical to have been selected. One is the infant mortality rate, which obviously is the number of deaths of infants under one year of age per 1,000 births.

As well we're looking at something that's called the incident of high-risk birth weight. We often talk about low birth weight but high birth weight also has significant risk complications around

diabetes and other kinds of illness. So we look at both infants who weigh less than one would expect and more than a certain weight average.

We're looking in terms of the whole area of prenatal care, and I won't go on but it's an example of not only are we identifying the indicators, but we're then putting together a package of information which will be most helpful to districts and the department in terms of planning and decision making.

Mr. Shillington: — So I take it that one might look forward to a description of the process and some conclusions in the annual report which will be filed in March of this year or are you saying the annual report which will be filed in March of 2000?

Mr. Hnatiuk: — I think March of 2000, Madam Chair. I think that the ultimate vision if I could describe it very simply, is that every community would understand and know what the status of their health as a community is. And they would know . . . For instance we take the example of birth weight of babies. They would know for instance this year how many babies were born underweight or overweight, therefore what is the preventative measures. What's the rationale for working towards mothers delivering babies born of appropriate birth weight. There are things that can be done in respect of nutrition and care and prenatal care, etc. What would happen next year? Have they improved? And you could take the same thing for cancer, and heart attacks; you can take it for mental health issues. And so the community would know.

For instance in this year we have had X number of teenage pregnancies or we have had X number of suicides. What the community would obviously want to do and what we all want to do together is improve our quality of life and our well-being and remove or lessen or mitigate those indicators. So what you need to provide is the historical information, the rationale for the change in how you're going to collect the information, what indicator you're working towards, how you resource that, and what the result is.

That sounds very simple and logical. It isn't very simple because every indicator needs to be rooted in science, in some empiricism and some evidence. And then it needs to be able to be described in a way that people can understand it. Then the resources need to be lined up to mitigate those circumstances. The results are then evaluated and measured and reported. So that is a very, very simply . . . It sounds very simple; it's very complex.

So if we can begin to do some of these and continue to add to all of these and also compare it to how we're doing relative to others — other provinces, other nations, or other communities — we then know how to target and how to plan to deliver our services and how we assign our resources.

Mr. Shillington: — Indeed you're right. That leads me directly into my final question and that is the allocation of resources. And I think you probably partially answered it. My question was going to be how are you progressing with respect to an objective, and I think, open set of criteria for allocating resources. But I suppose the obvious answer is that the allocation of resources will necessarily follow your ability to publish and defend the performance criteria.

Mr. Hnatiuk: — Madam Chair, we actually probably are more advanced than most jurisdictions now in that we have a needs-based funding formula with criteria. And that needs-based funding formula is, if I can describe it, as being caretaked or cared for by a group of folks that are called, what we call the funder-user group, it's the people who receive the funding. It's people from the delivery system that work with us to look at the formula and ensure that it's fairness, it's well-known, it's transparent.

Now we want to improve on that and as we have performance indicators and as you aptly describe, we can then modify, refine that formula and continue to improve on it because right now it is fairly broad. I think it's relevant to the population health of a particular health district, but it can be refined so that resources can be more specifically targeted.

Mr. Shillington: — Just a final comment which you may or may not want to comment on and that is that it seems to be that your ability to make this process open and understood goes to the very heart of the solution to the current controversy surrounding health care. It strikes me that any time unlimited demands run up against limited resources you're going to have the kind of controversy you have now with the jockeying and the demands for more.

But to the extent that one can, it strikes me that this goes to the very heart of our ability to deal with the current health care controversy. And that is to make the whole business of allocation of resources better understood. Because each, it seems to me each district, indeed each health care professional, seems to think that they're shortchanged. Everyone else lives in the lap of luxury, and their corner of the world is the one being shortchanged.

And it strikes me that if the whole process were better understood and more open and more accessible, you might go a long way towards resolving the controversy which surrounds the health care system.

Mr. Hnatiuk: — Madam Chair, I absolutely agree with the member — that's what we're attempting to do. I believe that we're in fact doing a lot more than we did before. And we do have some more resources but not as much as he has indicated everybody would like.

And we are doing a lot more. We're doing a lot more surgery. We're doing a lot more hip replacements. We're doing more cataracts. We're doing more day surgery. We're doing procedures more quickly.

But as we're doing all of these things there's even more demand for the latest and best equipment, techniques, and so on, and so forth. And so we never seem to be able to exchange, you know — exchange what isn't, what has been not as good or not as well proven for something new. We just keep adding. And I think that's the process that we're going to have to get into to make a sustainable system.

Drugs are a critical area where the costs continue to increase, and there's a tremendous demand and growth, and an improvement in drugs that can in fact provide for better care of people.

But the debate often still centres around the number of beds and doctors and access to doctors. And I believe that is changing. It is an important component of the health care system, but that's not all that the health care system is all about. And the sooner we can get to what you've described, I think the better understood the process will be.

Mr. Shillington: — The Department of Finance has had I think some success. Their corner of the world it seems to me is debt management, and the allocation of money, allocation of surpluses, among payment of debts and reduction of taxes. It seems to me that their hearings, which they hold across the province in advance, during the period of time the budget is being prepared, has met with some success in terms of more understanding public of the limits of our ability to reduce taxes and pay down debt all at the same time.

And it may well be that the Department of Health — I know your human resources are stretched to the absolute limit — but if one could imitate that process perhaps and hold some hearings around the province in which you not only speak to health administrators whose responsibility after all is to ask for more, but deal with some of the service providers and the public as well. We might all be very well served by the process.

Those are my questions, Madam Chair. Thanks.

Mr. Koenker: — Just a brief comment to commend you for your involvement with the office of disability issues. I'm thinking particularly of respite care issues that are being looked at by that new office. And my understanding is that you've received a report on autism, and you've reviewed that, and you're now working with the office of disability issues with a view toward respite care programs in general across the piece.

And I think that's a very small and in some respect insignificant part of the work that you're doing, but it's nonetheless very important. And I want to commend you for adding that to your responsibilities, and particularly for your willingness to work in concert with other government departments such as Social Services and disability issues.

Mr. Hnatiuk: — Well, Madam Chair, thank you. I think another example is working with that office in terms of acquired brain injury as well. I'm really proud of the initiative between Saskatchewan Government Insurance, Social Services, the office of disabilities, the Department of Health, and the district health boards. I think that we're demonstrating what can be done in good partnership and creative use of resources to address an issue that is very difficult for family members and for community when someone acquires a serious brain injury. Thank you.

Mr. Koenker: — Well done.

The Chair: — Thank you. I have a number of questions. They're not long ones but I just . . . The first one is, one of the things that really I notice and I guess it still bothers me since the changes in our health system, is the word patient has gone out of the system and we call everybody a client now. As soon as people like myself who dealt with business talk about clients is that, first of all, the first word that comes to your mind then is money. Why do you call patients clients?

Mr. Hnatiuk: — Madam Chair, I think I use both interchangeably and I haven't thought about it. Because I think . . . I'll tell you what I do, and it's probably wrong, is a patient is more traditionally associated to me with someone being in a hospital and a client is someone who is receiving community services.

But that's probably very artificial and perhaps even very inappropriate. I've not done a lot of thinking about that but thank you for raising my consciousness about that. It'll give me considerable . . . I will think considerably about this issue.

The Chair: — I noticed the district health boards do it quite frequently too. And it seems to me it just brings up the word money to me, and I think when we try not to . . . when we don't want to do that then I think that it's something that's important.

One of the things the auditor brought out is that the department doesn't approve annual budgets for the districts until after the fiscal year has actually started. And I'm just wondering why this happens and wouldn't it make it easier for everyone if they had a budget in before so they weren't sort of in limbo for part of the time.

Mr. Hnatiuk: — Well it goes back, Madam Chair, to the process by which we get our money. The legislature has to approve the budget before we can put it out to other parties. And I don't know how it is that we would approve their budget before we know what it is that the legislature approves for our use. So we would like to give them early approval of the budgets, but I don't believe we disagree with the Provincial Auditor. We'd like to make it earlier and that's why we're asking for three-year plans.

But to approve their budgets in the absence of knowing what the legislature is going to approve for us, for me, provides a challenge that I don't think we can meet.

The Chair: — The three-year planning is probably a good idea for everyone.

Does your department keep records of how many people or residents that may be on waiting lists that chose to go out of province instead of waiting?

Mr. Hnatiuk: — Yes, we do, Madam Chair. We do have anything that is out-of-province that is pre-approved for payment, obviously we have a record of. So yes, we do have those records.

The Chair: — And what happens if someone would decide to do it and pay for it privately — for an MRI by going to Edmonton or something. Would you have records of that?

Mr. Hnatiuk: — No, not if that service was available here. Now we would in certain circumstances approve it but it would require prior approval.

The Chair: — Okay. And we understand that there's going to be another MRI in Saskatoon isn't there?

Mr. Hnatiuk: — That's correct. And a new one in Regina beginning operation in March, April of this year.

The Chair: — So that'll mean that there will be more technicians hired and so on.

Mr. Hnatiuk: — That's correct.

The Chair: — So right now we know that the MRI in Saskatoon is being used in the evenings by the students at the university, which is great, they get to work on it as well. But wouldn't it help with the waiting list if the technicians were hired now so they could be using the existing machinery more . . . 24 hours a day to get the waiting lists down.

Mr. Hnatiuk: — Yes, well of course it's not only getting people into the MRIs. It's what happens with them also after they leave the MRI and get the diagnostic done and getting them to it.

So the MRI actually . . . And criteria for access and waiting time is one of the initiatives of the western Canadian waiting list project as well. Because it's a challenge for everyone in terms of ensuring that it's appropriately used and that the standards for its use and waiting time are appropriate. But we will have the opportunity in Saskatchewan to have the full use of three MRIs very soon.

The Chair: — The kidney dialysis machine that's in Yorkton is up and running but it really only has enough funding for six patients so that means that the rest of them are still going into Saskatoon which means that . . . Regina, which means that there is still an added cost for some people. It's considerably cheaper, of course, if you can just do it within 20 miles from home.

Is there anything being done to address the fact that this is actually extra cost to certain people, and I don't know how they choose which ones have to pay out the extra hundred and fifty dollars or whatever it would cost to just drive into the city.

Mr. Hnatiuk: — I would ask Carol to respond to that.

Ms. Klassen: — Thank you, Madam Chair. The dialysis has commenced in December of this past year, 1998, in Yorkton. It's the second new satellite within a 12-month period. You might recall there was a satellite opened in Tisdale earlier in the year.

We have been going through a process working with both Regina and Saskatoon which have in-centre dialysis services for dialysis patients to see where we might in fact add satellite services.

The decisions in terms of where those satellites are and how much capacity we put into it is based on an assessment that the specialists do in those centres in terms of which people have conditions which they consider to be stable enough to be provided service outside of their direct care responsibility. And they will communicate with the family physician in that centre.

So actually the selection of people for the satellites and the indication to us in terms of the level of need is based on a clinical assessment that involves a specialist and the nursing care in the Regina and Saskatoon area.

We continue to monitor that because it does change. We also

look at what the diabetic population in the area is because diabetes is one of the contributing factors often to a need for dialysis.

The need that has happened in the south and central area which is Yorkton, also means that we will look at whether we ought to expand that satellite. We want to start with a core that is at the level that you describe, at six basically, so that we can gain experience with the nurse managers and the relationships that need to be formed and strengthened between a family physician on site communicating with a specialist.

As we gain that experience and as the specialists assess patients, we will look at whether that satellite needs to be expanded.

The Chair: — Basically it will be up to the specialists and the family physician to inform the Department of Health that yes, there is more patients that could use the satellite out in Yorkton, and then there would be additional money given to that satellite.

Ms. Klassen: — We actually have on an ongoing basis a committee that meets that looks at that. So that we do have communication and formal mechanisms to receive that information and to work together to ensure Regina and Saskatoon and the department and all providers work in a collaborative fashion. And that's been working very well.

The Chair: — Okay. Thank you. With drug services, I'm not aware if hospitals buy drugs centrally to give out to patients who are in the hospital, or do the patients . . . I know in some areas they have to bring in their own if it's certain drugs.

Ms. Klassen: — By and large the hospitals will provide drugs for all of the treatments that are subscribed. They have group purchasing contracts for some drugs, and some drugs are on an individual facility or district basis.

But unless you're an out-patient, typically the drugs are provided in the hospital. You may bring some of your drugs which are prescribed due to another condition that is not being the major focus of treatment.

The Chair: — So is there any cost saving there to be looked at if the drugs were all purchased centrally?

Ms. Klassen: — There are, if I could answer that, many . . . SAHO has a service that is provided to all districts that does in fact do bulk purchasing or group purchasing on behalf of all districts. And it's a voluntary process but they actually work very actively with districts across the province to determine what their forecasted needs are and then enter into a contract on behalf of many districts, not just one.

The Chair: — So then hospitals aren't part of that contract.

Ms. Klassen: — Yes, they are.

The Chair: — Oh, they are. Okay. I think we read . . . all of us saw an article not too long ago about the increase in the number of drugs that were prescribed and given out in the last few years, a considerable increase in them. And one of the comments was that doctors prescribe drugs because if they're very busy and they want to make sure they don't overlook

something, so often they prescribe a drug. Are you hearing that type of comment?

Mr. Hnatiuk: — I think there's a number of things at play here. First of all we do have an aging population, so people are living longer. So as a whole population we will use more of whatever is available.

I think the second thing is you've got a tremendous increase in proliferation in new drugs that are available to people, development of drugs for MS and a whole variety of diseases.

It wasn't very long ago that people were dying from AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome). Now this is not a very major issue in Saskatchewan as compared, for instance, to Vancouver. But AIDS is an example whereby people were dying; shortly after being diagnosed or contracting AIDS they were dying. People are now living with this condition as a chronic disease because of the application of drug therapy. It's called cocktails, and now they're finding ways to eliminate three drugs and only one replaces three and so on. So a tremendous advancement and development of pharmacology as a form of treatment.

So there's a whole multiplicity of reasons why that is happening.

The Chair: — I was contacted lately from somebody who's in a seniors' home and they were told that they're starting to pay for on an individual basis a lot more items like Band-Aids. And not only do they pay for the Band-Aid, they pay for the nurse's time to put the Band-Aid on. And I'm wondering if this is something that we're going to be seeing more of and if it's something that you're aware of.

Mr. Hnatiuk: — Madam Chair, I'd think it'd be unusual to pay for a nurse's time in a facility. I would like to know more about that particular case so I could follow up. I would find that highly unusual.

There's always been a payment of some supplies. My mother was in a special care home and I know we had to pay for certain supplies before health reform, and that has always been the case. But I would find that unusual. But I would be more than happy to get more information and follow up on that.

The Chair: — Okay. And the one area that I notice in the budget that mental health has had some increase in funding in the last couple of years from 42 to 46 million. And it seems to me that it's probably one of the areas that you may be addressing with your indicators because of the way that it also affects Social Services and Justice and all the rest of it. Is mental health issues one of the ones that is being given more of a priority now or are you looking at it in conjunction with other departments?

Mr. Hnatiuk: — Well I think it's, Madam Chair, I think it's a really, really critical issue from the perspective of Justice, Social Services, Health, and from the community at large. I think that when we went through the restricted and difficult budget times, oftentimes those services that are not kind of tertiary, acute care services were tending not to get funding or were in fact reduced.

That's why we're anxious to see this as a priority. It's interesting enough, one of the items that is under consideration by the provincial western provinces' waiting list initiative — mental health is one of the six areas. So we do want to give it more priority into the future. It's a really critical element in our health care system.

The Chair: — I just have one question left and that was on an issue that I think most of the other colleagues have dealt with in some way, and we're talking about SHIN. And I think that this information when it's all up will be given to doctors and to hospitals and to pharmacists. Is that correct?

And so probably and hopefully one of the big issues is confidentiality. Is that something that's taking more time and effort to maintain it? Like is this one of the issues that's already been dealt with by other areas that are using this type of network?

Mr. Hnatiuk: — Well I think, Madam Chair, that all of the provinces are considering what they're going to do about ensuring or giving greater assurance to the public about the protection of their privacy and their own information. That's why we're currently engaged in consultations and the health information protection Act. Now we may think that we have more security now than we'll have in the future. The reality is, is there probably isn't all that much protection now as dependent on each profession's own ethics. But there is no sort of systematic process.

I think however that when we get into electronic transfer of information and because of what we hear in the media, we as a community believe that there will be less security or there is more possibility for someone to break into the system, or hack the system, and get very sensitive information.

I know that the partner that's working with SHIN — Science Applications International Corporation — does have a system that protects the medical information of the president of the United States. They've built the security system for the Hong Kong harbour. They protect the information for Walter Reed and Bethesda hospitals and all the veterans' hospitals. So the technology's there to do it.

What we need to do is ensure that the legislative protection is there and that the population of our community feels comfortable that they are protected and know what the provisions are. And that's why we've been taking the extra time and consulting with the stakeholders on the health information protection Act and will eventually be bringing it through the legislature.

The Chair: — Thank you. If there's no further questions, we've got the recommendations. And I believe that there's all but four of the recommendations are ones that were dealt with in November, so I'm wondering . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Oh, and something under Part B as well.

But I'm wondering if we can just agree that the motion that the ones we ratified or made comments on in November, we'll just move forward . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . We'll just restate them.

So we have no. 7: We recommend that the Hospital prepare a plan to address the Year 2000 issue and carry out corrective action on critical systems before December 31, 1999. All in favour? Agreed.

A Member: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Okay. And the next one is ... a new recommendation is no. 11. Again concur? Everyone agree? Okay.

A Member: — Agreed.

The Chair: — And the new one on the fall report, page 88: We recommend that the Corporation should: prepare a development plan for each phase of SHIN that shows the benefits that will be achieved for the money spent; (and it) clearly set out when its development partner is to meet its expected performance level, obtain an independent assessment of its development partner's performance, and ensure differences, if any, between the expected and actual performance levels are remedied; obtain an independent assessment of the project's risks; and obtain progress reports from its development partner that provide more measures on the status of the project.

Agreed? Concur? And everybody's in agreement?

A Member: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Okay. We have a new one, no. 4, on chapter 6, "District Health Boards". It says, "We recommend the health boards prepare plans to address the Year 2000 issue ..." Agreed?

A Member: — Concur and note progress. Progress towards compliance is the auditor's comment, right?

The Chair: — Okay, concur and note progress. Agreed.

A Member: — Agreed.

The Chair: — And we have no. 9: We recommend that health districts: submit their budgets to the minister on time ... and obtain approval for planned operating deficits ... Agreed. Concur?

A Member: — Note progress.

The Chair: — Agreed. And I think that's it.

I'd like to thank the deputy minister and the officials. We had a very informative morning and we do appreciate the time you spent with us in answering all the questions.

Mr. Hnatiuk: — Thank you, Madam Chair, and Merry Christmas. Tomorrow is Christmas Eve in my world, so a Merry Christmas.

The Chair: — Well then, Happy New Year for whenever New Year's is.

Mr. Hnatiuk: — That's right. Thank you very much.

Public Hearing: Public Service Commission

The Chair: — Welcome. I apologize for making you wait out there. We'll try and make sure you don't miss your lunch hour.

I'll ask the Acting Chair, Rick, if he wants to introduce the officials with him this morning.

Mr. McKillop: — Certainly. On my right is Clare Isman, the executive director of human resource development. On my left, immediate left, is Sharon Roulston, director of administration. To her left is Shelley Banks, manager of communications. And I'm Rick McKillop, executive director of employee relations.

The Chair: — Thank you, and welcome. And the Provincial Auditor has a new official.

Mr. Strelieff: — Yes. With me is Rosemarie Volk, who leads our work at the Commission.

The Chair: — Welcome. And I'll read the statement to the witnesses.

Witnesses should be aware that when appearing before a legislative committee your testimony is entitled to have the protection of parliamentary privilege. The evidence you provide to this committee cannot be used against you as a subject of a civil action.

In addition, I wish to advise you that you are protected by section 13 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms which provides that:

A witness who testifies in any proceedings has the right not to have any incriminating evidence so given used to incriminate that witness in any other proceedings, except in a prosecution for perjury or for the giving of contradictory evidence.

A witness must answer all questions put by the committee. And where a member of the committee asks for written information, I ask that 15 copies of it be given to us so we can distribute it and record it as tabled.

And please address your remarks through the Chair.

So I'm going to ask the Provincial Auditor and his officials to give us an overview of this short chapter, chapter 15 I believe.

Mr. Strelieff: — Yes, it is chapter 15. And in this chapter we outline the significant issues facing the Public Service Commission as well as the results of our audit for this past year.

We put the significant issues in the chapter because we think that those issues will help legislators and the public understand and assess the performance of the commission. We also think it helps put our audit conclusions and findings into context.

Now Rosemarie is going to provide a more specific review of our chapter.

Ms. Volk: — Good morning, Madam Chair, and members. In this chapter we report that the Public Service Commission has

adequate rules and procedures to safeguard and control its assets for the year ended March 31, 1998 and that the Public Service Commission also has complied with authorities governing its financial activities.

In addition to our financial audit, we assessed the usefulness of the commission's 1996-97 annual report as an accountability document. To assess the performance of the commission, legislators and the public need adequate summary information about the commission's plan and about the achievement of those plans. Annual reports can provide this information.

The commission's '96-97 annual report has improved its reporting in several key areas; however, there is still room for some improvement. For example, the report should provide more information on what the commission has done and what it plans to do. And the report should also include a summary of broad goals and what the commission views as its measure of successful achievement of those goals.

We note that in 1994 this committee recommended a change in the law to allow the release of annual reports when the Assembly is not in session. To date the government has not changed the law. The commission's report for the year ended March 31, 1997 was tabled and released to the members on March 27, 1998, which would be 12 months after year end. The 1998 report has not yet been tabled.

Mr. Strelloff: — Thank you, Rosemarie.

The Public Service Commission also has developed and published a new strategic plan. You should obtain copies of it because it is quite useful and interesting. And again, as Rosemarie said, we still encourage you to encourage the government to pass the necessary laws to make sure that annual reports of departments and other agencies can be published as soon as possible.

We're finding that some agencies, because they can't table annual reports, will table other kinds of documents, incur the additional cost to make public what they're planning to do because it's important in terms of building public confidence and explaining to people about their programs and success. So I still urge you to encourage change in The Tabling of Documents Act, 1991.

Other than that, that's our review of chapter 15, Madam Chair.

The Chair: — Thank you very much. And I'm going to ask Rick if he has anything he would like to . . . any comments he'd like to make to the members.

Mr. McKillop: — Just that in response to the auditor's observations regarding our annual reporting, we are taking into consideration those comments in the preparation of our '97-98 annual report in terms of identifying broad goals and objectives and the linkages between activities, the things that were identified here.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you very much and welcome. I think from our last time that we met with your agency you brought us up to date with a lot of the initiatives that you're undertaking. One area that I want to ask you to update us on is an issue that

seems to move to the forefront and then subside from time to time and that's the whole issue around pay equity or equal work . . . pay for work of equal value and how to determine and ascertain all of those issues. Would you bring us up to date on where you are in that regard?

Mr. McKillop: — We have gone through a process with the SGEU (Saskatchewan Government Employees Union), the main bargaining unit in the public service, to jointly develop an equal pay for work of equal value classification plan. That plan was implemented October 1, 1998 as part of the memorandum of agreement reached in settlement of our most recent collective agreement.

Our undertaking to develop that equal pay for work of equal value classification plan came out of our '94 through '97 collective agreement, and we began work on it with the union in '95 and completed it in 1998.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Classification process is completed then?

Mr. McKillop: — The classification process is completed. The plan has been developed. All of the jobs in the SGEU bargaining unit have been evaluated against that new classification plan and implementation decisions communicated to all employees. We're still completing the final handful of appeals that came out of that allocation decision.

Mr. Gantefoer: — So it's then basically implemented with the current collective agreement that you've negotiated, is that correct?

Mr. McKillop: — With the SGEU bargaining unit. We're still in the process of developing a comparable plan with our smaller CUPE 600 bargaining unit, and then the out-of-scope classification plan has not been addressed at this time.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Is there implications or precedents that are likely to be transferred from the realm of government to the realm of private enterprise, if you like, in terms of that classification system? Or is it pretty much specific to government enterprise?

Mr. McKillop: — The classification plan is very much specific to government as an employer, has been developed for purposes of evaluating jobs within executive government itself. Other public sector employers, I'm aware — some others — are involved in similar processes with their bargaining units.

But in terms of the public service plan itself, it's very much specific to government employment.

Mr. Gantefoer: — And includes not only government departments but some or all Crowns as well, or not?

Mr. McKillop: — A small number of boards and agencies but not even the complete list of those and none of the Crown corporations.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Okay. Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Chair: — Any questions from any members?

I have a couple of questions. The cost of the agreement that was signed in October, are there dollar figures available for that?

Mr. McKillop: — I'm sure there are. I don't have them here. The settlement was three twos and an additional one per cent that was into benefits for a three-year agreement.

The specific dollar figures, I don't have here. Sharon?

A Member: — No.

Mr. McKillop: — They certainly are available. I don't have them.

The Chair: — So I have a couple of questions on the dollar figures. So maybe if I give them to you, you could provide the information to us?

Mr. McKillop: — Sure, certainly.

The Chair: — I'm wondering what the expected new costs will be for equal pay for work of equal value.

And the changes to the classification systems, I would imagine there was a number of them as well.

And then the recent 2-2-2 increases for government employees, can you give us an idea what that will cost as well? And the only other question I have: is the case against the federal government for pay equity, is that going to have any implications provincially?

Mr. McKillop: — Well it won't have any implications for us because we have negotiated and implemented equal pay for work of equal value plan. The federal case has to do with the timing of their implementation and whether or not there is an extensive period of retroactivity involved. We have addressed those questions in the implementation of our plan and there are no outstanding issues such that the federal decision will have any implications for us.

The Chair: — Thank you. I don't believe there are further questions. We just wanted to get an idea of the costs that would be involved.

Mr. McKillop: — The dollar costs, both with respect to the collective agreement and the new classifications.

The Chair: — That's that new classifications and the increases that are going to be given out. It would be useful information as we go into session. So if there isn't any further questions, I believe there is only one recommendation. Concur and note progress? Agreed?

A Member: — Agreed.

The Chair: — So we took you in late but we got you out on time. We do appreciate you coming down and for your information I understand the Provincial Auditor is pleased with the strategic plan that you have presented and so we'll take his word for it because I haven't seen it. Good work on that . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Okay, that would be great. Yes, I think it would be great. We appreciate it. Thank you very much.

So the members, do you want to do Labour now or do you want to . . .

Mr. Shillington: — I don't think it's going to take . . .

A Member: — I think we can do it.

Mr. Shillington: — Yes. I don't think it's going to take a whole long time.

A Member: — Let's go for it.

The Chair: — I'm going to see if the auditor is ready for this.

A Member: — Continue to improve the annual report. Concur and note progress.

A Member: — What do you have to say about that?

A Member: — Concur and note progress.

A Member: — I think so.

A Member: — Agreed.

Public Hearing: Labour

The Chair: — I prefer you wait for me.

A Member: — I think I agree with that.

Mr. Strelieff: — It's up to the members obviously. We would be going over what we have in the chapter, focusing mainly on the key risks that the organization faces, which are on page 222 to 223, line 4, but a discussion of those risks really you need the department officials here to explore how they're managing those risks.

So in general I'd like to just bring to your attention that we have set out those risks that the department needs to manage well to make sure that they're successful, to have a look at them, and then when you have the opportunity to speak with department officials, ask them how they're doing.

The one recommendation obviously relates to the annual report. The assurances that we're providing you on page 224 and 225 says that we carried out our audit and we're assuring you that they have pretty good management controls in how they manage their resources. They're complying with the key legislative authorities and that we think that they can improve their annual report.

And as I said earlier, I still urge you to recommend to the government that legislation change so that organizations can prepare and table annual reports in a more timely way. The more timely it becomes the more useful they are as performance reports and are taken seriously within the organizations. When it comes out a year later, it's sort of not a very relevant performance document.

So please consider that piece of advice. But on the other hand this committee has recommended the law be changed in the past and just for some reason there's an obstacle on it.

The Chair: — So maybe we should make sure that in our report we reiterate that fact, that we do believe that these reports should be brought out on a more timely basis.

Mr. Koenker: — I'd like to comment actually on the risks that were identified by the auditor. And I think these are significant and often not recognized by us as legislators. There's so many other matters that we have to deal with, often of a very practical nature, when it comes to the Department of Labour.

I think you've done us a real service in identifying the responsibility of the department for occupational health and safety — for example, protecting workers' rights — that workers have confidence in the department's programs but the concern that the resources might not be there to meet those challenges.

And more than that, the need for the department to keep abreast of changes in technology, in health and safety, and in the workplace, which is really changing so very rapidly, to ensure that they are up to running speed in dealing with the challenges of change.

I think these are very significant and I think they merit actually . . . In my mind I think they merit discussion with the department. I'm a little bit disappointed, I should say, that the department isn't here so that we could pursue these. I think the next time around, I for one would like to flag these and come back to them when we deal with the department.

So I want to thank the auditor and his office staff for flagging these. I think you've done us a real service.

Mr. Streliaff: — Well, one of the things we can do is make sure that these, or an update of these risks, are included in our next report so that you can read this with the idea of discussing with the department officials about how they are managing the risk.

By the way, the department agrees with them. But one of the healthy things that I find happening when we raise whether the organizations have identified their goals and then the key risks that might affect successful achievement of their goals and objectives is, quite often they haven't. And it provides them an opportunity to step back and reflect on exactly what they're trying to do. And then in the longer term it has, I think, a positive impact on how they manage their responsibilities and then explain.

Mr. Koenker: — I'm sure it does. But this is a comment. If you could hang a little bit more flesh on some of these things, develop your thinking and discussion with the department on these things for your next report, that would be helpful.

Mr. Streliaff: — One of our strategies is to try to get and encourage departments to do that themselves in their annual reports and then to have those annual reports provided to you in a more timely way. So what we do is say, well here's our understanding of the challenges or risks facing an organization, but we think the department should embrace them — they agree with them — but then put them in their planning and performance reports.

In the long term it shouldn't be the auditor that does this. It should be the department or agency officials. But just to trigger, encourage, precipitate action, we do it ourselves. So if they haven't done that in the next year in terms of the public reports that you get, we can flesh them out.

But again, the longer term is trying to encourage officials who manage programs and resources to set out their thinking on what they are managing and what they're worried about and how they're making sure that what they're worried about is managed well.

Ms. Stanger: — I just wanted to say that I like this format — the new format in the report. Who was responsible for that, just the way it's been published?

Mr. Streliaff: — It's an office-wide issue constantly.

Ms. Stanger: — I see I raised something.

Mr. Gantefer: — A struggle. If we've got to vote I'd like the old form. It's easier to see.

Ms. Stanger: — I'm sorry. I like this one better so there you are.

Mr. Streliaff: — It's easier to see the recommendations, yes, because this one is dark green and it's hard. Yes. But we're always trying to make it . . . If you remember we had a co-op student in here last May and part of her job was to help us redesign our reports, and this, is the result of that.

Ms. Stanger: — I knew it was a woman.

Mr. Streliaff: — It usually is.

The Chair: — Just that one comment now. The one recommendation that, to deal with, we can . . . We agree and . . .

A Member: — Concur and note progress.

The Chair: — Okay. And we're going to recess. But there was . . . Now you made me lose my train of thought. I can't remember what I was going to say.

When we talked about not having officials in here it was a decision like . . . Mr. Shillington, I agreed that we wouldn't. But I think maybe, all of us, it's our responsibility to make sure that if we want officials in here and if it looks like on the agenda we haven't got them, just raise it.

Mr. Shillington: — Yes. Any request would have — yes, that's right.

The Chair: — Yes.

Mr. Shillington: — I would admit that you were courteous enough to discuss this with me, and I concurred in that.

The Chair: — Okay. See you at 1:30. Thank you, everyone.

The committee recessed for a period of time.

Public Hearing: Education

The Chair: — Good afternoon. We have our quorum so we'll get started so we can get finished.

Good afternoon, Mr. Dotson. If you'd care to introduce the officials with you.

Mr. Dotson: — To my right is Ms. Mae Boa, the executive director of our shared finance and operations branch, shared with my department and the Department of Post-Secondary Education. And to her right is John McLaughlin, the executive secretary of the Teachers' Superannuation Commission.

The Chair: — Hello and welcome. The Provincial Comptroller has additional people.

Mr. Paton: — Yes, Madam Chair. I've got Lori Taylor with us again this afternoon. And as well Elaine Wood, who's a senior analyst in the department, is joining us.

The Chair: — Welcome. And also the Provincial Auditor.

Mr. Strelieff: — Yes, thank you. With me today is Amy Kinvig, originally from Milestone, sitting over there and a recent chartered accountant graduate. As well as Mark Anderson who's going to be presenting pretty soon. As well as Rosemarie Volk again, Bob Black, Fred Wendel, and Judy Ferguson. Judy's over there, in the middle.

The Chair: — Welcome. And I should have said last but never least. Before we continue on, I'll read the statement to the witnesses.

Witnesses should be aware that when appearing before a legislative committee your testimony is entitled to have the protection of parliamentary privilege. The evidence you provide to this committee cannot be used against you as a subject of a civil action.

In addition, I wish to advise you that you are protected by section 13 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms which provides that:

A witness who testifies in any proceedings has the right not to have any incriminating evidence so given used to incriminate that witness in any other proceedings, except in a prosecution for perjury or for the giving of contradictory evidence.

A witness must answer all questions put by the committee. And where a member of the committee requests information, I ask that 15 copies be submitted to the Clerk, who will distribute the document and record it as tabled.

And please address your remarks through the Chair.

We have chapter 3 to deal with, and I'll ask the Provincial Auditor to give us an overview.

Mr. Strelieff: — Okay. Thank you, Madam Chair, members, and officials.

Chapter 3 focuses on the kindergarten to grade 12 education system. And this, as you know, costs taxpayers about a billion dollars each year and provides education to approximately 190,000 students.

In late November this committee discussed our previous report on Education related to our '97 audit. This chapter focuses on our '98 audit. And as Mr. Dotson mentioned in the fall, our '98 work is a little bit broader than our '97 work and he was quite anxious to attend this committee meeting to discuss that work.

We did carry out additional work on the . . . in addition to our annual audit of the department and the many funds and agencies that it is responsible for. We also worked with the department to describe the department's role and the key areas it needs to manage to be successful.

We also looked at how the department used best practices to encourage and maintain the commitment of its key stakeholders to use the key performance indicators and report on how the kindergarten to grade 12 education system is performing.

Now I'm going to turn it over to Mark Anderson who will discuss the role of the department, our understanding of the key areas of importance, and the work on the Education indicator project.

Mr. Anderson: — Good afternoon. Thanks, Wayne. What is the role of the department? Simply put, the department is responsible for the overall quality of the kindergarten to grade 12 education system. The department must work with many partners though to carry out its responsibility. We also use the word stakeholders when we talk about partners, and I'll be using it somewhat interchangeably.

And I want to speak for a moment about the goals of education. The department working with some of its stakeholder groups developed the goals of education back in 1984, and we have found that they have held up well. The goals of education can be found in several of the department's publications, for example, inside the publication that was just handed out to you, the 1998 Education indicators report.

Now this report is an example of something important that the department does. The department publishes periodic reports on information on how it is doing on achieving some of its goals. We congratulate the department on these reports, and we encourage you to read them if you haven't already done so.

I'm going to speak for just a moment on risks that the department faces. Our office has worked with the department to identify the pressures and the risks it faces. The department has identified four areas of focus to help it reduce its risk. The first is before you.

The department needs to ensure the provincial curriculum reflects the knowledge and skills people need. The department sets the curriculum. The school divisions are required by law to deliver. Now not only must the curriculum equip students to live and work successfully in the future, but the department must see that schools actually use the curriculum and see that intended results — or we call them outcomes — are achieved.

Second, to reduce risk there needs to be a clear understanding of who is accountable for what and to whom. As I mentioned, the department is responsible for the overall quality of the kindergarten to grade 12 system and shares the responsibility for delivering that system with its partners. And one key partner is school divisions. When we speak of ensuring a clear understanding of expectations, the expectation is of a quality education system delivered at a reasonable cost.

No. 3. To reduce risks the department needs to ensure that schools have equal access to appropriate funding. School divisions receive their funding from two main sources — property taxes and from the department. In 1997 this split was roughly 550 million from property taxes and 400 million from the department.

Now school divisions will be quite different. They'll be different in terms of local economies, demographics, enrolment levels, and of course in terms of revenues that are available through property taxes.

The department needs to understand and work with these factors to ensure that school divisions — all of them — are put in a position to deliver the curriculum effectively to meet the goals of education.

This also means the department has to work closely with other parts of government, including Municipal Affairs, Culture and Housing, and with school divisions.

Finally, the department must develop and implement measures to address the needs of children and youth at risk of doing poorly in school. As identified by Saskatchewan's Action Plan for Children, of which the department is a participant, physical and economic social conditions all have an impact on how children learn. Identifying and eliminating these barriers increases the chances that children and youth will fully participate in society. The department plays an important role in addressing issues facing our children and youth.

As I mentioned a few minutes ago, the department has for quite a few years tracked and provided the public with some information on how it monitors the achievement of some of its goals. It does this through what it calls the kindergarten to grade 12 indicator reports.

The department has not accomplished this alone but it has done this with partners or what we call key stakeholders. These groups are the department's partners and are integral to the delivery of the education system.

I have them listed up here: the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation; the Saskatchewan School Trustees Association; the League of Educational Administrators, Directors and Superintendents. And, of course, there are others. For this study, these are the key stakeholders which we have identified.

We recognized that the relationship amongst the stakeholders was vital and was key to successful public reporting, and this year we decided to take a look at that relationship. Now the results of our study can be found in our report, chapter 3, between pages 37 and 46, and the heading of that particular segment is "Leadership in Reporting."

What did we look at? We looked at how the department gained and kept the commitment of the other stakeholders — the ones I've just mentioned — to use performance indicators. And just to explain for a moment what an indicator is. It's a gauge for monitoring performance. And examples that I'll mention are student education, student/educator ratios, the percent of students achieving expected levels of performance, average marks of students by gender or by location, for example.

We worked with the department to identify what best practices would be. What would constitute best practices for gaining the commitment of the stakeholders. And these are as follows. The first is that a supportive environment is established and maintained. Secondly, that the key stakeholders allow constructive approaches to emerge to differences — they develop a constructive way to deal with their differences. Third, that the key stakeholders assume joint ownership of decisions. And, finally, that the key stakeholders take collective responsibility for future directions.

What did we find? We found the department successfully used and uses best practices to gain and maintain a commitment of key stakeholders. We think this is a notable achievement considering the very different values and attitudes and beliefs that the stakeholders brought to the table.

Over time the commitment of the key stakeholders was not absolute and does not remain absolute. There were and are very dramatically differing values and attitudes regarding indicators, but these differences illustrate the value of what the department and the other stakeholders have achieved. The department has processes to allow the key stakeholders to acknowledge their differences, debate their views, find common ground, and proceed.

Now we took another look at what the department and the other stakeholders achieved and we came up with some more familiar words to describe why they were successful, and in the report we tie these words to the best practices that I indicated earlier. Here's what we found.

Perseverance. This is reflected in the department's overriding goal at the start of its work in indicators to bring its stakeholders along through collaboration.

A firm foundation. The department and other stakeholders took the time to lay down some underlying principles to support their work. These principles have held up well and are still being used by the department and stakeholders to evaluate the work that's being done in indicators. They still use it as a touchstone.

Continuity. There was considerable continuity among the stakeholder groups and among those representing the stakeholder groups at the table. This fostered and allowed an understanding of each other's positions and points of view. And perhaps as a result of that, trust. A level of trust existed among the participants and that trust allowed the stakeholders a higher comfort level than they otherwise would have had to deal with decisions that challenged the beliefs that they had brought to the table.

Now we think that gaining stakeholder commitment to common goals and choosing indicators to measure progress are difficult

tasks. What the department and its partners have achieved serves as an example to others that also face the problems of working with multiple stakeholders. And what we have seen from the department's experience is that these tasks are achievable.

I am going to turn it over to Rosemarie to provide an overview of our annual audits.

Ms. Volk: — Thanks Mark. In this chapter we provide you with the results of our audits of the department and of three funds: the correspondence school revolving fund, the learning resources distribution centre revolving fund, and the school division tax loss compensation fund.

We did these audits for the entities for the year ended March 31, 1998. Our audit revealed that the financial statements for each of the funds was reliable; that the department complied with authorities governing it and the funds' activities relating to financial reporting, safeguarding of assets, revenue raising, spending, borrowing, and investing; that the department had adequate rules and procedures to safeguard and control its assets, including those of the funds with a few exceptions that I will discuss shortly.

In addition, we assessed the department's annual report for its usefulness as an accountability document and we will discuss a few of the further improvements we suggested.

Our office continues to make two very important recommendations to improve accountability. The committee discussed these recommendations at its November 23 meeting. In order for the department to fulfil its responsibilities it must ensure the money it received from the Assembly is properly safeguarded and spent. The department needs to ensure key participants such as school divisions have a common understanding of the goals of education. The department must also ensure it receives good performance reporting from its key participants.

We recognize the department has fulfilled part of this role. It, along with its key stakeholders, have set the broad goals of education. It also collects data from various sources and periodically publicly reports its findings. As Mark discussed, the *Saskatchewan Education Indicators 1998 Report*, which is this one that you just received, is an example of such public reporting.

However, more work is needed. The department as yet does not ask the school divisions to prepare performance reports beyond the audited financial statements. Financial statements do not contain sufficient information to assess performance. And as I will discuss, these financial statements do need improvement. Without this information the department cannot fully demonstrate to the public that it has fulfilled its responsibilities.

The department has told us that they have set up a working group to look at the accountability framework for education and that this framework will include public reporting expectations. And the group has not yet finished its work.

As previously reported, we recommend that the department set financial reporting requirements for the school divisions

consistent with those recommended for the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accounts for the public sector. The minister has not yet changed the required format of the financial statements to meet this recommendation but management has told us that they are working with the Saskatchewan Association of School Business Officials on this matter and that they are working towards having a new financial reporting format consistent with those recommendations.

Our final recommendation deals with the annual report and it's to assess the performance of the department. Legislators and the public need adequate summary information about the plans and the achievement of those plans. Annual reports can provide this information.

We note that the department's 1996-97 annual report has improved its reporting on several key areas, however, there is still room for some improvement. For example, the report could include a summary of the department's goals, an outline of what the department views as its measure of successful achievement of those goals, and could discuss its progress towards the achievement of those goals. This information would strengthen their report.

In addition, we note that the 1997 annual report was released about 12 months after year end. We note that in 1994 this committee recommended that the law be changed to allow annual reports to be released when the Assembly is not in session. To date the government has not changed the law. This has resulted in reports not being timely and we look for the committee's continued support in this area.

I will now turn it over to Wayne to discuss some previous PAC (Public Accounts Committee) recommendations.

Mr. Strelieff: — Thank you, Rosemarie. That ends our discussion of this chapter. And in the previous meetings in November you had issued specific recommendations dealing with the two recommendations. And now Judy Ferguson will join me in helping to answer any questions that you may have.

Mr. Shillington: — Yes, I do have a question, probably of Wayne, but perhaps . . . probably of Mark, but perhaps you want to . . . (inaudible) . . . Wayne.

You listed the stake . . . I'm not being critical because this is the traditional list of stakeholders. You listed the stakeholders here — and I can't lay my finger on it quickly — but I noted the list of stakeholders did not include the students. And I wonder if any . . . And I know that's traditional.

But I wonder if any thought has been given to including the students as a stakeholder and finding some method of plumbing their views on the effectiveness of this service. Because it strikes me it'd be highly relevant if . . . And I know it's not easy because there is not a Saskatchewan association of students. But it strikes me you're missing the views . . . If they weren't thought of as a stakeholder, then you're missing the views of the most relevant group.

Mr. Strelieff: — Well there's a number of people that would love to address that question. I mean it does seem to make sense from an intuitive position that students should be consulted

about the quality of education.

Mark or Judy, does that . . .

Ms. Ferguson: — Perhaps what I'll do is maybe explain where we got the list of the key stakeholders and why we focused on that particular listing.

Basically what we did is we were using the K to 12 indicators' program as the focus of our study. And it was . . . Those are the key groups that basically work with the department quite closely in terms of meeting with the department, etc., in the gathering of the information. So that's why those particular ones are listed.

I think your comment is quite a valid comment and probably may perhaps more appropriately addressed to the department as opposed to our office in terms of like a broader answer.

Mr. Shillington: — I will have the same question in the next chapter with Post-Secondary. And that's a little easier because in fact there is . . . there are SRCs (student representative council) at both campuses.

This one I recognize is difficult. It just strikes me that it's highly relevant though.

Mr. Anderson: — I would just add that there are quite a few different stakeholders and I . . . (inaudible) . . . mentioned these. These were the ones that we focused on in the study.

There is quite a lengthy list including parent associations, including universities, colleges. All of these groups were represented at the table in these processes as well. These groups tended to be invited. The core group that participated in all of the meetings were the ones that we have included. The other groups were invited to participate in the proceedings and did participate at various times in various parts of the proceedings. So they . . . I would say it's fair to say that they were a part of some of this as well. We decided to focus on core . . . (inaudible) . . . group that was there for the whole . . .

Mr. Shillington: — Okay.

The Chair: — Do you have any response you'd like to make before we get into other questions from the members?

Mr. Dotson: — On Mr. Shillington's point?

The Chair: — Or anything. Any overview?

Mr. Dotson: — Those who know me would be surprised if I had nothing to say this afternoon, so I don't want to surprise you. I hope members can understand having heard the auditor's report and now had an opportunity to see it why in November I was so eager to come back before you.

On behalf of all of the staff in the Department of Education I just conveyed to you our enormous pride in having been singled out in this way for a close, tightly-focused Provincial Auditor's office review examination of one of our principal and key efforts to be accountable to the people of the province. And we're proud that we were selected to be the subject of such a

review and I won't pretend to hide from you our pride of course in the results that have been reported to you by the auditor. We take that seriously and we take our business seriously and we're pleased to have been singled out for such a commendation.

If I could just elaborate on two points, please. First, what are indicators? The document that I distributed to you at first blush might look like a hodgepodge of disparate, disaggregated, dissimilar indicators: what's the student, what's the total population of Saskatchewan, what's the GDP (gross domestic product) of Saskatchewan, a couple of financial indicators, some student achievement indicators, proportions of Aboriginal students in our schools, proportions of Aboriginal teachers in our schools and so on. How does one make sense of this disparate array of indicators?

What we try to do is give three kinds of indicators. Context — that is what is Saskatchewan, who are Saskatchewan people, who's in school? Process indicators — what proportion of our teachers, what proportion of our administrators are female, which is a relevant social question. What proportion of our students, what proportion of our teachers are of Aboriginal ethnicity, that's a process question. And there's some other process indices throughout the report as well. And finally then, what we most often perhaps think of when we think of the performance of the school system, is we ask ourselves the question, well can Johnny read? And of course, that's an appropriate set of outcome indices as well, the outcome indicators.

But it seems to us and to all of our colleagues in the school trustees community and the teacher community and the administrative community, and I'm confident the parent community as well, that focusing solely on one index, one indicator would be wrong-headed, misleading, and false. It's as though one were seeking to ascertain the health of a large, complex, modern, late 20th century national economy by focusing solely on the prevailing market interest rates.

And we all know that focusing on any such single macroeconomic indicator in a large, complex, modern, industrial economy would be narrow-minded, wrong-headed, and false. And we economists don't report on economies that way and we think it would be no less wrong for us to seek to report on the education system in that wrong-headed way as well.

Finally then, with respect to the point that Mr. Shillington raises, what about the student population as a stakeholder set? I'm not so sure that I would want to consider, in the K to 12 public education system, students as stakeholders. That seems to me too weak a word to . . . It seems to me the students are the reasons for which we have the education system. They're not just a stakeholder in the system, they're its *raison d'être*. Had we no students, we would need no system. They are the reason for which it exists.

I'm quibbling with the word "stakeholder". At a more practical level, it's difficult to know how we might ascertain in some statistically legitimate authoritative way the relevant views of youngsters of 6, 7, 8, or 9 years of age about the quality of the educational experience that they're being afforded.

Is the school year too long? Well I think we can predict what the answer is. Is the school day too long? Do you spend too much time on the bus? Do you have too much homework? I'd be happy to write the questions, but I'm not sure any of us would trust the answers.

We might have more confidence in some sort of opinions being expressed on different sorts of questions perhaps, about — if they were asked of youngsters 10, 12, 14, and 16 — is your school a safe place to be? Do both boy students and girl students feel equally comfortable and safe at school? Those sorts of questions I think I would have a lot of confidence in if they were asked of 10-year-olds or 12-year-olds or 14-year-olds.

But there are obvious practical difficulties in ascertaining in an authoritative way the views of school-age youngsters. I think perhaps a valid proxy, albeit only a proxy, would perhaps be the views of parents. Parents of school-age students I think are an honest, a fair-minded, and accurate — by and large accurate — reflector of the . . . and assessors, gauges, and judges of the adequacy, quality, fair-mindedness, and accessibility of the school system in which their youngsters are involved.

I've got lots more to say but I think I'll zip it up.

The Chair: — Okay, thank you very much. I really am pleased to hear the glowing report from the Provincial Auditor on the work that your department has done. I understand why you wanted to come back immediately and show us that this is the kind of work that has been accomplished. And I'm sure I'm speaking for all members when I congratulate you.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I too would like to add my congratulations to the department in terms of bringing these groups of people together. And I suspect in some measure you may have succeeded too well because in recent memory I have now been lobbied by those same stakeholders, LEADS (League of Educational Administrators, Directors and Superintendents) and ASBOS (Association of School Business Officials of Saskatchewan) and STF (Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation) and SSTA (Saskatchewan School Trustees Association) in my local area, and I suspect every MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) has had the same experience, about impressing on their local MLA the importance of increased funding for the program. So you succeeded more than you realized in bringing these people together in common cause.

As well I'd like to make at least an anecdotal comment about the students. A number of years ago when I had the pleasure of being on a board of education in Melfort, we amalgamated in a physical sense a division 3 and 4 school, and in that process we had a lot of people very, very concerned. And we talked to parents, we talked to the teachers, we talked to everyone we could think of, including the students. And at the end of the day the people that gave us the best advice were the students.

So I wouldn't hesitate to trust a lot of their intuitive descriptions about the education environment. We found it very refreshing and they were mature more than beyond what we expected.

I would like to move to an area that I'm sure you can appreciate

has raised and is raising a great deal of concern in my area, and I speak about the school situation in Zenon Park. And I wonder if perhaps it'd be best if you updated us on this situation. There is a very divisive situation in that community between the Fransaskois community that have established their own school board or system and the current public system and it resulted in some court cases and now there's some physical construction going on.

And perhaps it'd be easier for you to give us an overview of the situation and I could perhaps ask any issues that you don't cover.

Mr. Dotson: — Of course. For many years the francophone community in Zenon Park, Saskatchewan, has been served by a K to 12 school administered solely under the auspices of the Tisdale board of education. That's a situation that is not new. It's existed for many, many years.

I just repeat that the community of Zenon Park is essentially 100 per cent francophone by ethnicity.

Pursuant to a judgment of the Supreme Court of Canada, with relevance to Saskatchewan and some other provinces, in the early 1990s . . . sorry, in the late 1980s there was a report produced by the education community in Saskatchewan referred to by the name of its Chair, I believe, the Gallant report. And the Gallant report, as I recall — I wasn't involved — but I think it reported to the Government of Saskatchewan and the education community in around 1988 or 1989 or 1990 or thereabouts.

And it said that in order for Saskatchewan to live up to the constitutional obligations of this province's status in Confederation, Saskatchewan must . . . needs to establish by law the opportunity for there to exist a francophone-governed francophone school system for those having certain constitutional rights pursuant to the Charter. In, I think it was 1993, acting upon that advice and in an effort to be consistent with the constitution, the government of Saskatchewan enacted amendments to the Education Act which henceforward have permitted there to exist in this province a discrete, constitutionally sanctioned francophone-governed francophone education system in strict accordance with the constitution. It was not a matter at the discretion of the government of Saskatchewan, it's an obligation placed upon the provincial government by the Constitution of Canada.

To summarize the provisions of that regime, without regard for the arithmetic here, wherever numbers warrant and wherever a sufficient number of parents having — francophone parents — having rights under the Charter seek to establish a francophone-governed school in their community, the Government of Saskatchewan without discretion, without choice, must so establish a francophone school in that community. The minister, the cabinet, the Lieutenant Governor have no choice. And that's been clear since 1993.

Since that time there were eight or so francophone communities which the francophone minority exercised that right and there were thus established in Regina and in Saskatoon and elsewhere, Vonda I think and elsewhere, conseil scolaire or local, discrete, independent francophone-governed boards of

education.

In early 1997 or late 1996, the sum of the francophone parents who had rights pursuant to the Charter in the community of Zenon Park began to express the desire for there to be established in their community such a Fransaskois, francophone-governed school, separate school board school governed by a discrete school board, separate and discrete from the long-standing French immersion school that had been administered in Zenon Park by the Tisdale board of education.

The paperwork was all in order. We were mindful of the divisiveness in the community. I attended at least one public meeting in the gymnasium where I had the pleasure of addressing the crowd both in English and in French that evening in the spring of 1997. And mindful of there being more than one point of view vigorously held in the community on this question, the government — I won't use the word decide — the government responded by taking the only course of action which was legally available to it and established then the discrete conseil scolaire in the community of Zenon Park.

That carried with it certain . . . and that school commenced in a thus far unused convent quarters and began to offer a school program in the fall of 1997. Those were temporary quarters. It was an unsatisfactory location for all manner of safety reasons and everyone knew it was a temporary situation. In the spring of 1998 I sought in vain to persuade the two communities in Zenon Park to seek to share the one physical facility in the community. I was unsuccessful.

Ultimately there was a decision of the Saskatchewan Queen's Bench court, rendered by Mr. Justice Kyle last May or thereabouts, which imposed certain obligations on the Tisdale board of education and on the department with respect to facilities for the conseil scolaire in Zenon Park. Within a month that judgment had been appealed; there was a subsequent judgment by the Court of Appeal.

In the end of May or very early June, thereabouts, and pursuant to that decision of the Court of Appeal, which no one has any reason to appeal itself any further, pursuant to that decision, we have undertaken to fulfill our provincial responsibility which is to construct an appropriate facility to the exclusive use of the Conseil scolaire de Zenon Park and also to assist the Tisdale board of education in fulfilling a portion of the superior court judgment which was that there should be some sharing of the pre-existing, larger facility — the gymnasium or the resource centre — I'm not quite sure what.

So there will be the old school, which is not all that old, with a gymnasium and science labs and so forth. There will be a new facility strictly, physically, in close proximity, proximate and connected to it, comprised of a number of relocatable classrooms, and there will be a sharing then of some portion of the pre-existing space.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you. I think you've pretty well summarized the situation for committee members and it indicates the difficulty in this whole area in that this new area accommodates the same number of children that were there before, or less. I mean, the population may have diminished a little bit.

The relocatables, I'll be surprised if you really can relocate them. They might have that title but I was there to see the construction and it doesn't look real relocatable.

And one of the issues that I have now over and above the divisiveness in the community is neighbouring communities within the Tisdale School Division particularly saying, who's paying for all of this? And I guess that's my question. Where does the capital cost for this work come from?

Mr. Dotson: — In the case of the facility at Zenon Park, a portion of the cost of the old school — and I don't remember the proportion — certainly a substantial proportion of the gymnasium was funded some years ago by monies from the Government of Canada. But the new facility is funded solely by the provincial treasury. It's out of our department's capital grants budget.

Mr. Gantefer: — Is there any requirement of the Tisdale School Division? I believe under normal construction relationships there is a certain local component in terms of capital cost. Does the Tisdale School Division per se have to contribute anything to the capital cost in this instance?

Mr. Dotson: — Not to the portion having to do with the conseil scolaire, so not with any conseil scolaire school because it's not the Tisdale Board of Education's school. It's not their property. They have no rights, no liability with respect to it. They can't sell it for example because it's not theirs and therefore they would have no financial contribution that they would be expected to make.

If Melfort School Division wants to build a new school in Melfort, Tisdale School Division is not responsible for contributing to that cost. Similarly Tisdale, I'm confident, is not being asked to pay for any part of conseil scolaire school. Now any of the renovations that may be going on with respect to the old school, I'm not so sure. There I just don't know.

Mr. Gantefer: — If renovations to the Tisdale School Division portion of the facility occur as a result of the requirement to physically make this connection, does that fall within the new school division's expenses or are they existing?

Mr. Dotson: — I believe that . . . I don't know, sir. I believe that that would properly fall to the proper charge of the Tisdale Board of Education as a consequent implication of the judgment of the Court of Appeal.

Mr. Gantefer: — So potentially there could be a cost implication by the way this had to be concurrent.

Mr. Dotson: — I don't know the answer. These are questions of fact and I'm sorry I just don't know the answer.

Mr. Gantefer: — That's fine. In terms of the overall cost and, if you don't have that information today, would you be able to make that available in terms of the capital construction cost of this project?

Mr. Dotson: — I don't and I will.

Mr. Gantefer: — Okay, thank you. Now the other thing is on

the operational cost. Can you explain, is there . . . how the operational dollars . . . I understand how they'd work for the existing Tisdale School Division, how do they work for the new school division?

Mr. Dotson: — Essentially we fund francophone school divisions and francophone education strictly the same way that we fund Roman Catholic separate schools, be they in a single school division of which we have some or public schools, urban or rural, according to the same formula with one exception and the one exception harkens back to what Mr. Anderson, that comment he made some half hour ago. He said that in Saskatchewan, the financial responsibility of public education is a shared responsibility, shared between the local ratepayers and the government of the province and that is true.

That is true everywhere with one exception. The one exception is in our francophone schools. And the reason for that is this. At the time in 1993 — and I was in the Department of Finance at the time, not in the Department of Education — but it's since been explained to me and on reflection it seems obvious.

Let me just try to draw an analogy or make a comparison between the two regimes. With respect to minority faith education in the city of Regina for example or in the city of Saskatoon, the constitution says that where the members of the minority faith wish to have — let us say that the minority faith is Catholic in Regina's case — wish to have a minority faith education system. Fine. That's the constitution. That's their right. That's good.

The law and the constitution then require that every Catholic and only Catholics pay all of their school taxes to the Catholic system without regard for where they may send their children. The constitution and the law further require that only non-Catholics and all non-Catholics must, of needs, send all of their school taxes to the public school system without regard for which system their children attend.

There is no such analogous constitutional requirement with respect to the francophone minority. So where a francophone minority exists we don't expect them to make any local contribution to the funding of their school system. That is all from the province. But those same francophone families in Zenon Park, continue to pay their property tax to the Tisdale board of education.

Forgive me for that long-winded . . . So, in essence, the francophone folks . . . Let me say that there are three families side by side in Zenon Park. The one is an anglophone and has no francophone rights. That person is obviously sending his child to the Tisdale school and is paying his property taxes quite properly to the Tisdale board of education. The other is a francophone household which has rights under the constitution but they've chosen not to exercise them. They want their youngsters educated in the Tisdale-Zenon Park school. They are paying their property taxes also to the Tisdale board of education. The third and final family is a francophone family which has these rights under sections 23 and 24 of the constitution. They however have chosen to exercise their rights and they've chosen to send their youngsters to the new conseil scolaire. Just like their first two neighbours, however, they too are sending their property taxes in exactly the same amount to

the Tisdale board of education.

Mr. Gantefer: — So a hundred per cent in the general sense. The board of education sends to all school divisions a per student grant, if you like, that covers the 40 per cent or whatever that's there. So that's going on across the piece. But in the Fransaskois school system, it's a hundred per cent.

Mr. Dotson: — Yes.

Mr. Gantefer: — And is the recognized cost formula the same right across the piece?

Mr. Dotson: — Yes.

Mr. Gantefer: — Is there any contribution that comes from the federal government to these francophone schools?

Mr. Dotson: — Yes there is, but it's in bits and pieces and it's not systematic and I would not be able to summarize it for you here. It's not much and it's in bits and pieces and it's not systematic if I can put it that way.

Mr. Gantefer: — So if there are say 40 students in this system, they would have in essence the same per student funding as the Zenon Park or the Tisdale-Zenon Park school would have . . .

Mr. Dotson: — The same formula would apply.

Mr. Gantefer: — Same formula would apply. There's nothing extra in terms of operational funding. Because one of the problems of course when you try to operate a, what's virtually a K to 12 school with 30 or 40 students, is you know, teacher/pupil ratios and things like that get quite crazy, administration overhead, all of those sort of things. I think all these documents or these funding formulas, etc., are public documents.

Mr. Dotson: — Absolutely, absolutely.

Mr. Gantefer: — Maybe we could have them as well to understand this?

Mr. Dotson: — Yes, you may. Sure.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you very much. And I thank the committee for its indulgence but it is an issue that potentially could occur in a number of other places. And it's just a heart-wrenching thing because you, you watch the students and they're not really part of this. And it makes it particularly difficult to understand in Zenon Park. If this was going on in Melfort that a francophone minority wanted a school in a community like Melfort where there is limited opportunities, but this was a French immersion community and a French immersion school, and it's just tearing the heart out of the community. And it's very difficult to watch the students have to live through this all because it's very difficult to understand. And I thank you very much.

Mr. Dotson: — Madam Chair, the member may be interested to know that the circumstance in Zenon Park is not the first such one in the province. There was another no less

francophone community that some number of years ago experienced almost exactly the same sort of intra-community, intra-francophone community divisiveness with probably the same social reasons, social-cultural reasons behind it, and regrettably, the same sorts of hard feelings attended at the time. And those have not healed fully yet.

Mr. Gantefer: — Are the two divisions still operating in parallel to this time?

One other area that I'd like just briefly, Madam Chair. There's been some comments from people, and it may not be accurate but perhaps you can help me, with the fact that there's at least rumour or gossip that Qu'Appelle could be losing its high school. Does the department maintain a list or a status of potential school closures or is . . . Do the various boards of education keep you updated as part of the reporting process as to their forecasts of school needs?

Mr. Dotson: — There is a process set out in The Education Act, 1995 pursuant to which a rural board of education must go through a series of discrete identifiable steps before it proposes or succeeds in closing a school. There are some several such steps and I simply don't have the sequence of them here in front of me — they're in The Education Act, 1995, and I can certainly make them available to the members of the committee.

I believe that no such motion of finality to close the high school at Fort Qu'Appelle had been made. I don't believe anything has been made for any school in the province for next summer.

And I wouldn't expect any to have been made by this point. I would expect those motions to be made more typically between January 1 and March 1.

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Stanger: — Thank you. It's good to have you here, and I was very pleased to note the progress that you have made in many areas and actually quite proud of our education system.

And I just want to pass on to the deputy minister and the other folks here that the separate school division, the public school division in Lloydminster, all express very good working relationships with the department. The rural school division, the Battle River School Division, I have met with them at length before Christmas, and they have concerns and I will be, you know, talking to you about them. But the two city divisions are very happy and they're very cognizant of the limited money that we have but they're very grateful where we have made efforts to assist them.

I just think when I read the goals, I just think that it would be good to have it on the records. I could send these out, because I don't think a lot of people know what is required of the education system. These are the goals that we have to provide, the basic skills — lifelong learning, relating to others, career and consumer decisions, membership in society, self-concept development, positive lifestyle, spiritual development, and growing with change. Those are the objectives that the school division, I mean the Department of Education and the school divisions must meet. That is a great challenge for them.

I have to say the inclusion of a goal like the spiritual development, I was really happy to see because it's just a personal belief of mine, having taught for 23 years in the school system, and I believe North Americans are, shall I be blunt, deputy minister, are spiritually defunct in lots of ways. And I was really glad to see that included along with the really important things. Also what we would have called civics. People don't even realize — it's included I suppose under membership in society — people do not realize how we as teachers do emphasize these goals.

And let me just say that it's a great challenge for you to accomplish these goals. And that leads me into the next area which is risks. I guess I'll ask this question and maybe have a supplementary. What does the department do to make sure the curriculum delivers the goals that it sets out for education? I mean I can see that being a risk. How do you make sure that as best as humanly possible, you can deliver some of those goals — or those goals I should say, not some of them — all of them.

Mr. Dotson: — We do so with great difficulty. We do not administer schools. I have no teachers in my employ. We have no student in the department with the exception of the correspondence school. Teachers are employed by local boards of education who hire, manage, discipline, and fire them. Teachers are educated by somebody other than me. They are hired by someone other than me. They're managed by someone other than me. They're assigned their responsibilities, their classrooms and the resources that they have by someone other than the Government of Saskatchewan.

Much then of the responsibility in Saskatchewan historically for ensuring that the goals of education are attained is a responsibility that the law, historical tradition, and convention and clear public expectation have placed on the local board of education.

Secondly, unlike most other occupations in society, teaching is one of the ones — one of the few — which we call a profession. It is acknowledged as such in statute; that statute has been on the books for 60-odd years in this province, and in Saskatchewan the teaching profession is deemed to be a profession much as it is elsewhere in Canada.

And so another enormous part of society's expectations with respect to how we will ensure — we as a society — ensure the achievement of the goals of education has to do with the respect we hold for the teaching profession to conduct itself professionally with respect to the youngsters in a given classroom on a given day under the charge of a particular individual professional teacher.

That isn't to say that we feel that we have any right to shirk our own responsibility. We feel we do have a responsibility and we seek through our intimate contact with the administrative staff of the boards, through their directors, and also through our many, many, many other formal and less formal contacts through curriculum committees or curriculum review committees or faculty of education, College of Education, relationships to seek to monitor the pursuit of the goals of education.

Ms. Stanger: — Okay. That leads into then, for me, the

accountability of the school divisions. Because it is true, you don't have any teachers and etc., etc., but a lot of the things that you hope to accomplish rests with the decisions that the division board makes. And asking this from some of the teachers I have met with, what responsibility and accountability does the division board have to the Department of Education to deliver these goals that we have?

Mr. Dotson: — I would wish to reframe that question, if I could, just a little bit. And if I could . . . I would be more comfortable if the question had been framed: what responsibility does the board of education have to its electors with respect to the . . .

Ms. Stanger: — Okay. That's the same. Because of course those are the people that elect them and ultimately the Department of Education only exists because of the democratic process. So okay . . .

Mr. Dotson: — Well there's . . . I'm seeking to make a distinction here. If you look at The Education Act, 1995 in Saskatchewan, something that the auditor said or one of his colleagues said a moment ago is so true: with respect to accountability, it's important to know who's responsible to whom for what.

Well there may be parts of this world where it's more complex to figure this out than in education. If there are, I don't know where that is.

It's both complicated and it's simple. And the education Act in Saskatchewan, for a long, long, long, long time has made crystal clear that there is a duel — a duel set of responsibilities, duties and obligations.

The Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan a long time ago said, there shall be locally elected, fiscally independent, tax-levying authorities elected solely at the discretion of their electors, which boards of education shall have the sole discretion with respect to the hiring, firing, disciplining, management of teachers, the location of schools, deciding whether chemistry or Cree or Ukrainian will or will not be offered in this, that, or the other school.

That's none of my affair. That's the affair of any particular board of education. And the minister, the provincial government, and the department do not tell any school whether or not they must offer either Cree, Ukrainian, French, or chemistry in their high school or whether they must offer any one of them. There are some high schools that offer none of those four.

The Education Act, 1995 is no less clear though when it says, the minister and his department are responsible for determining what the curriculum shall be. So that, if your school chooses to teach Cree, we're responsible for determining what the Cree curriculum is. If your school chooses to teach chemistry, we're responsible for determining, for all schools, what the chemistry curriculum is, and so on. We're responsible for certifying teachers and so forth.

My point is that . . . Maybe this is clear only in my own mind because it seems to be unclear in the minds of everyone else. To

me it seems clear that the Legislative Assembly has said, the provincial government is responsible for these half dozen things or so, or dozen things, whatever; the boards of education are themselves solely and ultimately responsible for this other half dozen things or so; and together they are jointly responsible for this third half dozen things or so. And it is only possible to get all of this done if they work closer together.

If we sought to go off and do our thing and boards of education sought to go off and do their thing, independently of each other, I don't know if school children are a stakeholder or not, but I know that they would certainly be the gross disbeneficiaries of such an outcome.

Ms. Stanger: — Well it's very important that we have this on the record though to explain to people, because there's an episode going on in the neighbouring constituency in Neillburg.

I have got . . . And I'm not the MLA there, but I'm the neighbouring MLA, and I got 92 faxes the other day on an issue that I or you can't do anything about. It's clearly the job of the local school division. But people, even people in the teaching system, don't seem to have it clear in their minds what everybody's responsibility is. So again, it's a matter of education, isn't it, of educating people as to how this works.

Mr. Dotson: — Yes, it is. I'm not so sure. I'm reminded of the people in a community whose school may be closed by the board of education. And sometimes they know very well who's responsible for what. Sometimes when those responsible have made an unpopular decision, rather than accept it, what those people do is send faxes to a neighbouring MLA or to my minister.

Ms. Stanger: — You don't think they'd maybe misunderstand? Anyway, okay.

The other thing that I just wanted to give you some feedback on is that there was some talk, and this is solely your responsibility, in doing away with regional directors at one point when there was restructuring being done in the department. I just want to tell you that that's very important to keep those people there.

While some people do not seem to understand what they do, I certainly understand what they do. The regional director in our area does much to make sure of the thing that you talk about: that the division boards and the local school boards — local school boards, the divisional boards, the department — everybody works together to deliver the best services for the child. And that's what we're interested in, aren't we?

And the person in our area has been extremely helpful. And I just wanted to tell you that I would think if we lost that we'd lose some of the co-ordination.

Mr. Dotson: — At no time during my three-year tenure as Deputy Minister of Education has there ever once been any suggestion, discussion, or proposal in my presence that the number of regional directors and regional offices be reduced at all. There has never once been any proposal, suggestion, or recommendation in my presence that the office of . . . regional offices of education, that the regional directors of education be

eliminated. That should not happen.

Ms. Stanger: — Well, good. I'm glad to hear that. I hadn't heard it officially from any of you but there's always little rumours.

Mr. Dotson: — I can make it more crisp if I knew how.

Ms. Stanger: — Okay. Well you have made it very clear. Now, the last area is home schooling. How are people that home school, how are they responsible? How do we know that they're fulfilling the curriculum?

Mr. Dotson: — We don't. One of the reasons that they're home schooling may well be is that they're not interested in the Saskatchewan curriculum. In order for a youngster to graduate from grade 12, to have a grade 12 leaving certificate, the youngster requires 24 credits in grades 10, 11, and 12 according to certain requirements — so many language arts, and so forth.

A youngster who is principally or solely home schooled may — it's exceedingly rare; if it's ever happened, I don't know; I would suspect perhaps not — may choose to take this course, that course, or the other course, in the next nearest school in the community, may choose to take courses by correspondence, and may possibly be able somehow to put together 24 credits of Saskatchewan high school credits and get a grade 12 leaving certificate.

Most home schooling thus far appears to be intended for primary school youngsters. There is a problem with educating one's own child. Up to the age of 6 or 8 or 10 or 12 doesn't seem to present the child necessarily . . . may present the child with enormous benefits and opportunities, but it doesn't seem necessarily to present the youngster with any significant social barriers or difficulties.

To seek to educate a youngster in our society in modern western Canada up to the age of 15, 16, 17, 18 at home without making some provision for the youngster to get some sort of socially sanctioned piece of paper at age 18, a family that does that may be running the risk of setting out their 18-year-old out into the world with a limited opportunity to get into a post-secondary institution or to get a certificate to get some employment.

Ms. Stanger: — That was going to be my next question, is that, do most of them stay at home and home school for awhile and then they go back into the system? Yes, okay, thank you.

There's just one more point and I'm like my colleague across the way there, Mr. Gantefer. I just want to give some anecdotal evidence on behalf of students. I have a granddaughter that's seven years old and I can tell you if you asked her the questions that you said that you wouldn't be able to ask a seven-year-old, I can tell you she would very clearly be able to tell you what kind of instruction she has had.

Now that might be a grandmother's prejudice, but I'll go back to the dear children that I taught — always six- and seven-year-olds. They are not complicated with facts like we are. If you came into my classroom and I would leave and you would ask them, what do you think of the reading program, in their level, what do you think of the math, they would be able to

tell you at their level.

I'm not kidding you, Craig. They would say, well I don't think we do enough subtraction or minus because we're not very good at it. And they would tell you, we really read well in this school, except — and they would be so frank with you — except those two boys over there who actually need some help but they can't get out to the resource room as much they used to because the resource room teacher's busy.

If you had wanted to spend a whole day with them, they would tell you. And from all of that evidence it is amazing, you would be able to tell exactly what could be improved in that classroom as far as the instruction from me and as far as the services being provided.

I would tell you that the 14-year-olds who now have more facts might not be as accurate and tell you that they wanted the school year to be 120 days instead of 197. My students would have told you they wanted to go to school all year. I can guarantee you that, at six and seven and eight.

I would take the word of 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10-year-olds before I'd take the teenager's because the teenagers are starting to get adult-like and they are totally confused by the facts, and besides, they're not as honest. My children were so honest. I learned so much from them. It's when we become adults that other objectives start to come. They would tell you exactly how that room was run. So don't discount those little guys. They can tell you a lot.

My granddaughter is in French immersion, Craig, and she can tell you exactly what the difference is between madam this year and madam last year, and why madam that she had in grade 1 should not be teaching children that are six years old.

So anyway, I just thought I'd tell you that about little kids, because they're the most interesting thing. You should go, as deputy minister, to a classroom with six-year-olds and spend a day. You'd love it.

Mr. Shillington: — I can be very quick. I'll just add my comments to Rod and Vi's. My impression has been that young people are very serious. There is a recognition at a surprisingly early age of the difficulties they're going to have on the job market and the need to bear down on education.

I think people of our generation believed the world owed us a living, and by and large whatever your level of education, you could make a pretty good living. My own sense of it today is young people no longer are of that belief and they're really quite serious.

I hear high school students talking about their resumé's. I was a long way from high school when I first thought about it. So I think you'd find young people a very serious lot when it comes to their education. They understand far more clearly than people of our generation that their future is directly tied to their performance in education. So I just add my voice to Rod and Vi's.

Actually I have a couple of questions. I have not seen this document before, which I regret. I was going to say I haven't

had the opportunity. I'm sure I had the opportunity and didn't avail myself of it. At any rate I see it for the first time.

It is an interesting statistical phenomenon. And that is that it appears that rural students on average do slightly better than urban students. If you look at page 34 — I did this really quickly — but it seemed to me . . . there are some odd results here now and then, but overall it appears rural students were slightly ahead in the percentage in their average marks.

And again when one gets to page 37, on average rural students, their average number of credits was a little higher and the average number of 30-level credits — whatever that may be, but I assume that's some additional attainment — is a little higher.

A Member: — Grade 12.

Mr. Shillington: — I see, okay. Yes, that's right. I wonder if you agree with the observation, and if so, does your study provide any objective explanation for it?

Mr. Dotson: — With respect to the latter two points, there is no ambiguity around the data. The data are unambiguous and clear and the implications that you draw from them I think are fair-minded and the only possible implications. Rural students who graduate from high school typically graduate with more credits than do their urban counterparts.

Mr. Shillington: — And apparently slightly higher marks in most locations.

Mr. Dotson: — Well no. Let me stop there.

Mr. Shillington: — Okay.

Mr. Dotson: — So with respect to those latter two data there's no ambiguity.

Mr. Shillington: — Okay.

Mr. Dotson: — There's no potential for ambiguity. It's a simple arithmetic, totting up the number of course credits — they're all written down somewhere.

With respect to the marks, this is not the first time we have seen this phenomenon. This tends to be something that we have begun to expect, so we're not surprised. Girls are tending to do — and this has been true for some time — significantly better or markedly better, noticeably better than boys in most of the upper level academic grade 11 and 12 subjects. And rural students on average appear to get higher marks than their urban cousins.

I'm more inclined . . . There appears to be less room for ambiguity as between the male marks and the female marks because typically the youngsters are in the same school, most often in the same classroom.

Mr. Shillington: — And about the same numbers of each.

Mr. Dotson: — Yes. But in Tisdale — it's a beautiful high school in Tisdale, Saskatchewan — in any chemistry class

you're going to have some gals and some guys. And it's the same teacher giving the mark. Once we get to a cohort of rural students and another cohort of urban students, now we've got different teachers doing the marking. And many of the marks in the rural schools are departmental exam marks; they're not teacher marks because these teachers are not accredited.

Mr. Shillington: — I see.

Mr. Dotson: — And so I don't say that that . . . That is manifestly a potential for ambiguity. Whether it is relevant, whether it has an effect I cannot say. The first two . . . The second two data, the data you report on, you observe on page 37, no possibility for ambiguity.

Mr. Shillington: — And does your study provide any objective explanation for it?

Mr. Dotson: — Yes.

Mr. Shillington: — I suspect the differences are cultural, but . . .

Mr. Dotson: — I think transience of population. Rural students in Saskatchewan are stable and tend to finish school where they start. They almost always finish the year in the school where they started the year to a far, far, far greater degree than is the case in our urban schools by and large on average.

Mr. Shillington: — Okay. A couple of other quick questions. With respect to the francophone school system, conseil scolaire, it has, it seems to me, the same objectives as the public school system with one additional objective added in — an attempt to ensure that students retain the ability to use the language and presumably understand something of the world of French literature and so on as well.

Does our study provide any assessment as to how successful the system is in meeting those latter objectives, whether they be one or two?

Mr. Dotson: — No. Because the francophone school system in Saskatchewan is not more than five years old. And so we have simply no evidence of any consequence.

It's an observable and perhaps regrettable fact — I think it regrettable — that the number of persons in Saskatchewan of francophone ethnicity according to census data, who speak French, is dropping and has dropped sharply and continuously for the last I don't know how many years, but at least 25 years that I've been in the province. And that would suggest that without any such special effort at récupération or recovery of one's cultural heritage, if left alone it would appear that francophone culture in Saskatchewan would before too long disappear. And it remains . . .

Mr. Shillington: — Within a generation.

Mr. Dotson: — The jury is out I think on the extent to which the opportunities to attend a francophone community, francophone school, francophone culture with a clear effort, an explicit effort, at récupération culturelle will be successful.

Mr. Shillington: — My final question invites you to be even more speculative. There is no urban Aboriginal schools. But there are schools which are in the inner city and there are some programs — I don't think they're funded by your department but perhaps they are — which attempt to work with students in the inner city and assist more of them in graduating and doing better. Do you have any . . . Does your department have any information as to how successful that collection, that menagerie of efforts are?

Mr. Dotson: — Yes we do and it's, like so much else, it's anecdotal. We have an absolutely outstanding exemplary school in Saskatoon. I forget the . . . the Native Survival School it was called when it was first started in the late 1970s and has since been renamed, 10 or 15 years ago, it has since been called Joe Duquette High School. Joe Duquette High School is perhaps the worst physical plant I have ever visited and it is probably the best high school I've ever heard of.

It is a small high school on Broadway. It is administered under the umbrella, under the administrative auspices, of the Saskatoon St. Paul's Roman Catholic Separate School Board. All of its staff are STF members of the St. Paul's. Its student population is substantially older than the norm. Many of these youngsters have been somewhere else and have now come back at age 18 to finish grade 10, 11, or 12. Some of them have young children of their own.

It is essentially administered by the school board — no, not by the school board — it's really administered by the Saskatoon Aboriginal community. And I choose those words deliberately because it is not a political, it's not a tribal council nor a First Nation, it's a Saskatoon Aboriginal community undertaking. It has turned out to be inordinately successful and has been so recognized by national arbiters of these things, the Canadian Education Association.

A second one in Saskatoon is Nutana Collegiate administered under . . . it's a school of the Saskatoon public. What's happening at Nutana is — I don't know how to say this nicely — a lot of the strange youngsters from Saskatoon end up going there.

Mr. Shillington: — Interesting ones.

Mr. Dotson: — And they're often the ones of Aboriginal ancestry or not who have not felt safe, have not felt comfortable, have not felt accepted in their own schools. The Aboriginal gal who was my hostess when she showed me around there in late November had, was 16 years old, she has a 1-year-old child in the daycare which is in the school. They have two Department of Social Services social workers whose offices are in the school. They have continuing steady year-in/year-out, month-in/month-out relationship with persons employed by the Saskatoon Health District who provide service to these youngsters in the school and . . . that's two high school examples.

We have had since the late 1970s or since 1980 at the elementary level now in North Battleford, Prince Albert, Saskatoon, and Regina, community schools in the inner cities and our . . . my measure of success there is that everybody would wish us to have more. So those in the systems, Regina

public, Regina Catholic, North Battleford, Prince Albert public or Catholic, they would wish us to say, could we please have another community school cause we like what our community schools are doing for these typically aboriginally concentrated — aboriginal concentrations of families around these inner city schools. Better evidence than that we do not have.

Mr. Shillington: — Thank you very much. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Hillson: — Yes, I'll be quick and if by any chance I'm going over ground already covered because of my lateness, please tell me I'm wasting your time and I will move quickly.

Ms. Stanger: — And read *Hansard*.

Mr. Hillson: — Yes, and read *Hansard*. Just quickly, for my information and I assume for the rest of the committee, on page 17 — oh, no, I'm sorry, I was going to ask that later. The standard referred to in the standard testings . . . yes, I'm sorry, page 27 and the next few pages. There's a . . . the dark blue line is referred to as standard. What, where does the standard come from? Is that national? Or what? That's national testing.

Mr. Dotson: — These are national test results. Sorry. Well, now wait a second. No, this is grade 5. On page 27, this is grade 5. These are provincial learning assessment. We provincially . . . we test in grades 5, 8 and 11.

Mr. Hillson: — Right.

Mr. Dotson: — This is an example of grade 5, next page is grade 8, next page after that is grade 11. The source at the bottom is in each case identified as Saskatchewan *Provincial Learning Assessment in Mathematics*. The standard then is a Saskatchewan only since the only testing . . . these students performance is being compared only to Saskatchewan students. The test is only being administered to Saskatchewan students. The standard against which they are being compared is a standard identified by a group of persons consisting of teachers, trustees, parents, and department folks. Together that group says how well should our students be doing. Well we think, this group thinks, that X proportion of our students at grade 5 should be at this level. That's where the standard comes from.

Mr. Hillson: — Okay. So then it seems in all cases we are fractionally below that standard in terms of actual results. But the standard, you're saying, is not test results; it's what the "experts" say.

Mr. Dotson: — Experts, including parents as experts, yes.

Mr. Hillson: — Your reference a minute ago to community schools and where they've been set up, being there's a demand for more, there is at least one school in North Battleford which fits the demographics of where there should be community schools even better than the community schools we have.

Is there going to be further expansions in the community school program?

Mr. Dotson: — Yes, but I don't know when.

Mr. Hillson: — Is it a funding issue? Is that . . . or, I mean, I agree with you that I think the community schools program appears to be highly successful and many people would say we need more.

Mr. Dotson: — And I'm . . . I mean, is everything a funding issue? Well, yes and no. If we had more monies, would we put more monies now into more community schools in North Battleford? I'm not sure because . . . or any of the other large urban communities. I'm not sure because we also have some needs in what you would have to call non-urban environments.

We have some rural school divisions with relatively high concentrations of Aboriginal youngsters whose families, be they on reserve or off reserve, are for whatever reasons choosing to educate their children in provincial schools, not reserve schools. And so far we have not had a program analogous to the community schools program for rural communities.

There's some other things that we do for rural communities. I could mention those, but we don't have any community schools at the high school level anywhere in the province — Regina, Saskatoon or any place else. So what would I do with my "marginal" \$250,000 or \$400,000? Would we set up one more K to 8 community school in some community somewhere or might we do some other thing? My point simply is that there's some other good things that also have a claim on that marginal dollar.

Mr. Hillson: — Well I realize the good ideas always exceed the money. But we do have at least one school in North Battleford that's 75 per cent Aboriginal and it's not . . .

I have read, and I don't know if this is correct, that our province lags behind in computer equipment and computer training in our school system. Can you comment on that, and is this one of the things we look at, is how we stack up against other provinces?

Mr. Dotson: — To answer your last question first. The answer is yes, this is one thing we look at. I have not seen any such reference. I'm unaware of any such data that would permit us to know whether Saskatchewan schools lag behind, and if so, in what regard. I simply . . . I'm interested in those data; I simply don't know it.

Mr. Hillson: — Just in a newspaper article, they claim computerization in other provinces had gone ahead much faster than us.

Mr. Dotson: — I would not . . . I would be very sceptical and want to know a lot more about the . . . (inaudible) . . . of the data on which any such comment was made. I don't know how anybody could know. You'd have to . . . We have 805 schools in Saskatchewan. You'd have to survey every single one of them and find out how many computers do your students . . . how many computers per student or students per computer — how we measure it — are in your school. We have 100 school divisions. If you didn't survey every school, you'd certainly want to survey every school division.

Mr. Hillson: — Does Sask Ed have a norm that there should be

a computer for each X number of students?

Mr. Dotson: — No. Nor do we have a norm that says you must teach Ukrainian or Cree or French in your high school.

Mr. Hillson: — That's left to where the demand is in the particular school district?

Mr. Dotson: — It's a decision which the government has determined is best left to locally elected boards of education.

Mr. Hillson: — So there are no provincial standards on computer equipment or training? Would there be such standards in other provinces, do you know?

Mr. Dotson: — I don't know. It would not surprise me if there were in a province like New Brunswick which has no school boards.

Mr. Hillson: — I guess my point would be though that I think most people would say that while we understand that say particular language training would be optional, depending on the needs of a particular district, that computers have very rapidly moved into one of the basics of education. Would you see it that way?

Mr. Dotson: — Yes, of course. And I visited 20-odd schools since Labour Day and I have seen a wide array of opportunities afforded to youngsters to work with computers at an early age and then in some high school environments.

I visited an inner city . . . I can tell you the name of the school, King George community school in Saskatoon, in November and was stunned to be told that in that inner city school there . . . in every grade 1 through grade 3 classroom — every classroom that has youngsters in either grades 1, 2, or 3 — has seven computers in each of those classrooms.

That is a high concentration of computers for elementary school students even in Saskatoon public. It's not the norm in that school system. It's an exceptional school and I don't report it as the norm even for Saskatoon public.

But they have sought to make an experiment with two schools in their system — one a suburban school, one a inner city school — and invest an enormous amount of technology right at the grade 1, 2, and 3 level.

Will that be something they will think was a good idea and seek to emulate next year or the year after that? I don't know. Others will have chosen to invest their monies and their resources into the middle years — grade 6, 7, 8 — and some of course have said, look it's the high schools where the youngsters really need to know how to use the word processing and spreadsheet programs and so forth, Internet access, and that's where we're going to put our resources.

There is a tension here with respect to technology, learning technology, in our school system. The tension is this: there is a desire on the part of some — there may be even a social desire — for some degree of standard or consistency. On the other hand, the world is changing faster than any of us can breathe, much faster than any of us can think, and no sooner might one

articulate a standard, then someone else would say that's not good enough for my youngsters, we're going to exceed it or we're going to buy Apple instead of IBM-framed platforms and there is no standard.

What we're finding is there is an effervescing, bubbling of energetic activity from the school division, the classroom, and the school level. This thing's not going to settle down for another 10 years — if it will have settled down by then.

Mr. Hillson: — So I think maybe you've already answered, but I take it then Sask Ed is not involved in decisions such as what software or what mainframes will be. That's strictly a local decision.

Mr. Dotson: — Absolutely.

Mr. Hillson: — And you don't, at this point in time, foresee the day when Sask Ed will be involved in what sort of software ought to be available in the classroom and decisions like that.

Mr. Dotson: — No. Let me if I may, I just would . . . No, sir, I don't. I do not envisage that.

Similarly though we don't have any standards, nor have we ever been asked for any . . . about what sort of photographic equipment is best put in a high school photographic arts lab. We're not asked what sort of lathes or welders are best put in a comprehensive high school industrial arts area. And I . . . I mean we would be happy I suppose to work with the community and develop some such standard.

I just point out for members that we have a Web site. Our curriculum is on the Internet; you can access Saskatchewan's grade 5 social studies curriculum at your home PC (personal computer) this evening if you would wish. We have had on average 393,000 hits a month — 393,000 hits a month. We have 13,000 hits a day, seven days a week, in a province that only has 11,000 school teachers. Somebody is using our curriculum an awful lot on the Internet because teachers are finding the electronic format for them . . . You've got a mixed grade 4/5 class, an elementary school teacher's responsible for teaching everything, and they find it an enormous boon to have access from their home to the curriculum on-line.

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you. My last question — and this is on page 17 — the amount of home schooling, while still small, appears to have doubled in the last four years. And that only concerns me to the extent that we seem to be hearing all over North America a loss of confidence in the public school system, an increase in opting out. And other provinces as you know are experimenting with a number of variations on the public school system that we are not experimenting with.

Are you able to comment or do you have any studies on what is the level of confidence in our publicly funded school system? Does it remain high; is there evidence that this confidence is eroding here as it appears to be some evidence that it's eroding elsewhere in North America. Is this a concern to you?

Mr. Dotson: — No, it is not. No, it is not because we have no evidence that the wide-spread Canada-wide and North American-wide phenomenon is being reflected in Saskatchewan

or experienced in Saskatchewan. Of course professionally it is of enormous concern to us, to me as it is I'm sure to members of the Assembly.

The home schooling having doubled in the last five years is almost certainly in part — and I say only in part — attributable to the fact that it was only in 1993 or 1994 or thereabouts that we regularized our independent schooling and home schooling regulations. And that fact sort of broadcast some of the availability in a way that simply hadn't been thought of perhaps in the decade before. If this doubles in another five years or increases by another 500 in the next five years, I will first of all be surprised, and second of all worried.

In Saskatchewan we have a unique, in Canada a unique set of circumstances. I believe — and others with longer political memories than I would wish to correct me if I'm mistaken here — it is my view that there has not been a province-wide political or partisan controversy regarding education in Saskatchewan since 1971. I'm unaware of any if there has been.

We have one of the few provinces in the country where all of the teachers in the province are members of the same teachers' federation. It is one of the only provinces in the country where all of the school boards in the province are members of the same SSTA. In our neighbouring province of Alberta that is not true.

We have managed by what I call the genius of Saskatchewan to accommodate over 90 years or 100 — well 80 or 90 years — a public and a Roman Catholic minority faith school system with an enormous amount of respect, mutual respect and coexistence. We've managed to incorporate into that independent schools, which teaches Saskatchewan curriculum and without much donnybrook nor controversy. And now in this decade of the 1990s to incorporate into that same diversity within unity regime, the francophone school system.

I mentioned the phrase the genius of Saskatchewan. It is my contention that in education the genius of Saskatchewan can be summed up thus — respectful pluralism that works. And if I may I would cite only one example — St. Vital School in Battleford, Saskatchewan. It is a public school division, a rural public school division, now rural/urban, which for 20 years has administered a Roman Catholic, episcopally sanctioned elementary school in Battleford. Nowhere else in Canada would that exist, and yet it's existed quite happily in that community. And I could cite three or four other joint-use elementary school, Catholic and public in Yorkton. A joint use elementary school in the works in south-east Regina.

There is no other place in Canada that I'm aware of where one will find what I am calling the genius of this province — respectful pluralism that works. It is my view that it is for reasons such as that that we have had no call for charter schools, no marked diminution in public respect for public competence in our school system, and subject to the political memory of persons much older than myself like the member from the northern part of Regina — no partisan controversy regarding education since 1971.

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you.

The Chair: — Thank you. I have a couple of questions, and then we can go on with the recommendations unless members come up with something else. I was looking at the stakeholders that had input into the discussion that Mark led. And I understand that Mr. Shillington and some of the other members talked about student input.

And I'm also wondering if there was input from tribal councils, native input. Because I believe the number of native schools is actually increasing a lot in Saskatchewan. And also the employers in Saskatchewan. I know that in post-secondary it's something that lots of times we see students will be going out and working with industries. But I believe that some of the life skills that we talk about that students should have when they leave grade 12 are very important to employers in this province as well.

So I was wondering if these two groups have been addressed in the stakeholders.

Mr. Dotson: — They are involved continuously by our department — the employer community through the CFIB (Canadian Federation of Independent Business) and the chamber of commerce, and the Aboriginal community through various representatives on what we call the Indian and Metis Education Advisory Committee. So the extent to which either of those groups has been a continuous dialogue partner in the indicators, I cannot tell you, but they are on our list of central stakeholders. FSIN (Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations), Gabriel Dumont Institute, and individual bands, we work with routinely.

The Chair: — I learned this in the past holiday season going to Alberta, that there's something called the virtual schools now that are used in Calgary I guess, as one student was talking to me about. And it seems it was something rather than being part of a satellite school or correspondence, they simply spent all their school day on the computer and they could interact during school hours with other students that were at this virtual school.

Have you had any insight into that, or is it something that's being considered?

Mr. Dotson: — We're aware of the virtual school phenomenon in Alberta. We in the department, and I think this is not just a reflection of my own personality, but I think it's a cultural phenomenon that's existed for some time, have tended to be conservative and not faddish.

And I don't suggest for a moment that the virtual school in Alberta is a fad. But I do suggest that it is our belief as professionals concerned with education that, wherever possible, youngsters are better off in the company, in the physical present company of some age peers; and that company with peers or with someone else on the Internet for most youngsters at most ages — and there can always be an exception and maybe Albert Einstein was an exception, I don't know — is probably not a good thing.

And I think the Department of Education would be reluctant to encourage youngsters to seek to get what passes for fulfilling the Saskatchewan goals of education, which includes socialization and spiritual exercise, by means of what is called

in Alberta a virtual school.

The Chair: — Your department may have had an inquiry from somebody along the Manitoba border regarding students who wanted to go to school in Manitoba.

Mr. Dotson: — Yes, I've seen it.

The Chair: — Can you give us an update on what's happening with that student and if they'll be allowed to continue their schooling in Manitoba.

Mr. Dotson: — I can't, Madam Chair. I saw that letter which I believe was addressed to my minister. I think I saw it yesterday or the day before and I've not been briefed and my officials . . . my officials had not even seen it when I first saw the letter arrive. I'll know in 10 days time or a week's time but I don't know now.

The Chair: — Is it something that is the local school division's decision or is it something that would have input from your department?

Mr. Dotson: — I cannot imagine any reason that we would feel compelled to get involved. Is it the . . . or which school division is it? Potashville?

The Chair: — I think the student wants to go to school in Swan River.

Mr. Dotson: — Yes, but where is the home or where's the . . .

The Chair: — I'm not sure. Kamsack, maybe?

Mr. Dotson: — I think it may be Kamsack. But if the Kamsack School Division wants to accommodate this family and pay the 5 or \$6,000 that the Manitoba school division would charge then I don't know that I would want to interfere with their decision.

The Chair: — And I'm just wondering with, in the future, will high schools be taking any different directions when it comes to what constitutes high schools, the size of them or what kind of courses they'll be asked to give.

Mr. Dotson: — We undertook in Saskatchewan an enormous review in 1993 and 1994, the Saskatchewan high school review, and that did have on it chamber of commerce, CFIB, every stakeholder in the province I believe, and it produced a fairly substantial report examining Saskatchewan's high school experience, making some recommendations about some modifications to the array of credits that would be required for your 24-credit graduation requirement and so on.

I don't know if it was early 1994 or thereabouts, the Minister of Education publishes the minister's response to the high school review. And it said, well, we agree with the review committee's recommendation on these 15 things and we disagree on this thing and here's what we're going to do about it and so on.

And that broad-based public consultation, everybody involved, everybody getting their say, was only, like I say, just undertaken in the very early 19 . . . or early to mid-1990s, and

we're still implementing some of its recommendations. As a consequence I think we feel that is really the current blueprint, the current directional corpus for secondary education. That doesn't mean there won't be some changes around the edges.

But the size of schools in Saskatchewan is dependent . . . size of high school is dependent really on two things, the physical distribution of students of high school age and the decisions made by their boards of education.

The Chair: — So that information is available?

Mr. Dotson: — I'd be pleased to send you a copy of that high school review pamphlet.

The Chair: — And one of the other things that we've been speaking about — the francophone schools and some of the problems that I guess, I don't know if the word is problems, but challenges that's associated with it. I imagine you're quite aware that I live in the other constituency that has a controversial school division with the Englefeld School Division starting up last year.

And I know that there is . . . the question about whether individual taxpayers have the legal right to have their taxes go to a school of their choice. Most of the people are now looking at the conflict there seems to be between guidelines in The Education Act, 1995 and the municipal government Act which applies to urban and rural municipalities. Is that something that's being looked at right now and what is the viewpoint on that at this time?

Mr. Dotson: — There appears to be unanimity within the school trustee community, including the Catholic section of the SSTA, and the SSTA and the association of school business officials and the provincial government. There appears to my view to be unanimity on this point. Where there exists a minority faith education system, all members and only members of the minority faith must pay their school taxes to the minority faith system. They have in law, no choice.

There seems to be unanimity further on this next point, corollary point. Where such a minority phase system exists, all members not of the minority faith must, without regard for where their kids go to school, send their children to the mainstream or public school system.

It is inappropriate and not a proper question for a civic official at the RM (rural municipality) office or city hall in Regina to ask me when I go down there, sir, which school system do you support? It's none of their business. They have every right to ask me, sir, are you a member or not of the minority faith? That's the proper question.

I am hopeful that in the not too distant future we will be able to enact some modest, teeny, tiny amendment to the legislation such that the form that is currently filled out by the ratepayer at city hall will be something that is determined under the auspices of The Education Act, 1995 rather than by my colleagues in the Department of Municipal Government, and I think there's agreement within the provincial government that that would be a good thing.

The Chair: — So what you're saying then is the conflict will be removed because the RMs will no longer have any input into it. It will be at the jurisdiction of the Education department.

Mr. Dotson: — Yes, but even now, may I take your example? Would that be appropriate?

The Chair: — Yes.

Mr. Dotson: — If there is a ratepayer in Englefeld, Saskatchewan, who is a Catholic, and if that ratepayer chooses for whatever reason, none of my business, chooses to support his home town Protestant school and wishes to pay his property taxes to the Englefeld Protestant separate school division, and if he's able to make that arrangement at the town office or the RM office, it remains open to the Humboldt Rural School Division to challenge that in court through the boards of revision and the appropriate mechanisms under the property tax regime.

Because if Humboldt Rural School Division says I know this gentleman; he's been on the parish council for 25 years, and those are his ancestors lined up one by one by one in the cemetery behind the parish church; and we all know the guy and we have lots of reason to believe he is not Protestant and no reason to believe that he is, I think we're going to challenge where he says he's going to send his taxes. I think . . . I will not speculate on the outcome of such a challenge.

The Chair: — So what happens to the . . . I think it's an increasing number of people who probably can't put down what faith that they are at this time because they just plain don't attend the church.

Mr. Dotson: — Then it's hard for them to claim to be a member of the minority faith, isn't it?

The Chair: — Okay. I just have one other question. This document that was put forward today and has obviously put a lot of work into it, and when we had the standard testing that was done in Saskatchewan and it's a . . . and we actually comparing ourselves against Saskatchewan, other Saskatchewan students, or the experts have drawn the baseline. I know that national testing is something that Saskatchewan isn't . . .

Mr. Dotson: — It's in here too.

The Chair: — The national testing is in here? Is Saskatchewan schools don't . . . aren't part of national testing?

Mr. Dotson: — No, I'm sorry, Madam Chair. The member was asking me a question a moment ago on which of her pages and it happened to be about . . . the pages he picked on where grades 5, 8 and 11 mathematics, that is our own provincial testing.

The national testing, also on mathematics, was done across Canada of youngsters age 13 and age 16. It's in here too. And that we compare our students to those 13-year-olds and 16-year-olds across the country. Same examination, same marking regime, and our children fall out wherever they may. And as you recall more or less this time last year, my previous minister expressed her disappointment at Saskatchewan students' achievement in mathematics.

The Chair: — So is this national testing that was done last year, is it something that will be done every year or is it just done in certain subjects.

Mr. Dotson: — There is a three-year cycle — math, language arts, and science. Saskatchewan has participated in the science; that's been reported. We've participated in the mathematics; that was reported. We have participated in the English language arts; that has not yet been reported. That will be reported sometime in the next two or three months. And then the cycles repeat themselves.

The Chair: — Okay, I think that's all the questions that I have.

We have, I believe on pages 34 and 35, we have two recommendations, and before we go to them I would like to bring to the committee's attention that on November 23, when reviewing some of these recommendations, there was a motion put forward by Mr. Whitmore at that time:

That Public Accounts Committee recommend that the Department of Education should continue working with the locally-elected school boards and other stakeholders to improve public accountability of school divisions with respect to the goals of education.

That was our resolution at that time. So when we look at resolution no. 1 on page 34: we recommend the department working with school divisions should set the public recording requirements with school divisions for reporting on divisions' performance and achieving the Saskatchewan goals of education.

Mr. Whitmore: — I would reiterate what we stated last time in terms of our policy.

The Chair: — Everyone heard that? Is everyone in agreement?

A Member: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Agreed.

Okay on page 35 recommendation no. 2: we continue to recommend that the department working with the school division should set the financial reporting requirements with school divisions consistent with those reckoned by the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants for the public sector.

The committee concurred with them.

A Member: — Concur.

The Chair: — Concurred. Agreed?

A Member: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Reiterate.

Thank you very much. Oh there's another one, no. 3. What page is it? Page 36, no. 3: we recommend the department continue to improve the contents of its annual reports. Concur?

A Member: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Agreed.

Yes, thank you very much. And I again will . . . I appreciate the document that was given to us and I am sure there was a lot of time spent on it. And the auditor and the members here are very thankful that you have prepared it and I'm sure the public will be as well.

Mr. Dotson: — Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: — Thank you very much. See you again.

We've got officials out there and I suggest that maybe we take just a few minutes break and then do that department. I think if we would just have a short break, deal with Social Services, and then we can come back and finish up everything on our agenda today. Okay? Because perhaps then we'll be able to finish off one more of Thursday's.

Public Hearing: Social Services

The Chair: — I appreciate your attendance again today. And I'll ask Ms. Yeates if she will introduce the officials with her.

Ms. Yeates: — Thank you, Madam Chair. With me are Bonnie Durnford, the assistant deputy minister of policy in our department; Bob Wihlidal, our executive director of finance and administration; and Phil Walsh, our executive director of income security programs.

The Chair: — Welcome. And the Provincial Comptroller has two new officials.

Mr. Paton: — Yes, Madam Chair. I've got two new individuals with us this afternoon. Jane Borland who is a manager in the financial management branch, and Tamara Stocker who is an analyst in the same branch.

The Chair: — Welcome. I think you have everybody in your . . .

Mr. Strelieff: — Just one new person I think, and that's Mike Heffernan with me right here, who leads our work in the Department of Social Services.

The Chair: — Welcome, Mike. We have one chapter in Social Services and before we start that I'm going to read the statement to the witnesses:

Witnesses should be aware that when appearing before a legislative committee your testimony is entitled to have the protection of parliamentary privilege. The evidence you provide to this committee cannot be used against you as a subject of a civil action.

In addition, I wish to advise you that you are protected by section 13 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms which provides that:

A witness who testifies in any proceedings has the right not to have any incriminating evidence so given used to

incriminate that witness in any other proceedings, except in a prosecution for perjury or for the giving of contradictory evidence.

A witness must answer all questions put forward by the committee. Where a member of the committee requests written information, I ask that 15 copies be submitted to the Clerk, who will distribute the document and record it as tabled.

And please address your remarks through the Chair.

As per normal, I'll ask the Provincial Auditor to give us the overview of this chapter.

Mr. Strelloff: — It begins on page 157, chapter 8 and it pertains to our work related to March 31, 1998. Mike Heffernan is going to lead you through it.

Mr. Heffernan: — Thank you, Madam Chair, members. We start off on page 157 showing that the government spent a total of 688 million for Social Services in assistance for the year ended March 31, 1998. The department spent 536 million of this. We also briefly describe the department's mandate.

On the next page, page 158, we show the department's major programs and spending, and we briefly set out the department's key risks it needs to . . . it faces in achieving its objectives. Our *1997 Fall Report Volume 2* describes more fully these risks and the department's systems and practices to manage the risks.

On page 159 we note the department needs to improve its records and document its procedures to ensure single parents receiving social assistance pursue child support.

The department requires recipients of social assistance to pursue other means of support before being eligible for assistance. A single parent is required to pursue child support from the other parent if obtaining such support is possible. The department reduces the amount of assistance it gives to the recipients by the amount of child support received by the other parent.

We found there was insufficient evidence that caseworkers ensured recipients made a reasonable effort to pursue child support from the other parent. Also the department's computer records used by staff to monitor the pursuit of child support were not always accurate. This could result in caseworkers not ensuring recipients pursue child support.

In recommendation 1 we recommend that the department improve its records and document its procedures to ensure single parents receiving social assistance pursue child support.

On pages 160 and 161 we note the department needs to ensure that organizations providing services on its behalf submit required reports. The department paid \$6 million to five northern Indian bands for social assistance to off-reserve Indians. The department also paid 35 million to over 200 community-based organizations that provide social services on behalf of the department.

The department has very good agreements with Indian bands and community-based organizations to ensure the money is

spent for the intended purposes. The department needs to work with these groups to ensure they are able to prepare the necessary performance reports for the department.

In recommendations 2 and 3 we recommend that the department ensure the northern Indian bands and community-based organizations submit their performance reports required by the agreements.

On page 161 we describe our review of the department's annual report for the year ended March 31, 1997. We think the annual report should explain the key risks the department needs to manage well to achieve its objectives.

The annual report shows a comparison of current year's expenses to budget and current year's revenues but not for past or future years. The report shows the department's investment in capital assets but it does not show what else the department owns and owes. For example, the report does not disclose the department's accounts receivable.

The report sets out the department's operating goals and objectives and activities to achieve them. The report, however, does not state whether the department has achieved its goals and objectives. Also the report does not show the department's performance measures and targets.

The annual report was tabled within the time frame required by law. It was tabled 12 months after the department's year-end. In 1994 the Public Accounts Committee recommended that the law be changed to allow annual reports to be released when the Legislative Assembly is not in session. To date the government has not changed the law to comply with the Public Accounts Committee recommendation.

At its October 1998 meetings, the Public Accounts Committee agreed with our recommendations while recognizing the difficulty of setting measurable target indicators in a single year.

In recommendation 4 we recommend that in its annual report to the Legislative Assembly the department describe how it manages the key risks it faces. And in recommendation 5 we recommend that the annual report provide a summary of the department's financial and operational plans, performance targets, and actual results. That concludes my remarks.

Mr. Strelloff: — Thank you, Mike, and Madam Chair.

The Chair: — Thank you, Mike. I'll ask Ms. Yeates if you have any comments you'd like to give to the committee members before we ask questions.

Ms. Yeates: — We're happy to move on to the committee's questions.

The Chair: — Okay, thank you.

Mr. Hillson: — Yes. As of this summer of course we have the new Child Benefit which I understand was mostly designed to provide some incentive to the working poor. It was a recognition that sometimes the assistance was more lucrative than low income employment. And I'm just wondering if it's

too early yet for you to make any comments as to whether the incentive of providing special assistance to the working poor is showing up as being a success or not?

Ms. Yeates: — Well there were two programs that were introduced — three actually that were introduced this last July. One is the Child Benefit and the other is the employment supplement. And at this point we have . . . The employment supplement is the one that has the . . . that I think you're referring to which is the supplementing of income which is wage income or self-employment income or maintenance payments for those who are working and who are in very low income brackets.

At this point we do feel it is too early to know. We are still having people sign up for the program. We are seeing the results of payments go out. We are seeing certainly quite a lot of interest in the program and quite a few people sign up. But at this point we haven't done . . . We haven't had the length of time that we would require to know the ultimate impact.

Mr. Hillson: — That's certainly understandable. But have you done any preliminary work to decide how you will ultimately test whether this has served as an incentive to keep or bring people into the workforce who may otherwise say what's the point?

Ms. Yeates: — Yes. With all three of our new programs, the Child Benefit, the employment supplement, and the family health benefits programs, we are working on an evaluation framework.

And we have worked . . . Because the Child Benefit is very closely aligned with the federal and National Child Benefit we are working jointly to see if we can have some efficiencies and some greater continuity of evaluation techniques between those two programs. But we are also working on evaluation frameworks and designs for all three of the programs, including the two that are unique to Saskatchewan — the employment supplement and the expanded family health benefits.

Mr. Hillson: — Are you saying other provinces do not have, in addition, a child benefit that when it all comes out in the wash the working poor get to keep and those on assistance in effect lose?

Ms. Yeates: — No. The National Child Benefit was a . . . Or the expansion of the Canada tax benefit was a national initiative so that applies across the country. But the individual provinces reinvested their savings, and in our case the savings plus additional new money — significant new monies — in various ways.

So some provinces chose to take those investments and put them into expanded child care spaces, and some did, for example, expanded family health benefits — which is one of the things we did. Saskatchewan did three things which, not all of which would be in other provinces. So for example, the employment supplement is quite unique in the country. There is an employment supplement run through the tax system in Quebec, but other than that it is a fairly unique program.

So the National Child Benefit or the Canada child tax benefit is

across the country, but the Saskatchewan Child Benefit and the employment supplement are unique to Saskatchewan.

Mr. Hillson: — The Provincial Auditor mentioned that there is a need obviously to encourage single parents to pursue the issue of child support. Now having worked on the other end, I am very much aware of the fact that it puts that parent through a lot of hassle and if they're on assistance, a net gain of zero. So it's not easy to convince them of the benefits.

Has the department given any consideration to allowing the single parent to retain some small portion, simply to give them an incentive and to see that there's something in it for them to go through the system and the potential hassle that comes of, well . . .

A Member: — Dealing with lawyers.

Mr. Hillson: — Well dealing with lawyers. Or frankly, keeping a man in their life that they would just as soon not be in their life.

Ms. Yeates: — Certainly that's a factor that has been considered quite seriously and has been implemented in the design of the Saskatchewan employment supplement.

So in addition to supplementing employment income or self-employment income, we also, I think quite uniquely in the country, are supplementing maintenance income. So rather than the dollar-for-dollar reduction, which as you mentioned was the previous situation with maintenance income for those on social assistance, there is an incentive now built in because that maintenance income is supplemented by the employment . . . the SES (Saskatchewan employment supplement) program.

So there is an incentive now for those with children to seek maintenance payments because depending on the number of children that they have, they will get a supplement or an incentive of anywhere from 25 to 45 per cent depending on whether they have one, two, three, or four children or more, from the maintenance payment.

So there is built into the new SES program exactly the kind of incentive that you're referencing.

Mr. Hillson: — Oh okay, very good. But I'm not quite entirely understanding you here. Is that the working poor or even those who are just on assistance?

Ms. Yeates: — That would be for either.

Mr. Hillson: — Either.

Ms. Yeates: — So for those who are on social assistance, who are . . . The SES program is available to those who are in low income brackets regardless of whether they are on social assistance or whether they are . . . or not. Whether they are on low income brackets perhaps from low income employment.

So those who are on social assistance who have maintenance payments can see some benefit from those maintenance payments.

Mr. Hillson: — So the policy change I've asked you to implement is already there.

Ms. Yeates: — Yes.

Mr. Hillson: — That's very prompt action.

Of course I've often been bombarded with statistics suggesting that social assistance levels in our province have increased dramatically through the '90s — I think some suggested a doubling in the '90s — and that staffing levels have only now increased marginally.

First of all, is there some underlying explanation of the statistics for the increase in those on assistance as sometimes, you know, the bare numbers don't tell the whole story? I wonder if you'd like to give some clarification or explanation of them and if they do give an accurate reflection of what has happened.

Ms. Yeates: — Well social assistance caseloads have been falling now, measured on a year-over-year basis, for 49 months or just over 4 years. They did increase, particularly in 1993, as a result primarily of a number of changes that occurred.

In one instance, in the way the change from Unemployment Insurance to Employment Insurance changed the dividing line in a sense between that program's support and social assistance support across the country.

But in addition to that in Saskatchewan there was a change in the way off-reserve status Indians were treated for the purposes of social assistance. So for example, it used to be that for the first year after someone moved they were the responsibility of the federal government.

Those changes had a significant, significant impact on the Saskatchewan assistance caseload. That peaked then in 1993 and since that time they have been falling fairly steadily.

A Member: — For four years, you say?

Ms. Yeates: — Yes, since 1993. Well, the year-over-year proportion is for now four years.

Mr. Hillson: — Both those policy changes you mentioned, the changes to the old UI (Unemployment Insurance) and the treatment of off-reserve First Nation people were yes of course federal, but that means it would apply to other provinces. And I understand that our experience with increases in assistance levels was not matched by other provinces.

Ms. Yeates: — Well I think the particular demographics of Saskatchewan meant that the on-reserve, off-reserve treatment was not in the first instance always consistent between provinces. For example in Saskatchewan it was the case that everything in the old DNS (Department of Northern Saskatchewan) was a federal responsibility, whether it was on-reserve or off-reserve, and that changed in 1993. So not all those policies were the same across the country.

But also because of our demographics it had a much bigger impact here than it would have for example in other provinces.

Mr. Hillson: — Okay. And you have this year had some improvement in the staffing levels of social workers. Have you developed a norm, like the student-teacher ratio? Do you have a norm as to how many youths should a youth worker have? What size caseload should a social worker have? Do such norms exist? And if so, are you able to follow them or have they had to go by the board?

Ms. Yeates: — We don't have caseload standards per se. Depending on the program, there are often a number of differences in terms of what would be appropriate. So for example in an income security program, the number would be much different for example in the caseload than it would be in a community homes worker program or a community homes program or in a child protection caseload for example. So there is no one sample.

But even within a program like income security, there are a number of cases that are quite intensive and then there would be a number of cases that are more administrative, you know, for example seniors or persons in residential care homes where there's not a lot of status employment income. Those are more administrative caseloads that perhaps are much less labour intensive than say a farm caseload or a more active youth caseload.

So there's not one standard. We don't feel a case is a case is a case in the sense each case is individual and in some cases they take a lot of worker time and effort and others they are more administrative. So we don't have a standard across the piece.

Mr. Hillson: — Do you have concern though that in the case of social workers that the caseload is such that just handling the income security side would may be all that he or she has time for, and other work with the family just isn't getting done.

Ms. Yeates: — Well certainly we would ... Our cases ... because our caseload, our cases, case numbers — as we've just discussed — have been dropping for the last four years, that has offered some relief. And so our caseloads per worker ... we haven't reduced workers in those four years in the same degree by any means. So there are in fact the caseloads per worker are dropping in the last four years.

We've been able to introduce some administrative support. For example, some of the computer changes make the worker ... make the cases easier to handle. But certainly we would ... I think we would always feel challenged in terms of providing the degree of intensive work with every individual client that is possible.

Certainly we think we are doing a fine job of getting people appropriately screened and making sure they're eligible for the program. We have significantly enhanced our accountability measures, and our computer measures I think provide good accountability and eligibility. But certainly in terms of the amount of time one spends with each case, that is probably not what one could do. But we think certainly we're in the range of being able to support the cases.

Mr. Hillson: — And what about youth workers?

Ms. Yeates: — Again the programs there vary from program to

program. Some intensive supervision programs we cap cases quite tightly. But in others, for example, we would have some rising caseloads. We did, because of that, add 50 positions to particularly the family services area because we were concerned about the caseload pressures on family services area workers and we added 50 positions because of that.

Mr. Hillson: — Are you satisfied with the flow . . . exchange of information between yourselves and First Nations bands to check for double claims?

Ms. Yeates: — Well we have been working with the federal government generally, and there's work ongoing with the federal government to make sure that there aren't those kinds of things. I'm just . . . For clarification, is the reference to the five Indian bands that are referenced in the report or just in general?

Mr. Hillson: — In general. Because I mean obviously, you know, all First Nations people belong to a band. And there is moving back and forth, so I mean they can oftentimes very legitimately and honestly claim two residences. So I was just wondering if you're satisfied that you're getting the flow of information back and forth so that both you and the First Nations band will be able to check for claim duplications.

Ms. Yeates: — Well we have a number of very strong accountability measures, but I'll maybe ask Phil to speak more specifically to the relationship with the federal government.

Mr. Walsh: — We do have an arrangement with Indian Affairs and with the various bands to exchange information on a case-by-case basis, so that does go on. And we're also working with the Department of Indian Affairs to develop a computer interface so that we can in fact, to the extent possible, match cases by computer from a band welfare list to provincial lists so we can prevent that sort of double receipt of assistance that you're describing. So in fact we do have that flow of information but we are continuing to work to improve it.

Mr. Hillson: — But tell me, my understanding is most cases on the First Nations side would no longer be coming from Department of Indian Affairs. It would be coming from the band itself.

Mr. Walsh: — Yes, and that's part of what we have to do is make arrangements with individual bands as well for exchange of information. We do have those arrangements on a local level with the various bands whether it be by telephone call or whatever. But I think in terms of the array of systems that are out there between the bands, we can't sort of have one system to match sort of across the province. We have to have certain local arrangements to deal with the systems that are available.

Mr. Hillson: — But are you saying you're satisfied that the . . . in one way or another the information is being shared, that the information is being shared?

Mr. Walsh: — The information is being shared. And because of the limitations in some of the systems, we would still like to see that improve in certain cases.

Mr. Hillson: — Are you able to tell us the per cent of the population or by hundred thousand that receives assistance in

this province and how that would compare to levels in other provinces?

Mr. Walsh: — Yes. The number of individuals on provincial social assistance is 65,000 right now out of a population of a million so that would be in the area of 6.5 per cent, somewhere around there. And I believe the most recent numbers across the province, that places us about third, in terms of the third lowest percentage.

Mr. Hillson: — Third lowest?

Mr. Walsh: — Right.

Mr. Hillson: — So actually you're saying in terms of national statistics we are not high in terms of recipients?

Mr. Walsh: — No.

Mr. Hillson: — We're actually . . .

Mr. Walsh: — We're in the lower . . .

Mr. Hillson: — In the lower half in terms of the per cent of our population receiving assistance?

Mr. Walsh: — Yes, that's correct.

Ms. Stanger: — Who would be the highest?

Mr. Walsh: — I believe Newfoundland. I believe it's Newfoundland.

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you.

Mr. Koenker: — Thank you very much. I guess I'd like to start by raising a concern with the auditor relative to the identification of risks that the department faces. Page 158, these are your assessment of the risks. Is that correct?

Mr. Heffernan: — Well we did discuss these with the department and the department didn't disagree with the risks. But we initiated this exercise, yes, because the department hadn't done it.

Mr. Koenker: — I just note that these are rather sterile risks in terms of the circumstances that the department deals with, namely they're really quite insulated or isolated from the clients that the department is serving. You might even go as far as to say that these are five key risks that the department needs to pay attention to in order to cover its head from public criticism, from legislature's criticism, and so forth. I guess my basic point here is, I wonder whether in subsequent years risk identification might focus a bit more on the client side of things? Provision of service relative to the mandate that's listed on the previous page?

Mr. Heffernan: — We did in our *1997 Fall Report*, we fleshed these out quite a bit. We had about two or three pages describing each one of these. And . . .

Mr. Koenker: — The risks or the mandate?

Mr. Heffernan: — The risks . . . But the risks come out of their mandate. And the first two in particular deal with services. First determining what the needs are of the people in Saskatchewan, social services needs, and then what kinds of services would meet those needs.

And in the previous report we did describe in quite great detail what those risks are and what the department is doing to meet these risks.

Mr. Koenker: — I don't want to belabour this point. I just note that in . . . I think it's a little bit the client-centred nature of the risk relative to the Department of Education that we just dealt with. This is a little bit more transparent than the risks identified here in terms of providing quality service to clients and their particular needs. I mean, that could easily be added as a, to my way of thinking, as a risk that the department needs to be cognizant of, lest we forget the people element. I guess that's what I'm saying.

Mr. Strelieff: — As we discussed a bit this morning, our intent or purpose of our office putting these risks on the table and encouraging the risks to be discussed is to transfer the ball to the department and encourage it to have a more public discussion of what it's managing and what are the issues that it has to manage very carefully in order to be successful.

And I think a more useful description of goals, mandate, objectives, and risks, should really come from the department. That's why the recommendations 4 and 5, we focus on the annual report and we see it as a mechanism of reporting to you and other legislators the department's thinking on the risks and challenges. By putting this information in our reports, we're trying to stimulate that thinking and debate.

Mr. Koenker: — I think that's well said, Mr. Strelieff, and I would urge the department, in identifying risks, to try to be client-centred in your perspectives — at least as client-centred as you are departmentally centred.

I think I can move on to a couple of items that pertain to departmental policy. And the first one has to do with the issue of assistance for 16-year-old youth who are handicapped and in their parental home.

It's my understanding that as part of the revision of Social Services, the threshold for social assistance was raised. Sixteen-year-olds used to be covered; they presently are covered in Alberta and other provinces.

I'm wondering though whether when we're looking at very severely handicapped children who have very severe medical needs, not to mention support services needs and not just for the children but for the families, and have a lot of attendant extra costs that aren't met by the new reforms such as the employment supplement, whether we don't need to revisit that policy.

I think of the Latimer case and some of the public discussion around the kinds of support that are provided to a family coping with such heavy, heavy intensive burdens. And I'm just wondering if there isn't a need for some revisitation of this issue.

Ms. Yeates: — Certainly the point is very well taken that there are families who do provide a tremendous amount of support to family members who have particular challenges and that that does place a burden on the entire family.

We do try to support families in those circumstances. We do have a variety of policies and supports for families. We have respite services, we have a number of support services that can come into the home and help families, and services outside the home that families can avail themselves of.

Your initial point about social assistance, we do not provide social assistance to persons, to children living in their family home. That has been . . . we've been trying to support families but have not taken that to the extent of providing social assistance when people are living within a family home but we have tried to provide respite in other supports.

Certainly there is always . . . I don't think anyone would question that there's a significant challenge still for families in that circumstance. And it's one we do try to support families in, but we do not, as you noted, provide at this time social assistance.

Mr. Koenker: — I think the horns of the dilemma are sharpened when one considers that the families in such circumstances could simply say we can't cope any longer; we're handing over our child to the state, to an institution. And then the costs really escalate. And in most of these cases, I think the families, to their credit, are very committed to their children.

But in one of the particular cases I'm dealing with, the child needs enteral formula and tubes for feeding. This isn't covered by the Saskatchewan health plan. They have to absorb these costs on their own. The respite care and the other services that you mention are there from Social Services, but the demands on the family are just so overwhelming, not just financially but in human terms, that I wonder whether we don't need to revisit this issue and see if we can't provide some even slight enhancement to severe, severe cases of handicap dependency which are in the home.

I mean we're doing this right now with the wellness model in health care. And basically we're talking about health care that's being given. These families are keeping the kids alive, for all practical purposes.

Ms. Yeates: — The point is well taken. We'll take a look.

Mr. Koenker: — Having raised that concern or question, I want to give credit to the department for its support of the family support centres. And I can only speak to the work being done by the Saskatoon Family Support Centre. And you will know that a couple years ago that funding for that centre was in question and that I think in its wisdom the department was able to secure funding for the ongoing work of that centre. And I want to commend the department for that and for the ongoing work that is being done there.

This is one of the legacies of the previous administration that I think is to its credit in establishing these centres. And there's some important work that's being done there. So hats off to you in that regard.

Ms. Yeates: — Thank you.

Mr. Shillington: — I only put up my hand to associate myself with the initial comments made by Mark with respect to the listing of risks. And I'm in no sense being critical of the Provincial Auditor's department because I think this is typical of our approach to this department.

We do not judge this department . . . Society it seems doesn't judge your department by whether or not you resolve the problems. It always seems our goal in this whole area is to minimize their visibility. And I'm not sure that does justice to the department. And certainly I don't think it does justice to the people who work there.

And I frankly got . . . Without in any instance being critical, I was left with the same impression when I read the Provincial Auditor's comments. We were concerning ourselves with whether or not they were pursuing maintenance; with whether or not they're abusing welfare; with whether or not they're double-dipping, etc., etc.

The criteria which we have urged upon the Department of Education and the Department of Health is the extent to which they are effective in resolving problems. We ask the Department of Education to tell us whether or not children are well educated, whether or not a sufficient percentage are going on to university, whether or not the system's effective in resolving problems. The same with health — are people healthier?

It seems to me if we adopted that approach in this department, in your audit it seems to me — and again I think your comment is well taken, that these goals should come from the department, not from your office — but it seems to me if we did that, we would be asking whether or not we are successful in assisting people to get off of welfare. Whether or not those who are inevitably on welfare because of mental or physical disability, or for whatever reason; whether or not they are kept in . . . (inaudible) . . . we would measure programs dealing with juvenile delinquents by the extent to which we brought the problem to the end and not necessarily punish them.

I make my comments, as I say, to associate myself with Mark's comments, but also to urge the department I think in being much more aggressive in perhaps breaking out of the traditional mould and setting objectives of resolving the problem and genuinely improving the lot of those who . . . your department really deals with people who for whatever reason fall outside the mainstream of our economy. It seems to me that you ought to be much more aggressive in setting goals and performance criteria which have to do with how well you resolve the problem, not how visible it is to society.

It's just, as I say, there's no particular question here. It's just that I think that the department needs to be more aggressive. And perhaps the Provincial Auditor's department may want to consider with the department a slightly different set of criteria by which we judge this department.

As I say, there's no question.

The Chair: — Okay. I have just a few questions. First of all, I

want to deal with the employment supplement. And Mr. Hillson had asked some questions on it and you said there hadn't been sufficient time to see how much . . . you know, what actually had been done. But I understand in September there'd been about 8,700 applications and I was wondering if you can give us an idea of what that number is today.

Ms. Yeates: — Yes, Madam Chair, I can. We have at this point over 10,000 — about 10,800 applications. Of those, the last month we had about 6,300 of those that have been processed who are actually receiving payments. So the numbers have increased since we were here last with you.

The Chair: — Saskatchewan actually reduces the monies that were received by some of the recipients by the amount of the child tax credit, right?

Ms. Yeates: — Yes, for those who are receiving social assistance, the Child Benefit, not the employment supplement, but the Canada child tax benefit and the Saskatchewan Child Benefit ensure that persons on social assistance with children are not worse off but they are not . . . it is not simply an add-on to their social assistance payments.

The Chair: — Some of the other provinces do not take off though. Is that correct?

Ms. Yeates: — Well the national agreement, the national objectives of the National Child Benefit had been to try and reduce what was called the welfare wall, the disincentive in a sense, to leave welfare and to move into the workforce. So the national objectives in terms of the trying to support the working poor and to reduce that and make that movement off social assistance easier, were something that all provinces had agreed to.

In the final analysis, there were two provinces — Newfoundland and New Brunswick — whose welfare rates are very low and they felt that given the very low level of their assistance rates that they would not do this. But in general it was an agreed-to plan across the provinces and they had some special circumstances that I think affected their decision.

The Chair: — I see. Okay.

You'd indicated that there was 65,000 people and about — I'm not sure how many cases — but about 65,000. I think earlier this year there was about 80,000 on welfare, is that correct? Or were our numbers wrong at the beginning?

Ms. Yeates: — The latest — I've got cases versus — the latest case numbers are about 35,000 for the year. That was for the . . . for or current year. Those are cases as opposed to beneficiaries. So I think the difference between the two numbers that — if I've understood the question — may be the difference between beneficiaries versus cases.

I think we have both of those numbers for you here. We can perhaps give those to you.

Mr. Walsh: — In November, we had 33,901 cases and 65,834 persons.

The Chair: — Thank you very much. You had indicated there had been 50 caseworkers hired. Have they all been hired now or is that a number that you are still looking for some?

Ms. Yeates: — Yes, they have all been added to the system at this point.

The Chair: — And the numbers that we've got from the Provincial Auditor, the social assistance plan is actually . . . was in the amount of \$319 million. Some of that would be actual salaries for the caseworkers themselves as well, wouldn't they?

Ms. Yeates: — No, if I understand how the auditor's numbers here are done, that would be the actual payments out in social assistance.

The Chair: — I see.

Ms. Yeates: — Not the salaries for the delivery or the administrative cost.

The Chair: — Okay. And I'm wondering, with the First Nations bands, the auditor had indicated that they were not filling out adequate reports. Has there been some changes in the status of that recommendation or have they been working on these reports now?

Ms. Yeates: — Yes, we are working with the five bands that have this arrangement and make the payments directly on our behalf. We have in the case of the two larger bands now moved them within the last year onto our computer system. So we have . . . that is improving our ability to work with them and should improve our ability to generate the kind of roll-up reports.

I should emphasize we feel . . . we don't feel that there's a risk, a financial risk here. We are dealing with the case-by-case checks, we have . . . The information is flowing but there are roll-up reports that we are not yet able to generate or they are not able to generate with us.

But we are working with them. Two of them are now on the system. The other three are very small bands, very small caseloads, and we are looking for ways of improving the reporting there as well. So we are in active discussions to move towards that reporting goal.

The Chair: — One of the areas that all of us, I'm sure, are concerned about is the living conditions on the reserves and the housing conditions, and I know that is a federal problem and responsibility. But in the end we, as a provincial government here, end up finding the people will move off the reserve because of some of the concerns that are on the reserve, especially living conditions.

Is there anything that the provincial government is doing to either push the federal government or any programs that they're doing to help the housing conditions on the reserves?

Ms. Yeates: — I can't speak for what other departments might be doing. We as a department are not involved in on-reserve housing. We do work in terms of exchanging information and trying to support caseworkers as families might move, to make sure that families are safe, or children are safe, or we've got

adequate controls in terms of making sure that we and the federal government or the bands who are implementing programs co-operate. But we are not . . . I'm not aware . . . we are not doing anything as a department and I'm not aware of activities of other departments on-reserve.

The Chair: — Yes. I'm sure that we're all aware that in the long run there's more money having to be paid through Social Services because of the conditions on the reserves and people just move off, period.

The community living aspect of Social Services — I understand in some provinces this is actually under Justice, right? Or is some of the provinces look after the homes under the Department of Justice?

Ms. Yeates: — In the community living area, I'm not aware of that. That may be the case.

The Chair: — With the inquiry into the death of Karen Rose Quill last summer, there was several recommendations that were brought forward and I'm just wondering if these have been implemented or what's the status of these recommendations?

Ms. Yeates: — Yes. We are, as a department, working very diligently on the child advocate's recommendations in that instance. And we have in a number of cases implemented the recommendations. In some cases for example there was a suggestion that all of the homes be reviewed in certain areas for certain ways. We've done those reviews.

Others of the recommendations are more long term and ongoing, but we are working on all of them and will be reporting back to the advocate later this month to that effect.

The Chair: — And she's asked for it in six months, so that's fairly close then.

Ms. Yeates: — Yes.

The Chair: — And the other, on community living, the recommendations after the incident with Helen Montgomery, there was a number of recommendations there as well. Have those recommendations been looked at?

Ms. Yeates: — Yes, with the community homes program. I apologize to Madam Chair, I may have misunderstood your earlier question. Certainly young offenders' programming is within the Department of Justice in a number of jurisdictions and I am aware of that. I'm sorry I was misinterpreting.

Yes, we have the community homes review has been received by the department and again a number of those recommendations have already been implemented. For example there was a recommendation that we work with the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) and local police forces to implement an emergency protocol. We've done that. That's now been signed off by all of the police forces in all of the cities or places where we have community homes.

So we've implemented many of the recommendations already. Others again are ongoing and we are continuing to work with

them in terms of implementing the recommendations.

The Chair: — There's been some pressure by some of the community homes to have an association of community homes, much like the one for the association for foster parents. And I talked to the Minister of Social Services some time ago and he had said that they would be putting some effort into making sure that happened. Are you aware of what the status of that is?

Ms. Yeates: — Well certainly I know that we are aware of the desire of some of the operators and we are very supportive of that. We've not felt . . . The department is facilitating and supporting. We don't feel it can be our organization. We can't form it in a sense, but we are certainly facilitating the formation of that kind of organization if that's what the operators wish to have and that is our understanding as well.

So there are some meetings that we are working on with operators to try and to help them in assisting them in getting their own organization if that's what they wish to have.

The Chair: — There's some funding provided by your department to help the foster families association. Will there be some monies available for community homes?

Ms. Yeates: — We've not got to that point in the discussions.

The Chair: — Okay. Is there any other questions?

One sixty, we have a recommendation: we recommend the department should improve its records and document its procedures to ensure single parents receiving social assistance pursue child support.

Mr. Koenker: — Yes, I have some questions about this. Is it true that the department reduces the amount of assistance it gives to recipients by the amount of child support received by the other parent? Or has there been a change in that regard following on the heels of the employment supplement which was introduced in July?

Ms. Yeates: — We do reduce social assistance by the amount of the maintenance payment for example.

So just to use a fictitious amount — I'll just make these up to use the example — if someone's entitlement or needs were \$800 a month and they were getting a hundred dollars from a former partner, we would reduce the social assistance payment to \$700. But we would supplement the maintenance payment through the employment supplement if they apply for the employment supplement, which we would encourage them to do, so that they would receive some additional support . . . a supplement to the maintenance payment.

So we actually reduce the social assistance payment but we supplement through the employment supplement program which is much less intrusive. It's a phone program; it's a different mechanism.

It is still the case that we reduce the social assistance payment. But we also . . . it is also the case that we supplement the maintenance payment.

Mr. Koenker: — So in other words, there's a net benefit.

Ms. Yeates: — Yes, yes.

Mr. Koenker: — So when the auditor makes this recommendation on page 160 to improve records and document its procedures to ensure single parents receiving social assistance pursue child support, it sounds as if there is almost a built-in incentive as a result of the employment supplement for workers to inform clients of the need to . . . or the desirability of pursuing maintenance and a built-in incentive for clients to take those steps as well.

Ms. Yeates: — Yes. Workers would always have informed clients of the requirement of the program that they seek maintenance support. But with the change in the employment supplement we think that there is a significant incentive now for clients. So we think this is actually quite a major change in terms of the incentive, and therefore we believe it will make the process or the . . . an added energy in the sense to pursuing maintenance that would not have been in the past under the previous policy.

Mr. Koenker: — So in terms of our disposition of this recommendation, I wonder if . . . I think we would concur and note progress?

The Chair: — Is there progress?

Ms. Yeates: — Yes, on the specifics of the computer change, the systems upgrade that it would take to actually make this, we understand that we should increase the coding or change the coding, update the coding. It is simply with the computer system changes that were required for the new programs, the employment supplement and the child benefit. And now with the Year 2000 requirements, this has simply just not risen to the top of the priority list in terms of computer changes. We understand that some coding improvements need to be made but it's not been the most urgent thing for us at this point.

The Chair: — So concur and note progress. Agreed. Okay.

Recommendation no. 2, that the Department ensure the Northern Indian Bands submit performance reports required by agreements. I understand that there is some progress on that.

Ms. Yeates: — Progress, yes.

The Chair: — Concur and note progress. Agreed.

No. 3, we recommend that the Department should ensure that CBOs (community-based organizations) submit financial reports to the Department and submit them on time as required by agreements. Concur and note progress. Okay. Concur and note progress on that one so far.

And then on the last two, if you read the last . . . Then the auditor has said that: "At its October 1998 meetings, PAC agreed with our recommendation." So no. 4, I think it's we recommend in its annual report to the Legislative Assembly, the Department should describe how the Department manages the key risks it faces. We had concurred and noted progress at that time. Agreed.

And the last one there was actually a motion made:

We recommend the annual report should provide a summary of the Department's financial and operational plans, performance targets, and actual results.

There was actually a motion by Mr. Koenker that keeping in mind the difficulty in establishing a measurable performance target for Social Services within the framework of a single year is noted by both the auditor's office and the Department of Social Services — the committee concurs and notes progress. We reiterate that. Agreed.

Okay. Thank you very much again. We appreciate your input here today and the progress your department is making on these recommendations. Have a good year.

Ms. Yeates: — Thank you.

The Chair: — No. We're going to do first of all Post-Secondary Education. We'd like to finish by 5.

Public Hearing: Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training

Mr. Strelloff: — That's chapter 4 I think. Yes. And we know your committee decided that no officials will be invited.

The Chair: — Yes. Unanimous agreement.

Mr. Whitmore: — Invited or required?

Mr. Strelloff: — Invited, I guess.

The Chair: — So we have chapter 4 of Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training and we have no officials here, and I don't know if we have any new officials here from your department.

Mr. Strelloff: — With me is Judy Ferguson and she is going to present the results of our work on Post-Secondary Education. It was quite, quite extensive, quite extensive work we did in the past year and involving the role of the department and its goals. And we're trying to get up to speed. We also identified the key risks facing Post-Secondary Education. Judy, do you remember if those key risks were agreed to by the department or is it our first shot at putting them on the table?

Ms. Ferguson: — Actually I'll let Rosemary handle technology and just in the essence of time we'll keep going here. Here we go. Thank you for your patience here. As Wayne indicated, the chapter that you have before you actually includes the key risks that we worked with the department to create. You'll find that they are a department that is a very complex department and very, very broadly based department. In addition to the key risks we have the results of our audit too.

So basically, if you stop for a moment and think about the Department of Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training, really the essence of the department is that their responsibility is to pick up where the K to 12 system ends. Okay?

Often we think of post-secondary in terms of just the education

component but I encourage all of us to think broader because it is both education and training. So it is not just managing the universities at all and managing the regional colleges. It also includes the training component for the education system.

And it's a large department. Overall the Department of Post-Secondary Education is responsible for that broad sector and that costs the province about some three-quarters of a million dollars each year. So it's a big department.

So what's the department responsible for? Obviously policy development in that broad basis.

They have a regulatory role in terms of the private schools, apprentices and trade programs that some of you may be familiar with.

They have the oversight role in terms of the regional colleges, SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology) and the universities.

They administer student assistance. It's the student aid program falls within this department. Often people forget about that.

They do some direct delivery now of training programs and education programs. If you have been watching the media, you've recognized that there's been a transition of responsibilities between the federal government and the provincial government in terms of employment centre services.

And there's a funding mechanism that happens between the department and the various provincially funded institutions. And it's important to keep that in mind — provincially funded institutions.

And who are they? Well, there's eight regional colleges; there's Northlands College; there's New Careers Corporation, which is slated to wind up in this upcoming year. Saskatchewan Communications Network — that's your television station that we all get. The two universities — the University of Saskatchewan, University of Regina; training completion fund, which is quite a small organization; and then the student aid fund, which is actually quite a large organization.

The department has a number of key initiatives that they've been working on. And in this chapter we've actually taken a moment to highlight what they are because we, in working with the department, we found that there's no one place where all the initiatives are put together in one spot. So to help legislators and the public understand the department, we thought it was important to bring it together.

The first initiative is *The Saskatchewan Training Strategy* and it focuses on the training sector including SIAST, regional colleges, various apprenticeship and training programs. It does not deal with the universities to a great extent; it's quite minimal.

The second one is the university revitalization. Some may be familiar with it through the MacKay report, along with the work of Ed DesRosiers and there's a number of reports from Ed DesRosiers that have recently been . . . well last summer were summarized into one final report.

This work focuses on the roles of the university vis-à-vis the role of the department and the provincial government, the public priorities with respect to the university sector, and issues relating to funding of the university. There's quite a bit of reading there but there's a lot of large issues that are put forward in that work.

And the last one that we've listed there is the student assistance reform and probably some members of your constituents are familiar with that. Basically it sets out the department's priorities for student assistance reform including things such as adequate support, debt prevention, and debt repayments assistance. And they're using this reform mechanism really as a blueprint to move forward in the changes in the area of student assistance.

When you look at the three areas, they each form a portion of the department's overall responsibilities. Each of these initiatives play a key role in helping determine the direction for that particular portion of their responsibilities. And if you haven't read the publications, please do so. There is various Web sites by the universities, the department, etc., that a lot of these documents are on the Web sites and they are public documents.

As I said earlier, we did work with the department to identify the key risks that they're facing. And also in doing that we thought it was important for people to recognize the context or the environment in which they're operating. And as Mr. Dotsen said earlier, it is an area that is changing rapidly, not only in terms of technology but also in terms of demographics, funding, etc., etc.

The public's expectations with respect to the post-secondary system I think are increasing. Workers make more frequent job changes and require a new set of skills often when they make those changes. Stats show that the higher your education, the most likely you are to participate in the workforce; and people are aware of that stat and obviously pursuing education aggressively. Our growing Aboriginal population may require and expect different education and job training requirements than our current system presently offers. So those are all huge issues that the department is grappling with.

In addition, the public is increasingly concerned about the rising costs of education and training. They're asking, are these programs making a difference? Are they making the student more employable? The public's asking, are their tax dollars directed to the right places? Is the sector being subsidized too much? Is it being subsidized too little? They're all issues that are being put forward in the various initiatives that the department has had underway.

Finally, I think we have to keep in mind that the federal government's involvement in this sector is changing too. The federal government is expecting more local involvement in the delivery of the related programs and services. And as I just mentioned earlier, the department is assuming expanded duties in the area of delivery of career and employment services that were previously provided by the federal government. And this has meant an increase in personnel and an increase in responsibilities for the department in the upcoming year.

So what were the three areas that we identified? Obviously to be successful they have to be able to coordinate the efforts of the various institutions that fall within their sector. Similar to the education sector, they're not in a position to deliver the programs themselves directly. They have to work with others to do that.

And the public pays for the costs of the post-secondary education system through both federal-provincial taxes and tuition fees. And the public funds continue to be limited. The department must take a lead role to ensure the costs of this system are reasonable and appropriately shared.

A prerequisite to successful coordination is for everybody having a clear understanding to who people are responsible, for what, and how. And we encourage the department to share this understanding with the public and the legislators. And I think they're gradually working on that through its various initiatives.

The second one is to make sure the system responds to the needs of the public and the employer groups. If you go through the training strategy, you'll find that they spend a lot of effort trying to determine what the needs of the employer community is for training. It's a recognition that, to ensure Saskatchewan is competitive, the programs and services offered must be relevant to both the current and future needs of society.

This means needs must be identified and tracked and the department must have a system-wide information system to develop and implement its policies to ensure that it provides the appropriate level of funding and the appropriate form of funding.

And the last one that we've identified is ensuring reasonable access to quality education and training opportunities. Again the department plays a key role to ensure individuals have reasonable access to quality education and training.

Factors such as the status of your secondary education — do you have a grade 12 that's recognized or not — awareness of opportunities, program prerequisites required, the cost, your access, whether it be physical or electronical, do you have the financial resources, do you have access to student loans, bursaries, etc. All of these factors must be recognized and the department must work with institutions to identify and address the barriers to access and also work with the community itself.

Moving on to our audit work, this chapter reports on our annual audit of the department, on New Careers Corporation, the training completion fund, SIAST, Saskatchewan Communications Network, and the eight regional colleges.

What did we conclude? Well we concluded that the financial statements of the organizations that prepare financial statements were reliable — there's 12 in all — that there is adequate systems of internal control, with a couple of areas that they need to work on to improve, and that they complied with the law.

We made a number of recommendations. There's one new recommendation that the committee has not yet dealt with, and that's dealing with the need for a system-wide plan. This recommendation actually has two subsets and it's on page 61 of

the report. It deals with the importance and the need for a sector-wide plan. Our office believes this is important given the complexity of the sector and the issues it faces.

We recognize the department has a lot of different planning initiatives underway for various aspects of its operation, but notes that they have not yet pulled together a more comprehensive plan. And they have not yet ensured that the different parts of their planning initiatives complement each other and do not work at cross purposes.

Based on this, we recommend the department provide legislators and the public with a clear description of the accountability relationships between the department and its key institutions as a prerequisite to its planning process.

We also recommend that the department bring together its planning efforts that focus on individual components of the public sector, public post-secondary sector together and bringing these components together form a plan for the entire post-secondary education and skills in training sector and then report publicly against this sector-wide plan.

We also note in this chapter that the department has not yet complied with two recommendations that this committee has already dealt with.

We had recommended that the department should require universities to report on how well they safeguard and spend public money, and table reports on how well the university safeguard and spend public money in the Assembly. These recommendations continue to be important given the legislators and the public currently receive limited information about how well the universities safeguard and spend public money.

Your committee has concurred with these recommendations in the past and has noted progress towards their completion. We continue to encourage the department to work with the universities to make progress towards compliance with these recommendations.

The next area of findings deals with New Careers Corporation, and that's on pages 63 and 64 of the report.

During the year, New Careers entered into an agreement with the department to deliver a part of the provincial training allowance program. New Careers was to pay applicants approved by the department a training allowance with monies they received from the department. As such, the corporation was not to use any of its own monies for this program.

During the year, we found that New Careers did not ensure it received enough money from the department before it made the payments. This resulted in New Careers using its own money for the department's program.

Based on discussions, we understand that the department has corrected this problem by now making the payments directly themselves and that they plan to wind up New Careers sometime in the upcoming year.

That concludes my part of the presentation. I'll turn it back over to Wayne.

Mr. Strelloff: — Okay. Well thank you very much, Judy.

Obviously it would be useful to have the department officials discuss their goals in recommending plans in the future world of education. But that's not the case and so we turn it back to the Chair.

The Chair: — Yes, I guess when we decided that we had the officials in not too long ago we thought it wasn't necessary. But I guess there's always some reason to have them in. But because they're not here, I guess we have the recommendations to look at.

The first one is on . . . Does anybody have any comments they want to make before we go . . .

Ms. Stanger: — I just have one question of the auditor. One of your first recommendations is that they have a clear accountability relationship with the department and the key post-secondary institutions, and I understand that they have a framework, accountability framework developed that will be instituted in the year 1999-2000. Has the auditor seen this framework and have you been working with them?

Ms. Ferguson: — Thank you, Madam, members. Yes, I am aware of the framework. The framework is being developed in conjunction with the training strategy and so that that framework actually focuses on the sector that that training strategy covers, which is the regional colleges, SIAST, apprenticeship programs, etc. It does not at this point in time extend to the university sector.

So we have had dealings with the department on that framework and they are moving forward on that. We have seen drafts and been involved in that process.

So again that's a framework that deals with a portion of their activities, albeit a . . . quite a significant portion. But it's not quite yet covering their entire operations.

Ms. Stanger: — Well I agree with you. I think it should cover the universities so they'll have to develop a framework to cover that. They've got SIAST and the colleges covered. Now they'll have to get something for the universities. Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: — I think that last . . . in our meeting in October . . .

A Member: — November.

The Chair: — In the November meeting, we had made this statement:

The committee noted that steps had been taken to comply with the recommendations and that the department acknowledges that further work is needed.

Mr. Shillington: — I think what we heard was the complexity of the relationship with the university. They have a long, jealously guarded academic independence. It's just a very complex relationship. I think we acknowledged that and that's why the motion was worded the way it was.

The Chair: — Yes. So do you just want to reiterate this?

A Member: — Reiterate it, yes.

The Chair: — Yes, okay. Agreed?

A Member: — Agreed.

The Chair: — And no. 2 is a new motion.

We recommend that the department bring its planning efforts that focus on individual components of the post-secondary sector together to form a plan for the entire post-secondary education skills training sector and then report publicly against the sector-wide plan.

Agreed?

A Member: — Concur.

Mr. Shillington: — Concur and note progress, I think. Or would that . . . is there no visible sign of that?

Ms. Ferguson: — If I could respond. It's probably early to expect progress on this.

A Member: — Too early. Okay. All right.

Ms. Ferguson: — I know when we discussed it with the department it was kind of like, yes, that needs to be done and it makes sense.

Mr. Shillington: — Whether they know it or not, I think they are doing it, actually. Cause I've seen evidence in some Treasury Board . . . so I think they're doing it. Perhaps the language here frightened them off.

The Chair: — So we'll say concur and then we agree.

Mr. Shillington: — I think we'll leave it at concurrence, yes.

The Chair: — Agreed?

A Member: — Agreed.

The Chair: — No. 3, we would recommend that the department should continue to improve its annual reports.

A Member: — Agreed?

The Chair: — Concur and agreed.

No. 4. We recommend that the corporation should establish a system to ensure it receives adequate funds prior to making payment for provincial training allowances. And we understood that they've already complied with for that so I would note compliance. Agreed?

A Member: — Agreed.

The Chair: — That's it. So you will note that it is exactly 5 o'clock. We did finish right on time.

Now would . . . we have three that are still on the book for Thursday that I know all of us would like to get off before then. There's one, we could be looking at SERM (Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management) or we could leave it until tomorrow. Whatever you suggest.

Mr. Gantefer: — Could we have a brief discussion, Madam Chair, about the — and I'm not asking for a decision at this time — but a discussion that we may ponder overnight on the appropriateness of how we would deal with the chapter 20, the Board of Internal Economy.

Mr. Shillington: — I was actually going to make the suggestion — probably nobody wants to do it, that's fine — I was going to make the suggestion we actually do both. We do SERM, stay a little over maybe but get it done, and then we won't have quite so much tomorrow if members want to get away and get home. And also I am quite prepared to make my comments about the Board of Internal Economy for members to ponder and I would welcome any response. But I was going to suggest we do both.

The Chair: — As long as we're done by 5:15. I've made a promise to a very important man.

A Member: — Oh I see.

A Member: — Does it matter?

The Chair: — Yes it matters. So make your comments about the Board of Internal Economy.

Mr. Shillington: — Okay. You're not going to deal with SERM?

The Chair: — Yes.

Mr. Shillington: — Or do you want to deal with Board of Internal Economy first?

The Chair: — At least we can ponder that if we don't get that far today.

Public Hearing: Board of Internal Economy

Mr. Shillington: — I have reviewed the recommendations of the Provincial Auditor and I invite other members to do so. While on the surface they seem to be straightforward and if they were comments made about any other department I suspect we'd concur in them, this is a little different. We're not dealing with an agency or a department of the government over which we as a legislative committee have authority, clear authority.

Here we're dealing with another department, another committee of the legislature over which I think we do not have authority to deal with, and this is different than a department or agency or a Crown corporation where as I say lines of authority are clear. They answer to us.

Another committee of the legislature doesn't answer to us. And I therefore think that we can't deal with this and I think we have to, I think in the first instance, send it back and suggest that they deal with it.

Mr. Gantefer: — Madam Chair, and this is just for information. Has there ever been a case in the past where the Board of Internal Economy has been presented in a report and is a precedent for the committee either dealing with it or not dealing with it?

Mr. Strelloff: — My understanding is that this committee has never dealt with the Board of Internal Economy.

Mr. Gantefer: — Has it ever been presented by way of an auditor's report that there were issues coming from that committee?

Mr. Strelloff: — As a result of our work?

Mr. Gantefer: — As a result of your work, have you ever included a chapter on the Board of Internal Economy?

Mr. Strelloff: — Yes.

Mr. Gantefer: — And in the past the Public Accounts Committee referred that work then back to the Board of Internal Economy or how was it dealt with in the past?

Mr. Strelloff: — In general I think the committees have declined to address that chapter. I don't think discussing in as forthright way the point that you've made but I think that has been of the general understanding that that one committee reviewing another committee doesn't seem right but it's never been expressed that way. Mainly it's just been not put on the agenda.

The Chair: — Greg said that it's not a committee. It's a board created by statute.

Mr. Whitmore: — Being a member of the Board of Internal Economy also, we have seen two chapters that have come to the board and we have reviewed them, the Speaker has, and then agreed on a statement that would be released in terms of those findings. There's a statement that is — I don't know if it's been circulated to all members or not — that the Speaker has replied to the chapter that was referred to in the report by the Provincial Auditor. And that discussion took place at the last Board of Internal Economy meeting which all parties discussed openly and upon reviewing that memorandum, agreed on the statement, the memorandum that was sent by the Speaker and all parties unanimously supported that.

Normally board of . . . Conditions have been that the board reviews the chapters in question.

Mr. Gantefer: — So there is . . . If indeed it would be appropriate for us to recommend that the board review this and that's the way we deal with it, or do we just not deal with it?

Mr. Shillington: — Take it off the agenda. I guess it looks . . .

Mr. Gantefer: — We agree to drop it from the agenda.

Mr. Shillington: — Take it off the agenda, yes.

Mr. Gantefer: — Well the only concern I had is that I didn't want to do that if it just gets lost again somewhere. I think we

have a responsibility to ensure it doesn't get lost and that's why I wondered, do you drop it from the agenda or you actually refer it to the Board of Internal Economy for review?

Mr. Whitmore: — In the minutes of the Board of Internal Economy, it's listed, the memorandum that was accepted by everyone. Your representative, Mr. Heppner, will have a copy of that memorandum signed by the Speaker to the Provincial Auditor in response to those. And so those are public records that are available for the members.

Mr. Gantefer: — I'm not concerned about that. I'm worried about, is it necessary for us to refer it to the Board of Internal Economy or can we just . . .

Mr. Whitmore: — In the two cases, it came directly to us.

Mr. Gantefer: — It went directly to you?

Mr. Whitmore: — We dealt with it there.

A Member: — So we just dropped it from the agenda.

Mr. Strelloff: — Just how it gets to the board is, we do write a management letter to each organization including to the Board of Internal Economy reflecting the substance of this. And we meet with the Speaker and the Clerk to discuss our recommendations and their response and reaction.

Mr. Gantefer: — So because this agenda has been accepted, do we need a motion to drop this item from the agenda . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . If everybody's agreed, fine.

The Chair: — Agreed?

A Member: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Okay, it's agreed.

Public Hearing — Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management

The Chair: — Okay, if we're going to go to SERM, that is on page 199. And if we ask the Provincial Auditor to do a quick overview for us.

Mr. Strelloff: — Thank you. Fred Wendel is going to provide an overview for us.

Mr. Wendel: — Madam Chair, members. This chapter 12 would be an interim report on our work at the Department of Environment and Resource Management for the year ended March 31, 1998.

And as we say on page 201, we've not yet completed our work on the financial statements of the big game damage compensation fund, the commercial revolving fund, fish and wildlife development fund, resource protection development revolving fund in those years and we'll report our conclusions and findings in a future report to the Assembly.

One of the things we've been trying to do over the last few years is trying to get all of our March work reported in the fall

report and we think that's going to take us several years to get to that stage. So we're not quite there on this department.

In our *1998 Spring Report* we made several recommendations based on our work on the 1997 year. And based on our work to date on the department for the 1998 year our concerns continue and we make the same recommendations. But we don't go into a lot of detail here because we don't think the department's had enough time to deal with all those issues yet. Your committee, this committee has agreed to all of the recommendations in this report during the November meetings.

Now just to give you a little progress on what's happened since we met, our understanding is the department now is developing a strategic plan which will allow them to work on recommendations 1 and 2 and be able to report better on those items. We also understand they're putting in a new financial reporting system, and that will also enable them to make their internal reports better and to be able to deal with their capital assets properly.

Finally with respect to recommendation 5, they've told us that they will comply with that recommendation in the future. And that concludes my remarks. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: — Thank you. I would agree that as Mr. Gantefoer suggested that on recommendations 1 to 5 that they concur and note progress. Agreed? Mr. Koenker doesn't look like he agrees.

Mr. Koenker: — Yes, I agree. Yes, I agree.

The Chair: — Okay — but . . .

Mr. Koenker: — But I'd like to go on to just put on the record what was shared in November. That this is a department that's probably seen greater cuts than any other government department. And so its ability to produce this information I think needs to be viewed in that light. And it's good to hear that they're concurring. I just want to make the point that they have really taken it on the chin in terms of reductions in staff.

The Chair: — Now I would like some input from the committee members. We have one department left that we should be looking at on Thursday. And the Provincial Auditor has indicated that he has a staff member that he would like to bring in too, for his overview. So we'd have to give him a few minutes, a little time notice. So I'm just wondering if we should suggest that he comes . . . We either start earlier or later on tomorrow afternoon, or what would the . . .

Mr. Shillington: — May I ask Wayne how long you would expect this to take? We had a fairly thorough discussion of it in November.

The Chair: — What chapter? Chapter 2.

Mr. Shillington: — In fact, as I recall our discussion in November the one department which left me wondering was actually Health because of the districts, and we got an update on that.

Mr. Strelloff: — Well I would hope less than a half-hour

depending on questions. The person in my office, Phil Creaser, who is responsible for our IT audit work agreed with you not bringing in witnesses on this one because he didn't think there was enough time and that, or enough time has passed since November. And that a more useful exercise might be to bring, to consider bringing people back in in April or May to get an update on the Year 2000 preparedness.

But on this one I think the key issues that he had to bring to your attention relate to some of the recommendations that we have in this chapter, and just to get your endorsement and support. They're pretty straightforward recommendations. But your support makes a big difference when we go out there and try to push practices forward. So that's mainly the main thing that he wants at the table, or he wants to propose.

Mr. Koenker: — I'd like to propose that we slot this from 12 to 12:30.

Ms. Stanger: — No, from 1 to 1:30.

Mr. Koenker: — I would suggest 12 to 12:30. That keeps us on track in the morning.

The Chair: — From 12 to 12:30? Okay. Is that in agreement with everyone? Okay, from 12 to 12:30. Okay. So everyone is . . . At that rate then we should be finished tomorrow by 5 or somewhere in that vicinity.

Mr. Shillington: — Thereabouts.

The Chair: — Okay, thank you very much. We'll recess until tomorrow morning.

The committee adjourned at 5:14 p.m.