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STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

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Heritage Language Schools / Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA)

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much. I want to thank the minister for his opening remarks, and my colleague for letting me go first with a couple of sets of questions. I know you'll be long into the evening, and there's important conversations to have.

Right off the bat, as you know, I've been daily raising the issue of heritage language instruction in Saskatchewan in that cut, so I'll have a few questions about that. Were there any other third party or non-government organizations where their funding was cut or eliminated in this budget?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — There was a \$100,000 payment that we had made to the Office of the Treaty Commissioner that was not continued. It was part of a . . . there was project work that was being done and was completed. The regional intersectoral committees — there was 10 of them — had received funding of I believe \$100,000 each, and that was not continued this year. And we've asked the people in that sector to work with the Hub and COR [centre of responsibility] to try and achieve the same types of results that are there. And then there was also, there was \$204,000 to the Regina District Industry Education Council, and the Saskatoon Industry Education Council. The total of 204,000 will be discontinued for 2016-2017.

And then there was a scholarship program with Pearson College which, a decision was made not to continue it several years ago, and it was \$34,000 but we left it in place until this year so the last of the students that were in the program could finish. And there are no more students in the program, so nobody will be left midway through whatever education program they were taking.

Mr. Forbes: — I remember that program. That was quite a good program, so I'm sad to hear that's gone.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I don't think there was anything wrong or critical of the program. It was just a desire to support programs in the province.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. So my question then is, why the heritage language program being singled out before you're getting in this transformational process? Was it something that you had been thinking about for some time? Why were they . . . It seems quite singled out because you've gone through quite a list of third-party groups that you are continuing to fund.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We wanted to give the heritage language people as much notice as we could, so we announced it sort of somewhat prior to the budget, the program was not going to be continuing. We have, in the schools, a lot of the schools have got alternate language fund program and there's a number of different languages that are available — Cree, Ukrainian, German, French, and a number of others that are there. They are taught at a 20 or 30 level.

The heritage language program, which I'm sure is a good program, but it was an after-school program, sort of an add-on and not part of our core programming. The school divisions, I understand, are going to continue to provide space for the classes. But we felt it was something that wasn't core, wasn't specific to our mandate, so we made the decision earlier in the year that it was something we would not continue funding. The cost per student per month was \$4.58. So our hope and expectation is that it's something that the parents or the communities will be able to absorb. We'd like to, of course, like to see the programming continue, but we don't think it's something that's core to government and ought not be funded by government.

Mr. Forbes: — Well they say, and I have a note here, that it's the Saskatchewan Organization for Heritage Languages member language schools offer the credit classes in Chinese, Spanish, and German. So who teaches your German classes? Is it all regular teachers? Or do you have some of those credits coming through heritage language schools?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I wouldn't be aware of how the classes are taught. The divisions make the decisions on who to employ. I'm not aware whether there's a full-time teacher teaching in the division that does heritage language after school or vice versa. I don't know that. It may well be.

Mr. Forbes: — Is there an official here today who can tell us who these teachers are? Because we're having a bit of a disconnect here. You're saying one thing and the heritage language folks are saying they are the ones who are teaching it.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I'm not saying anything. I'm just saying that we don't know . . . We don't have information as to who they've retained to teach the heritage language schools and whether there would be an overlap. I assume that there would be some overlap, but we don't have the information.

Mr. Forbes: — Well, and are you doing this tomorrow as well?

A Member: — Yes.

Mr. Forbes: — So maybe you could get the information for tomorrow . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I don't know whether we'd have it. We'd have to go to all of the divisions and ask them, do they have teachers that are there? You know, if heritage language says that there's overlap, we don't take issue with it.

Mr. Forbes: — So when you made this decision, were you aware that the heritage language instructors were carrying out these credit classes? And was that the information given to you?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The credit courses we expect to be taught by accredited teachers. We don't know whether they all are or are not in the heritage language programming.

Mr. Forbes: — Well the ones that are offered, the member language schools offer credit classes in Chinese, Spanish, and German this year.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — If they are in an accredited course, if they're taking the course not as a being part of an after-school program, if they're taking the course towards a credit, those continue.

Mr. Forbes: — Do they continue? This may be news to them.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Okay. Yes. I'm sorry. If the course is a credit course — and it may be taught at different times — if it's a credit course, it will be taught by an accredited teacher. And so far as I know, those continue.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay, so the . . . Now how will that continue if the school is no longer functioning? How will you ensure that those programs . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — They would be taught by the school in the ordinary course. They may or may not be taught at different times of the day.

Mr. Forbes: — But now you're expecting them to do that without any funding.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The funding that we provided was for an after-school or a weekend program.

Mr. Forbes: — So the credit classes were not taught at the same time, on the Saturday or after school?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — There might be some variation. We can try and find out some better information between now and tomorrow.

Mr. Forbes: — This is a pretty big issue. Because this is what they're feeling, is that there's not been a good communication around this issue.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We'll try and get you some information.

Mr. Forbes: — So tomorrow night? I mean, they're watching right now. I've told them . . . and unfortunately I don't have my phone with me because I said, text me any questions, because we do that. But there's a series of questions, though, because they're an integral part of the education system and they take exception to be considered an after-school program.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We will certainly undertake to find out. It's not our goal to try and disrupt or discontinue a program that leaves . . . is part of an accredited course, is part of somebody's grade 12 or 11 classes. We'll find out for you.

Mr. Forbes: — It just seems to me . . . and I appreciate the numbers in education, and rightfully so, should be one of the main expenses of our government budget. And you talked about 176 million in operating funds, and I imagine that's where the \$225,000 comes out of. And it just seems to me the positive impact of heritage languages that we have in Saskatchewan goes beyond much more than being an after-school program. In fact, the different languages and the ethnic groups who support that instruction really feel this is a big part of them belonging to Saskatchewan, and they feel very strongly about that. And it is interesting, because they talk about how the Ministry of Education makes good use of them actually as experts in their fields and particularly when it comes to curriculum development. Are you aware of that?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I can tell you this. The program, I think, is of benefit to the families that choose to participate in it. To the extent that it's an after-school program or an evening or weekend program, it's something that we regard as not being core to the programming that we provide during regular class during the day. So for that reason it was felt that we would not continue funding for it. It was largely paid for by families and by the participants.

Within the divisions we have a number, nine or ten different language classes, that are taught at different levels. Those would continue in the ordinary course and would not be affected by this decision. So what this was was a decision that was for an after-school, evening, or weekend program, and that was why that decision was made.

[19:30]

Mr. Forbes: — So am I hearing you say that it's because it's after school, and any program that is considered or offered after school is now at risk because it's not during the regular business or the instructional hours? Is that what I'm hearing you say?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Well what I'm saying is we look at all of the programs that are provided or programming that's done in our schools with a view to determining what is core, to do it . . . This we know is going to be a difficult and challenging

budget year. So we made a number of different decisions to try and make sure that we were able to maintain the viability of our school system, and this was one of the ones that we felt was an after-school program. The cost of it was small enough that families would be able to absorb it themselves at \$4.58 a month, and that we felt it was something that was not something that other taxpayers should be paying for.

Mr. Forbes: — You know, I mean there's a couple of comments there, and we're here to find out more information than to get into arguments. But I think, you know, we've all gone through the period of Mosaic here in Regina, and we look forward to Folkfest in Saskatoon. And you know, as taxpayers we all get the benefit of these heritage language schools, and we all celebrate our heritages. And I think this is so critical because we do see a healthy, more robust provincial economy.

I think about when I was touring IRD [International Road Dynamics Inc.] in Saskatoon a few years ago, and they were so proud of the fact that many people spoke, I don't know how many languages were present in that workforce. It really made a difference because they could talk to the business world.

Now they didn't make a requirement to say, you must speak this language before you get hired, but they considered it a bonus because they're in particularly Saskatchewan as an export province. And we know we're an export province, and we seek to do more exporting, that rich array of languages is a gift to us.

And actually, it's the reverse at only \$4.58 to us. Is it a bonus? You know, I mean I think that we're getting the best part of the deal. We're getting qualified teachers to speak an array of languages. And we're getting . . . And as I was just talking about the curriculum experts, and I'm thinking of Eleanor Shia from Saskatoon who has worked on the Mandarin language curriculum, if I'm correct. And if the curriculum folks . . . I think that's correct that she's worked on that curriculum as an expert.

It is a gift. It's a complete gift. So I'm just curious about why in a \$176 million operating budget, you know, \$225,000 makes a difference?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I don't want to diminish the hard work of that group of people or the fact that a lot of the work that they do is done on a voluntary basis, but as part of our core curriculum, as part of our role as an education system, we have language classes throughout the divisions. Those classes are taught in the ordinary course. Some of them may be evenings and weekends as part of, you know, whatever the scheduling the school system has. So we said, okay these are the regular core programming that we provide in language services. That will go to assist us in making Saskatchewan a warm and welcoming place. That will assist us in having newcomers come to the province that will want to say, okay, yes I want to go there because my children will be able to take a class in this or that. So those classes are taught at and part of the regular school program.

So we made the decision that this particular program, what flowed through the heritage language program . . . And I've gone to some of their events. You know, I

don't in any way want to . . . But it's something that should be provided by way of cultural work done by that group of people or paid for by then families, when we know that our goal as paying for core education is the languages that are being paid for within the regular school system.

Mr. Forbes: — I will continue tomorrow and if you could have that answer to the question. I guess the second question would be, how many of the languages off your website will be taken off because they are after hours or be part of heritage language school offering?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We'll find you the list of languages. I had it for a question period early on so I don't . . . [inaudible]

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you. And just shifting gears and . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I can tell you these are the ones that will continue: core Ukrainian, K to 12 [kindergarten to grade 12]; German, 9 to 12; Mandarin 10, 20, and 30; Russian 10; Spanish 10, 20, and 30; Aboriginal languages, K to 12; and nēhiyawēwin 10, 20, and 30. So those are the ones that we have now. Those are the regular ones that are done for and those will all continue.

Mr. Forbes: — So did you say Spanish 10, 20, 30?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Yes, I did.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay, I will follow up and see if the heritage languages folks seem to have the same understanding that you folks do.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Sure.

Mr. Forbes: — I just want to shift gears here and just talk a little bit about GSAs [gender and sexuality alliance]. And of course this was scheduled last week, but in light of the horrible, horrible tragedy in Orlando, the hate crime that was committed there in early hours of Sunday morning, this is something that I'm sure that many classrooms were abuzz about today. And perhaps even the ministry were thinking about what this really means in terms of some of the initiatives we try to do, to make sure our schools are as safe places as they are.

But we are in June, so the year is wrapping up, and I'm just curious to know what new initiatives you had over the course of the year. Were they successful in terms of providing safe spaces for students?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Thanks for the question, and I appreciate the opportunity to sort of respond on that.

On Saturday, myself and a number of MLAs [Member of the Legislative Assembly] from both sides of the House participated in a Pride parade in Saskatoon. And it was a happy and joyous event — people celebrating in who they were, celebrating their pride — and

the pride literally was just, was bursting out. It was truly a happy event.

I can say that our thoughts and prayers have to go to the friends and families of the victims, of the people in Orlando. I can't imagine a worse thing, to go through that. And I think as a government and I think as Canadians, we condemn this senseless and cowardly act of violence.

Today all of us stand as one with the LGBTQ [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and/or questioning] communities, not just in Orlando but around the world. I think today we are all part of that community and want to do everything that we can to offer our support to them. I think it was a horrible, horrible tragedy. And you know, I don't know what we can do for those particular people, but I think it's important that they know that all of Canada and Canadians stand with them and offer our full support. So anyway, thanks for the opportunity of letting me point that out.

I can tell you that the work that we're doing in that area continues. As you're aware, we had developed a curriculum and resource material for teachers to use with regard to Deepening the Discussion: Gender and Sexual Diversity, which you've likely seen. It's available online and is actually a remarkably good resource.

We've worked with the divisions to make sure divisions continue to offer the supports that students need. And we have seen, when a year ago there was issues raised in some of the school divisions — this wasn't available; that may not be available — I can say that the complaints or the concerns that have come forward to the ministry have dropped to virtually nil. Now that doesn't necessarily mean that we're where we want to be or where we think we should be, but we know that we're making progress. And when you talk to the people within a division, they regard themselves and the services that they're providing still as a work in progress.

Now I know that your next question will be, why we don't legislate it. To me when the divisions are wanting to do it, willing to do it, I think it sends a bad message to legislate it. And what do you say to a student? Well we have a law. Well what are you going to do if the law's broken, phone a police officer and ask him to give the school a ticket? No, we're there to provide supports for kids. I don't want this running off into the court system. It certainly would pass legislation in a heartbeat if I thought there was a single one of the 28 school divisions that wasn't willing to or wasn't trying as best they can to try and get up to speed and provide all the resources that they are.

I am joined by Kevin Gabel and I'll certainly let him provide a bit more detail.

Mr. Gabel: — Good evening. Right now with the gender and sexual diversity, some of the work we're doing is we continue to support all the student divisions and students with the document that the minister talked about. We're continuing to support students with the creation of GSAs [gay-straight alliance] through a pamphlet we've put all online. We have a policy statement online as well.

Students are able to access our anonymous online reporting tool, where if they feel like they can't go anywhere else, they can go on that. I can share that 100 per cent of all

issues that have been brought forward have been dealt with by school divisions through that tool. And we're continuing to work with some of our community partners in regards to gay-straight alliances and gender-sexual diversity issues.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I can also add that all the new P3 schools, as well as all of the schools that have been built in the last year or two, have gender-neutral washrooms or washrooms that have open sink areas and separate enclosures. So they will continue to have that type of facilities as they go forward. And it seems to be working.

We're also making changes to student data systems to allow students to enroll as the gender with which they identify or as unspecified, at their will, without any documentation. We think that's sort of . . . I don't know whether Kevin is going to be able to answer how many times that . . . [inaudible] . . . the discussion paper has been accessed or downloaded. I don't really . . .

Mr. Gabel: — Since October of 2015, the document's been downloaded over 1,000 times: 975 in English, 38 in French.

Mr. Forbes: — Very good.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I know that was a long answer, but we tried to anticipate . . .

Mr. Forbes: — I appreciate it and it's thorough. And you know, it is interesting that . . . And I couldn't make the Pride march this week, so that's why I was at the flag raising. They're very important to get out to. It's interesting because the joy and, as you say, the happiness, it's got quite a good feeling to it.

But what's interesting that came out last night . . . and I know a colleague over here was at the same vigil. There was comments made about how we have to remember that it is a march, that we are marching for a purpose, and that is to make sure that people are all treated with respect. And sometimes just because the world . . . In many ways, it's two steps forward, and then we have a huge tragic step backwards like we did in Orlando. But does . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I'm sorry you weren't able to make it. I know that you're a supporter and are a passionate believer, so I respect that.

Mr. Forbes: — I appreciate that, thank you. But I do and I will continue to advocate for the opportunity for students who ask that the school must provide a GSA, which doesn't mean every school must have one, just when a student requests it. And I really appreciate and I know parents and activists appreciate the good work that's gone on, but it's missing that final step.

And while I know you have a philosophical disagreement, and I don't think it's about giving tickets or anything like that, but I do have to say that this government, to its credit . . . But then at the same time it's been kind of shamed into this. The amendment to the Human Rights Code, we were very glad to see that. We supported that and we voted along with that, but we did have to acknowledge the fact that many other provinces were

ahead of us in legislating the changes to the Human Rights Codes in their province. And Canada still is working on their change as we speak, and we didn't quite get far enough with that.

And today I'm very, very happy to see the amendments to vital statistics. But again, the recognition was that it was because of a ruling that really brought us to that stage, but again, credit to the government. And I can tell you, Mr. Minister, I will be celebrating the day when you bring forward the legislation to have GSAs in the schools. And you never know, you might be it because if it happens really quick . . . Are you going to commit to it right now?

[19:45]

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I appreciate the comments you're making. I may not agree necessarily with the reason or the rationale or the logic of why things take place with the timing. However if you want to have a further discussion on it, you may want to go upstairs to the Chamber. I understand that Mr. Wyant is available there and is expecting your attendance.

Mr. Forbes: — So we can do it through Justice. No, but it is interesting. I do have to tell you that Laura Budd, when she was leaving and she was having a conversation with someone within the Chamber, that person told her that she would never see what happened in vital statistics today ever in her lifetime. And that was two years ago. And so it's amazing what things can happen. But we know that other provinces have done this. It's been painless. It's not a huge thing, but it's a signal that every student in every school must be safe. And not may be safe, but must be safe.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think on that you won't get any disagreement. I think I'd mentioned last year that I had gone to Bethlehem and heard a grade 11 student speak about the support that he had got through a GSA, the difficulty he had coming in grade 9 to the school, not feeling a part of the school, feeling singled out. And then some older students made him feel comfortable, made him aware that there was a GSA in the school.

And what was amazing was that the school gym was full of grade 11 students from both sides and that he was able to stand up and speak comfortably in front of them and explain to his fellow students what he felt was the benefit that he had received, how he was able to feel safe, secure, and know that he wasn't alone and know that there was resources that were there.

When he finished speaking he got a generous round of applause, but this wasn't an epiphany or something that was new or different. This was just his . . . He was comfortable talking about it. And I turned to one of the administrators and said, that could never have happened when I was a student. And the administrator replied, saying, that could not have happened five years ago.

So there's no doubt the students are far ahead of where their parents are and where the teachers are, and those that have young people in their family or in their classroom are a long ways ahead of where the general population is. And it's great to see the youth

leading the rest of the population. So to the young people in Saskatchewan I would say, continue being leaders, and it should be our role to catch up and to provide the supports that we can.

So I'm proud of the work that the ministry have done in developing this, would encourage both of you to read it, have a look at it, share the piece with it, whatever. And thank you.

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you. And actually just, I'll end on this. It's a short comment. Students of Bedford, from their GSA at the flag raising, urged the GSAs be legislated. So I felt inspired by them. And to that point, that's why I'm here tonight. So with that though I think I'll turn it over to my colleague because I know she has many, many questions with that. Thank you very much and thanks to the minister for the answers.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Thank you.

The Chair: — Thank you, Mr. Forbes. Ms. Beck.