



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Fourth Session

Standing Committee
on
Alberta's Economic Future

Ministry of Jobs, Economy and Northern Development
Consideration of Main Estimates

Tuesday, March 14, 2023
9 a.m.

Transcript No. 30-4-6

**Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Fourth Session**

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC), Chair
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP), Deputy Chair

Allard, Tracy L., Grande Prairie (UC)
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Jackie, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (Ind)
Bilous, Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
McIver, Ric, Calgary-Hays (UC)
Panda, Prasad, Calgary-Edgemont (UC)*
Rowswell, Garth, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright (UC)
Rosin, Miranda D., Banff-Kananaskis (UC)**
Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UC)
Walker, Jordan, Sherwood Park (UC)

* substitution for Jordan Walker

** substitution for Jackie Armstrong-Homeniuk

Also in Attendance

Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP)
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (NDP)

Support Staff

Shannon Dean, KC	Clerk
Teri Cherkewich	Law Clerk
Trafton Koenig	Senior Parliamentary Counsel
Philip Massolin	Clerk Assistant and Director of House Services
Nancy Robert	Clerk of <i>Journals</i> and Committees
Sarah Amato	Research Officer
Christina Williamson	Research Officer
Warren Huffman	Committee Clerk
Jody Rempel	Committee Clerk
Aaron Roth	Committee Clerk
Rhonda Sorensen	Manager of Corporate Communications
Christina Steenbergen	Supervisor of Communications Services
Shannon Parke	Communications Consultant
Troy Rhoades	Communications Consultant
Tracey Sales	Communications Consultant
Janet Schwegel	Director of Parliamentary Programs
Amanda LeBlanc	Deputy Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Participants

Ministry of Jobs, Economy and Northern Development
Hon. Brian Michael Jean, KC, Minister
Andre Rivest, Executive Director, Financial Services

9 a.m.

Tuesday, March 14, 2023

[Ms Goehring in the chair]

**Ministry of Jobs, Economy and Northern Development
Consideration of Main Estimates**

The Deputy Chair: Good morning. I would like to call this meeting to order and welcome everyone in attendance. The committee has under consideration the estimates of the Ministry of Jobs, Economy and Northern Development for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2024.

I'd ask that we go around the table and have members introduce themselves for the record. Minister, please introduce the officials who are joining you at the table. My name is Nicole Goehring. I am the MLA for Edmonton-Castle Downs and the deputy chair acting chair for this committee. We'll be starting to my right.

Mr. Rowswell: Garth Rowswell, MLA, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Mrs. Allard: Good morning. Pleasure to be with you today. Tracy Allard, MLA for Grande Prairie.

Ms Rosin: Good morning. Miranda Rosin, MLA for Banff-Kananaskis.

Mr. Panda: Good morning. Prasad Panda, MLA, Calgary-Edgemont.

Mr. Stephan: Jason Stephan, MLA, Red Deer-South.

Mr. Jean: Brian Jean, MLA, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche. I'll introduce my officials in my opening remarks, please.

Ms Gray: Good morning, everyone. Christina Gray, MLA for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mr. Bilous: Good morning. Deron Bilous, MLA, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

As we have no members online, we'll just get right into it. I'd like to note the following substitutions for the record: Ms Rosin for the hon. Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk, hon. Mr. Panda for Mr. Walker.

A few housekeeping items to address before we turn to the business at hand. Please note that the microphones are operated by *Hansard* staff. Committee proceedings are live streamed on the Internet and broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV. The audio- and videostream and transcripts of meetings can be accessed via the Legislative Assembly website. Members participating remotely are encouraged to turn your camera on while speaking and mute your microphone when not speaking. Remote participants who wish to be placed on a speakers list are asked to e-mail or message the committee clerk, and members in the room can signal the chair. Please set your cellphones and other devices to silent for the duration of the meeting.

Hon. members, the standing orders set out the process for consideration of the main estimates. A total of three hours has been scheduled for consideration of the estimates for the Ministry of Jobs, Economy and Northern Development. Standing Order 59.01(6) establishes the speaking rotation and speaking times. In brief, the minister or member of Executive Council acting on the minister's behalf will have 10 minutes to address the committee. At the conclusion of the minister's comments a 60-minute speaking block for the Official Opposition begins, followed by a 20-minute

speaking block for independent members, if any, and then a 20-minute speaking block for the government caucus. Individuals may only speak for up to 10 minutes at a time, but speaking times may be combined between the member and the minister.

After this, speaking times will follow the same rotation of the Official Opposition, independent members, and the government caucus. The member and the minister may each speak for a maximum of five minutes, or these times may be combined, making it a 10-minute block. If members have any questions regarding speaking times or the rotation, please send an e-mail or message the committee clerk about the process.

With the concurrence of the committee I will call a five-minute break near the midpoint of the meeting; however, the three-hour clock will continue to run. Does anyone oppose having the break? Seeing none, we will commence with a five-minute break.

Ministry officials may be present and, at the direction of the minister, may address the committee. Ministry officials seated in the gallery, if called upon, have access to a microphone in the gallery area and are asked to please introduce themselves for the record prior to commenting.

Pages are available to deliver notes or other materials between the gallery and the table. Attendees in the gallery may not approach the table. Space permitting, opposition caucus staff may sit at the table to assist their members; however, members have priority to sit at the table at all times.

If debate is exhausted prior to three hours, the ministry's estimates are deemed to have been considered for the time allotted in the schedule, and the committee will adjourn.

Points of order will be dealt with as they arise, and individual speaking times will be paused; however, the speaking block time and the overall three-hour meeting clock will continue to run.

Any written material provided in response to questions raised during the main estimates should be tabled by the minister in the Assembly for the benefit of all members.

The vote on estimates and any amendments will occur in the Committee of Supply on March 16, 2023. Amendments must be in writing and approved by Parliamentary Counsel prior to the meeting at which they are to be moved. The original amendment is to be deposited with the committee clerk with 20 hard copies. An electronic version of the signed original should be provided to the committee clerk for distribution to committee members.

Finally, the committee should have the opportunity to hear both questions and answers without interruption during estimates debate. Debate flows through the chair at all times, including instances when speaking time is shared between a member and the minister.

I would now invite the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Northern Development to begin with your opening remarks. You have 10 minutes.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. members, thank you for having me here today. I am pleased to present the 2023-24 budget estimates for Jobs, Economy and Northern Development, our 2023-2026 business plan, and how we will help secure Alberta's future through economic growth, diversification, and support to Albertans.

With me today are Shawn McLeod, the deputy minister, at my far left; Myles Morris, assistant deputy minister, safe, fair, and healthy workplaces, in the gallery; Suzanne Harbottle, assistant deputy minister, labour and workforce strategies; Sonya Johnston, assistant deputy minister, financial services; Paul LeBane, assistant deputy minister, economic strategy, in the gallery; Tanis Liebreich, acting assistant deputy minister, economic development and business supports; and Andre Rivest, executive director of financial services, to my left. Thank you.

This year my ministry remains focused on our mandate to enhance and communicate Alberta's competitive advantage and, in turn, help grow and diversify Alberta's economy by attracting investment, drawing and developing a highly skilled workforce, and promoting safe, fair, and healthy workplaces, ultimately allowing Albertans and Alberta to thrive.

This is the renewed Alberta advantage: low taxes, no sales tax, a business-friendly government, a young and highly skilled workforce, abundant job opportunities in a diversified economy, some of the most livable cities in the world, and the can-do spirit that Albertans thrive on. After all, Alberta is the economic engine of Canada, representing nearly a quarter of all jobs created in Canada last year despite comprising just 12 per cent of the country's population. With that, our work will be guided by four main outcomes. Our first theme is helping to ensure Alberta's economy is and continues to prosper.

Through Budget 2023 we will continue to build Alberta's reputation as a first-class destination for the film and television industry. The film and television tax credit has helped our province attract some of the largest productions in Canadian history such as the HBO hit show *The Last of Us*. If you haven't had a chance to see it, please take your time and do it. It's a great show. It also benefits many local economies with filming taking place in more than 100 communities right across Alberta, a third of which were rural. As of January 2023 111 productions have been authorized to participate in the program and are expected to spend more than \$859 million and support more than 8,000 jobs here in Alberta. That is why we are investing an additional \$100 million over the next three years in the program to help increase industry confidence, attract more productions, and support even more growth in the sector for Albertans.

Budget 2023 is also helping the government ensure all corners of the province can attract job-creating investments. In particular, northern and rural communities have unique challenges and need creative solutions. That is why the northern and regional economic development program will receive \$9 million over the next three years to support Alberta municipalities, Indigenous communities, and nonprofits with regional economic growth and diversification. This will help organizations continue to deliver business supports, promote labour force attraction and retention, enhance regional tourism, and build capacity for economic growth.

We will also continue to invest in Alberta's nine regional economic development alliances, or REDAs. These independent, nonprofit organizations are made up of member municipalities and regional stakeholders who work together to promote long-term economic development and prosperity. Investing in REDAs means investing in every single area of our province. We are funding these valuable organizations with \$125,000 each annually to help them continue their important work.

Budget 2023 will also continue to support the Northern Alberta Development Council bursary program, increasing funding by \$350,000 to a total of \$500,000 annually over the next three years. Since it began, this program has helped to attract and retain 7,000 Alberta students to study and work in Alberta's north; this includes many Indigenous learners. We are excited to see how this additional funding will help attract even more skilled professionals to the north. These important initiatives also align with the government's economic development in rural Alberta plan, which demonstrates a commitment to drive growth and address challenges in rural and Indigenous communities.

9:10

The second outcome is building a skilled and resilient labour force. As Alberta's economic momentum continues, we are

developing creative ways to address labour shortages and support employers and workers. As part of last year's budget the government committed more than \$600 million over three years through Alberta at work to help Albertans build their skills and find jobs and to help employers find workers in existing and emerging sectors. This funding is allocated across various ministries. Budget 2023 continues the strategic investment of this important initiative to include an additional \$176 million in funding for the '25-26 fiscal year. We are doing our part to make sure all Albertans benefit from these investments to develop the skills they need to build rewarding careers.

Under my ministry Alberta at work includes \$73 million dollars in investment over the next three years in Alberta's proven skills development and employment training programs. This includes training for work, which offers employment and training supports to Albertans who are unemployed, underemployed, or currently collecting employment insurance or other income support. Budget 2023 also includes continued investment in the Canada-Alberta job grant to help more Alberta workers access training to gain the skills needed for businesses to grow and diversify. This will help meet growing program demand and assist with preparing Alberta's workers to best contribute to economic growth.

We're also leading the delivery of the aviation skills grant program as part of an MOU with WestJet Airlines, another initiative under Alberta at work. To support training for new jobs that will be created as a result of this agreement, my ministry has developed a skills training grant program starting in 2022-23 that will provide \$5 million annually over three years to off-set training costs in the aviation sector. This is an amazing opportunity for Alberta. It will help the sector build its workforce and support its continued growth while further diversifying Alberta's economy.

Lastly, we are funding the Alberta Is Calling campaign, appealing to talented professionals in in-demand sectors and highlighting the many advantages of living life here in the best place in the world, Alberta. Since this campaign launched last summer and as of last December, almost 20,000 Canadians chose to make Alberta their home. Budget 2023 forecasts this trend to continue, with Alberta's population growth expected to rise to its fastest pace since 2006, in part due to strong international and interprovincial migration levels. We are currently exploring options to focus the campaign on new markets.

The third outcome is that Albertans are safe at work and treated fairly in the workplace. This year's budget includes more than \$64 million in funding to ensure safe, fair, and healthy workplaces. My ministry collaborates with many groups, including workers, employers, health and safety associations, industry associations, and labour groups, to make sure that everyone understands their rights and responsibilities in the workplace and to seek their guidance and input. For example, recent amendments to the OHS code were developed after extensive consultation. These come into effect March 31, and Budget 2023 will continue to fund the ongoing code review process. After all, as workplaces, best practices, and technology change, we must make sure health and safety rules keep pace.

Another example is the certificate of recognition, or COR, program. This voluntary program is a partnership between industry, the department, and the Workers' Compensation Board that encourages participants to create or improve their health and safety management systems. Budget 2023 will ensure these critical programs and safeguards can continue to protect the rights and health of all Alberta workers.

The fourth and the final outcome is better services for workers, investors, and employers. Under this outcome we will be allocating \$4.6 million to the Alberta Labour Relations Board in 2023-24 to

continue its important work of overseeing and applying Alberta's labour laws. Nearly \$16.9 million will also support the Appeals Commission for Alberta workers' compensation in 2023-24. This will assist injured workers and employers across Alberta in accessing free, independent appeals and advisory services through the commission.

My department in conjunction with the partner ministries is also continuing to provide concierge service that works directly with Alberta-based businesses considering major new or expanded investments. This will help companies navigate government approvals and resources more effectively and seamlessly. With this support in place, alongside our many other business-friendly policies, we are demonstrating our commitment to reduce red tape . . .

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Before we get into the next portion of the meeting, I would like to invite Mr. McIver to introduce himself for the record.

Mr. McIver: Ric McIver, MLA, Calgary-Hays.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

For the hour that follows, members of the Official Opposition and the minister may speak. Hon. members, you will be able to see the timer for the speaking block in both the committee room and on Microsoft Teams. Members, would you like to combine your time with the minister's?

Ms Gray: I would be very interested in combining time.

Mr. Jean: Block time. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Go ahead.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much. Thank you to the minister and all department officials who are here to answer questions and for the work that you do in this very important and newly reconfigured ministry that we have.

For my first question block I'd like to start talking about outcome 3, safe and fair workplaces. I think that making sure that every worker who goes to the job is able to come home safely is one of the most important priorities for this ministry, and the work that the OHS teams do is incredibly important. Through the estimates process I'm hoping to get an idea of how progress is going and what the current state of that work is. Certainly, there have been some unique challenges with COVID-19 and influx of requests.

When it comes to this ministry's FTEs and the number of staff, I see that in this budget it is going down by 24. I'm interested in finding out specifically how many staff are currently working within occupational health and safety, specifically the officers. There's an important measure when it comes to health and safety, the number of officers per 100,000 workers, that is often used to compare province to province. In 2018-19 we knew that Alberta had 6.2 officers per thousand workers. I'm wondering if the minister and his department can tell me what the number is today and, for context to help anyone who's watching, if you would be able to also provide what's happening in other provinces. For example, for the year 2018 we knew that Quebec had 7.2 versus Alberta's 6.2, B.C. had 12, Manitoba had 7.8. If the minister has that contextual information, that would help as well as the number of officers per 100,000 workers.

Similarly, having a sense of how much work is happening can be quite helpful. If the minister is able to break down the number of occupational health and safety inspections that were completed for 2022-23, reinspections, OHS orders written, perhaps number of work sites visited would be interesting information and a

breakdown between reactive and proactive inspections. This is information that is often shared through the annual report. It is my hope that the minister may be able to enlighten us and provide a little bit more detail here today so that we can have a sense of the work that the ministry is doing.

Now, I understand, particularly during COVID, the practice of virtual inspections, which was not new at the time but was used a little bit more – if you have any information about virtual inspections versus in-person inspections, I'd be interested to know how the ministry's work is breaking down along those lines.

The minister's perspective on any trends that we are seeing when it comes to number of inspections, types of inspections, types of workplaces that are gaining the focus would be helpful to myself and to those watching and those keeping an eye on occupational health and safety trends within the province of Alberta.

Now, when we look at performance indicator 3.a for OH and S, we see a very clear trend that our lost-time claim rates, which is the number of lost-time claims for 100 person-years worked – and they tend to represent worker injury or illness, whenever a worker misses more than just the day they were injured at work – that number is increasing. It was in 2019 1.56; in 2020 it was up to 1.72; 2021, up to 1.81. That's actually a 31 per cent increase since 2019.

9:20

I'd like to know a little bit more about what potential trends may be involved there, knowing that COVID and the occupation, those who are infected at work, could be impacting these numbers. At the last estimates for occupational health and safety – it was then the ministry of labour and immigration – I asked the minister and the department about if they had any disaggregated data that split out perhaps COVID information from other types of occupational injury. I'm curious if the minister is able to break that down so that when we're looking at the increase in lost-time claim rates, we can understand what the factors are there. I know the department uses that information to then target their proactive measures. What is happening? Can you help understand? Of course, when someone just looks at performance indicator 3.a, they're seeing increases.

Similarly, when you check through the WCB data, fatality claims accepted, 2021 was 178 workers killed due to accident, injury, or occupational disease, which is the highest in the last five years. Again, recognizing COVID potentially is a factor here, what can the minister tell us about these rapidly increasing stats? How is the ministry working to make sure that all Alberta workers are able to return home safely to their families? Certainly, the government's business plan, the government members, myself, all Albertans want to make sure that workers are safe.

I'm particularly concerned because during the term of the UCP government these past four years, during the same time frame where we're seeing an increase in lost-time injury, we're seeing an increase in fatalities, there have been a number of changes and what I consider rollbacks when it comes to occupational health and safety: eliminating oversight mechanisms; reducing worker participation in health and safety; changing the right to refuse unsafe work; putting more restrictions on front-line workers during a global health pandemic; restricting workers' right to participate; reducing joint work-site health and safety committees and, in fact, removing them from being included when there's a work-site investigation; reducing training provided to employees about health and safety.

It's concerning to me, having spoken against all of these rollbacks to occupational health and safety, the laws that protect workers, and now we see these trends increasing. Certainly, I hope that the minister would be able to walk me through what he is seeing, because all evidence in these budget documents really

seems to indicate that the Ensuring Safety and Cutting Red Tape Act, Bill 47, had the opposite impact from what it was intended. If the minister can break that down: how is the department working to keep workers safe? How has reducing their rights and reducing their access to information in the work site helped to keep them safe? It really does look like the opposite is happening.

We've talked a lot about occupational health and safety, and I hope that the minister and the department will be able to quickly come back with the numbers, some of the information, because that really does help to get a sense of what's going on.

Similarly, I'd be interested on the employment standards side. What updated trends are you seeing? What has changed during the pandemic? For many years now an early resolution process has been put in place to try and get quick resolution on employment standards, and we saw for many years a real positive decrease in the amount of time between when a complaint was received and when it was resolved. What would be the latest information we have on the number of employment standards complaints that have been resolved within – I think it was 180 days was typically the measure and the number of average days to begin an employment standards investigation. Do we have that latest information?

Now, around occupational health and safety I noted that the department had recently published a *Working from Home: OHS Information for Employers and Workers* document. Certainly, there's been a lot of talk about the global trend towards remote work. That really gained a lot of momentum during COVID when people were working from home. I'm curious. Within the occupational health and safety numbers that we're seeing, have larger remote work trends impacted the department, the types of calls and concerns that are coming in, even potentially how the department and other government of Alberta workers are performing their work? Remote work would impact pretty much everyone in some way over the last several years, and it's continuing to impact people that way.

So we've talked a lot about the sections that are in the safe, fair, healthy, outcome 3. I'm really hoping the minister and the department will be able to walk me through what trends they're seeing, how staffing is looking, and what is happening in both the occupational health and safety side and the employment standards side.

I appreciate your time. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Member.

Minister, you have 10 minutes.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Madam Chair. Well, we can certainly see a lot of questions there. I know that you as a former minister know the file very well, so I appreciate you being here today because nothing could be more important than the safety of our workforce.

I think what I heard you ask was generally about the occupational health and safety. You wanted to focus on the inspectors and where we are on there. You also talked a little bit about COVID and the issues because, of course, that was a new scenario for all of us and we all had to come to terms of how we'd move forward on that. Workplace site visits and whether or not it has changed as far as virtual and otherwise goes. You talked about the amount of workplace injuries and deaths and how concerning that was, and of course that is extremely concerning to our department and to myself.

You mentioned rollbacks. I haven't seen them, but I'll try to deal with some of the numbers to let you know exactly what is happening. I know that, you know, the department is always looking for ways to be more innovative with safety. With the department itself they had moved somewhat towards a more safe environment such as our airlines do with SMS, safety management systems, in some of the areas, which is more effective.

You've asked for where the trends are and where we're seeing things change with COVID and other things. Finally, you talked a little bit about red tape and where the red tape reduction was happening and whether or not it was actually cutting back services – I have not seen that, but I'll get into that in a little more detail – and the working from home rather than working from the office in our downtowns and how that's changing things and how that might change the occupational health and safety. I'm going to just deal with it on an overreaching macro basis, on occupational health and safety, and then I'll try to get into some of your questions. I think we'll have time for all of that.

Safe, fair, and healthy workplaces help Alberta to be more attractive and more competitive to work and to do business. As you know, we have to attract people from all over the country and the world right now to fill the many jobs that we have, over 100,000 unfilled right now. It's a great environment.

We have to make sure people recognize that occupational health and safety laws are there for them, and these laws that set out the minimum health and safety standards for workplaces help ensure workers return home safely at the end of their workday and prevent costly lost production and downtime due to these incidents, which, obviously, impact them and their family. Consistent enforcement of OHS laws helps prevent workplace illnesses, injuries, and fatalities and lets people know that Alberta is a place where you can work safely and the government will have their back.

My ministry collaborates with businesses, employees, health and safety associations, industry associations, and labour groups to promote an informed and knowledgeable workforce regarding both rights and responsibilities and has that relationship that they can seek input on a continuous basis, which makes for better laws. One such way my ministry ensures an informed, knowledgeable workforce is making it easier to receive information about health and safety obligations. For example, our OHS prevention initiative promotes awareness of some of the most common forms of workplace injury and illness and leverages partners throughout the OHS system to provide information and resources.

Jobs, Economy and Northern Development is focused on identifying efficiencies, improving processes, and enhancing service delivery to Albertans. This ministry will ensure its staff levels reflect the government's commitment to fiscal restraint while continuing to provide the excellent services that Albertans rely on. The department's FTE count is decreasing as the Alberta jobs now program is shifting to primarily focusing on managing and monitoring existing grant agreements with employers as no further program intakes are planned. This decrease is partially off-set by additional FTEs to support the delivery of employment standards and the aviation skills programs.

Now, you mentioned some decreases, but OHS officers remain constant from prior years. Obviously, there are always some ups and downs in any field, but it has, I believe, approximately 148 to 150 officers on a consistent basis year over year, and based upon the ratio it's about 6.0, the number of OHS officers per 100,000 workers.

9:30

The scenario with 2022-2023 inspection priorities. This year's proactive inspections focus on workplaces at higher risk of illness, injuries, and fatalities. In 2023-2024 proactive programs will include wholesale manufacturing and process packaging, supportive living, selective industry, and cities and municipalities. The key facts relating to from April 1, 2022, to January 31, 2023: there will be 11,210 inspections completed, 7,929 inspections and 3,281 reinspections. And 7,169 orders were written: 545 were stop-work orders, 69 were stop-use orders, 6,555 were compliance orders.

There were 26 tickets – 10 to employers, four to supervisors, and 12 to workers – and 15 administrative penalties. Seven hundred and three investigations were conducted on serious incidents; 11 investigations resulted in the Ministry of Justice laying charges under the OH and S Act. More than 100 OHS officers are in the field, and 27 per cent of OHS inspections were proactive and 73 per cent were reactive. I believe that was question 8.

From April 1, 2021, to March 31, 2022, 15,568 inspections were completed. Of that, 11,798 were inspections, and 3,770 were reinspections. This is a 12 per cent decrease from the prior year due to additional inspections being conducted in 2020-2021 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which I believe was question 3. And 8,403 orders were written, which was a 7 per cent increase from the prior year: 472 stop-work orders, 77 stop-use orders, 7,854 compliance orders.

Fifty-seven per cent of orders had a report on compliance, and that would be 4,928. Those were reports on compliance. Thirty-two tickets – nine to employers, five to supervisors, 18 to workers – a 42 per cent decrease in tickets compared to the prior year. The number of tickets issued is highly variable from year to year as they are issued in response to specific noncompliances that are observed during inspections.

Now, you asked about lost-time claim rate. The lost-time claim rate provides an indication of occupational health and safety performance in the province. The ministry continues to work towards more effectively identifying employers with a high rate of injury and disease and working with them to improve their workplace health and safety practices and management systems. Improved health and safety contributes to reduced WCB premiums by targeting sectors with the highest injury rates. The measures indicate the number of lost-time claims per 100 person-years worked to indicate increases or decreases in a worker's risk of injury or disease. One person-year is equivalent to one full-time worker working for one year, or 2,000 hours worked.

The results of this performance indicator are by calendar year, and the objective is to obtain the lowest rate possible by having consistency year over year so we can measure appropriately. The analysis of the results indicates that the lost-time claim rate increased by 5 per cent to 1.81 in 2021 from 1.72 in 2020. In the last five years there appears to be an upward trend, with the 2021 lost-time claim rate being the highest rate since 2012, which is concerning. COVID-19 had an impact on the lost-time claim rate. Approximately 21 per cent of the lost-time claims received in 2021 were actually COVID-19 related claims. I believe that was another question, question 5 or 6.

Additionally, there were an undetermined number of lost-time claims that were related to the COVID-19 pandemic but not necessarily directly as a result of COVID-19; for example, lost-time claim for a skin condition developed due to personal protective equipment. Between 2020 and 2021 COVID-19 claims actually increased by 14 per cent. In addition, the 10 per cent increase of lost-time claims in 2021 outpaced the gain in employment of, for example, 5 per cent. All of these factors contributed to the increase of the lost-time claim rate in 2021.

I know I'm running out of time. I have a lot more information for you here. In 2021 136 workers died, as identified in WCB-accepted fatalities claims, and that is very concerning to the department. I'm actually having meetings in relation to that and have had several bits of deep-dive work on it. Within these claims, 39 fatalities occurred because of a traumatic workplace incident, and in comparison there were 39 traumatic workplace fatalities identified by WCB in 2020.

Unfortunately, I think I'm out of my time for that block of answers, but I very much appreciate all the hard work you've done on this file as minister and indeed as the opposition member.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Minister. That was incredibly helpful. I appreciate the level of detail and contextualizing some of this.

I do want to circle back just to the number of officers per 100,000 because you've responded with six. Thank you for that. It appears that might be trending down but not much of a large change. If you have and can contextualize that by providing what the current number of officers per 100,000 is in other provinces, if you have that – I don't have an easy way to know what's going on in Manitoba, Saskatchewan under the same time period – I appreciate that very much.

The other follow-up that I have is just around the – perfect. No, I think you were able to answer almost all those questions, so again thank you very much.

I'm going to invite you to continue to share some of the information you didn't get a chance to when you were responding, and I'm going to add to this with some additional questions. I'd like to talk a little bit from the government estimates, page 141, line 3.3, which is employment standards, and in your business plan on page 80, the references to having a balanced, stable workforce and environment. Recently we've seen in the media some questions around the minimum wage, and the minimum wage is part of employment standards and part of the minister's responsibilities. Specifically, we've seen the chair of the minimum wage panel, that this government struck, demanding the UCP government share the group's final report with Albertans prior to the provincial election in May, believing the report would be of value and should be seen by Albertans.

This relates to your party's platform commitment to have a Minimum Wage Expert Panel, and it is estimated to have cost Albertans \$25,000. Now, there have been rumours around this report, given that it has essentially sat on shelves for three years, that the report may in fact call for a lower minimum wage in rural Alberta. Is the government not releasing this report because it would clearly tell rural workers that the government is interested in cutting their wages, and should Albertans have that information before they vote? Certainly, there have been a lot of conversations around trust when it comes to this government, and the fact that this report is not being released is certainly an interesting one.

It's particularly timely as well because we're seeing record inflation, and we know that low-income Canadian households suffer the most from soaring inflation, and we've seen that from Conference Board of Canada research. Because someone working on minimum wage will spend a higher share of their budget than wealthier households on basic needs like food, clothing, and shelter, Canadians with the lowest income, the bottom 20 per cent, will devote more than half their expenditures to necessities. In a time of such high inflation those on the minimum wage are suffering the most. So if the government is considering further reductions to the minimum wage, that would add a great deal of pressure onto those lowest paid Albertans. Now, we also know Alberta has the slowest wage growth in the country, so that is adding pressure onto our lowest income Albertans. Under employment standards, knowing high inflation tends to worsen inequality and poverty, what is the government intending to do when it comes to minimum wage? Are further reductions being considered, and why has the report not been released?

9:40

At the same time, and under the same line item, this government has lowered the minimum wage for youth. Youth minimum wage is \$13 per hour. I would like to highlight to the minister that our youth unemployment rate continues to be quite high. Youth unemployment was at 11.3 per cent in February, up from 10.3 in January. When the youth minimum wage was introduced, Albertans were told it was being done to make it more economical for employers to hire youth.

The difference between the youth minimum wage is significant. The only other province with a youth minimum wage – there is a small difference. Here in Alberta it's \$2. We see an unfortunate trend from Stats Canada that despite Alberta having a lower youth minimum wage, something that makes it harder for youth to earn enough to pay bills or to save for school tuition, our neighbouring province, which I've often used as a good comparator, Saskatchewan does not have a youth minimum wage and has much lower youth unemployment and has had that consistently.

So if it is the government's premise that a lower youth minimum wage will make youth more employable, why do we see the exact opposite? Why are you continuing with this policy given that in your business plan it speaks frequently about evidence-based decision-making?

This is a policy that I'm particularly concerned about because many people feel it's a discriminatory policy, that there is an argument that the youth minimum wage discriminates on the basis of age, violating the equality rights section of the Charter, and it denies youth the benefit of receiving equal pay for equal work. With credit to Julia Amelio at the Centre for Constitutional Studies for her work and analysis, it's quite clear that a youth minimum wage is reducing economic opportunities. It's limiting the hours they can work during the school year. They already have limited hours, and they must now accept less money for the limited hours they can work.

Many youth are dealing with homelessness, experiences with the criminal justice system, and food insecurity. Reducing their minimum wage makes it harder for them to deal with these issues or requires them to work increased hours. Youth living in rural areas have fewer potential job opportunities, so that idea of a lower minimum wage in rural Alberta is particularly concerning to youth because if the minimum wage is lowered in rural areas, I can only imagine it would trickle down through the youth minimum wage as well.

So my question to the minister really is: is the government committed to continuing with this lower youth minimum wage? When will the minimum wage report be released? What information is the government prepared to share with Albertans about what they've studied and what they've seen as a result of the youth minimum wage? Looking at the Stats Canada data and seeing our high youth unemployment when compared to our neighbours, the government cannot claim that their youth – oh, I forget what the slogan was when they introduced it, but it was like: the job-creating youth minimum wage. It has not been. Instead, youth are just getting less money for doing the same work as other people, and it's putting a lot of them at a disadvantage.

Today as part of our budget estimates and knowing that it's been recently in the media, I very much wanted to raise this to the minister and get more information on what this government's intention is through the business plan. It used to be that youth minimum wage was its own specific paragraph in the last several business plans, but it's now missing, and I imagine that's because the government is not seeing the results that it wanted.

I'm going to change topics with my last two minutes into outcome 4. I note that the Labour Relations Board is seeing a 15 per

cent increase. Certainly, when we last discussed estimates for this ministry, certification votes and other processes were being delayed because of capacity issues. One of the things that changed in the labour code was removal of timelines as part of red tape reduction, but it appeared to have the impact of making it harder for employees to exercise their freedom of association and right to collectively bargain. Is the 15 per cent increase intended to help the Labour Relations Board hire more, process more cases? Is that what's happening there? Can you explain that for me?

If you have it, I'd be interested to know how many applications and hearings the Labour Relations Board has completed in the last year. I note that performance measure 4(b) sets the target as 85 per cent, but from previous years we can see a downward trend. Again, I'm assuming the 15 per cent increase is intended to assist with this, if you can comment on that. Now, the ministry used to report on the average number of days from the acceptance of an application to the date of a first labour board hearing. If the minister has that information, that would be helpful, just to get a sense of what is happening here.

Then, finally, under the WCB I note that for the 2023 WCB premiums to employers the WCB is again providing a subsidy, and in this case it's a 24 per cent subsidy, which puts the cumulative total of subsidies to employers and rate adjustments at about \$1.6 billion. Alberta remains the lowest rates, when it comes to WCB, in the country. Can the minister speak to any meetings he's had with the WCB, the decision-making that went into the rate setting when it comes to the 2023 year?

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Member.

Minister, go ahead.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, and thank you again. I just want to reiterate: if I understand properly, the first question was in relation to the inspectors and what's happening in other jurisdictions provincially across the country. The second question was on the business plan, page 80, in relation to some factors there. The minimum wage report: I would say to be careful what you wish for. You know, you talked a little bit about youth employment – and be careful what you wish for again – and I will get into that a little bit. And you asked about affordability for some of our most vulnerable Albertans, and I'm going to talk a little bit about the \$2.8 billion, the unprecedented amount that our minister of affordability and our Finance minister have put into those individuals in Alberta that are less fortunate and are struggling right now. Question 4, labour relations, the 15 per cent increase: what's that for? Finally, the WCB and the lowest rates in Canada, which obviously speaks to what a great job our government is doing, the department, and our employers. I will get into that a little bit as well.

As far as the inspectors go, with other provinces, the department does do cross-provincial comparisons, but I don't have those figures in front of me today. I'm more than happy to get that for you. We do keep those figures and make sure that we're as competitive as we possibly can be.

In relation to the minimum wage report I'm just going to talk a little bit about that if I may. The Minimum Wage Expert Panel was appointed in August 2019 to do two things, analyze and publish all of the available economic data on the labour market impact of the previous government's increase in the minimum wage – you were part of that government; as you know, that did change things somewhat – and assess whether hospitality industry workers who serve alcohol would likely generate higher net incomes with a wage differential, similar to Quebec and other jurisdictions.

Well, the Minimum Wage Expert Panel completed its report in February 2020, and I thank the expert panelists and the everyday Albertans on the panel for their hard work. I'm reviewing the report, which was prepared, of course, before the pandemic, and considering how we may release the relevant research in the report given the evolution of Alberta's labour market in the last three years, which has been unprecedented, and I would congratulate the department officials and the department itself for that. I expect to make an announcement in relation to the report very soon, and I would say that the more political I am, the more I want to give the release of that report. As I said, be careful what you wish for.

But I will say this. Because the report proves something that all economists know, and that it will be that if boosting the minimum wage very quickly and haphazardly means that a lot of people on minimum wage lose their jobs, I don't really understand why the NDP thought that was a good thing. The empirical evidence certainly lays that out as that was what would happen, and that's what did happen. So our government is going to be thoughtful and prudent on the minimum wage issue because we have learned from what the NDP did that you can hurt a lot of people without realizing it, and you want to make sure that you don't make quick decisions that will put people, especially families, in pain. We will make sure that whatever decisions we make, we will do so in a balanced and professional as well as a strategic way.

Now, Alberta continues to have the highest weekly earnings in the country, and that was, I believe, your third question. You talked about how we have not seen the higher growth that British Columbia and Ontario have seen, but I would remind the member that we are number one and have been number one for a long time in the highest weekly earnings. We still continue to be number one, and that's something to be very proud of notwithstanding that we have record net in-migration from other provinces. The wage gap between Alberta and the Canadian average has been lessening. However, excluding 2020, which, of course, was misleading with the growth rates due to COVID-19 and some of the things that were done, Alberta's average growth of 2.5 per cent in 2022 was the highest it's been since 2014.

9:50

Alberta's average weekly earnings increased by 2.2 per cent from December 2021 to December 2022, to \$1,268. The average weekly wage, a slightly different metric, fell by \$9.71 to \$1,277.25 in January 2023 from December 2022. The Treasury Board forecasts average weekly earnings to increase by 3.3 per cent in 2023 and by 3.7 per cent in both 2024 and 2025.

Item 2: I skipped over that because I was so excited about the minimum wage report. Employment standards: we have a change, an estimate of \$13.3 million. The budget for 2022 was \$12.211 million, and we are maintaining core operations and service delivery standards. The increase to the 2023-2024 estimate is primarily due to additional funding of \$550,000 to recruit five additional employment standards officers – I know you're excited about that – as front-line levels are being bolstered to manage the continued volume and the complexity of some of the complaints received recently from employment standards. As I mentioned, COVID has changed things a little bit. The remaining increase is related to public-sector compensation increases.

Now, just to give you a few more key facts in relation to employment standards because I know you spent some time on that, the employment standards program delivery has 101 positions, with 57 focused on resolving complaints. This is an increase of five employment standard officer positions since 2022-2023. The remainder are in appeals, permits, education, outreach, temporary foreign worker support, management, and administration. In 2022-

23, as of January 31, 2023, there were 3,393 complaints received, 2,531 complaints completed, and 2,595 complaints concluded.

A complaint is, of course, completed when employment standards program delivery has finished their investigation into the complaint. The complaint may still be active at appeals or collections. A complaint is considered concluded when employment standards program delivery has collected money on behalf of the complainant or has exhausted all available options for resolving the complaint, whether through voluntary resolution, issuing an order or a decision, the appeal processes, or the conclusion of the collections process.

Employment standards has resolved approximately 94 per cent of complaints within 180 days, and I think that's congratulations to them. That represents a 1 percentage point decrease over the results of 95 per cent in the prior year, so it's very consistent. The average time for complaints to be resolved was 95 days. Employment standards program delivery concluded 148 complaint inspections.

Now, let's talk about youth. Youth are very important. I have children. I understand how important it is for kids to get a good education as part of their work experience. As our economy grows and diversifies, Alberta's government continues to deliver training and support programs to help youth gain the skills they need to build rewarding careers in our province. I would say that I think we have one of the best programs for school and integration into the workforce in the entire country.

As part of the Alberta Works initiative we're supporting the delivery of skills and training programs that support people receiving income supports and underrepresented groups, including youth. In my short time in this department I can assure you that that's a big emphasis by the department officials. They make sure in every program to ensure that people of all ranks in Alberta receive the opportunity they do, especially those that are more vulnerable.

Youth employment rose to 311,700 in January 2023. That was up, actually, 1,200, .4 per cent, from the previous month and up 2.4 per cent when compared to the same month last year. That's over 7,400 individuals. In January 2023 there were 35,700 unemployed youth in Alberta, and that is concerning. This is 6,000 lower than the same period last year and down 1,100 from December 2022, however, so that is good news. The unemployment rate for youth fell .3 percentage points to 10.3 per cent in January 2023 as the number of employed rose another 1,200 and the labour force grew another 100. The average weekly wage for youth fell by \$7.24 to \$592.86 in January 2023 from December 2022.

And I know we're bouncing around a little bit, but I want to make sure I answer all of your questions. I've got 35 seconds left.

Maintaining core operations and service delivery standards. The increase to the 2023-2024 estimate is primarily related to additional funding for staffing so that the Labour Relations Board can continue to provide the high-quality service it does to Albertans in a timely manner and fulfill, of course, its statutory mandate, which is not an option.

Thank you. That concludes my time.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Bilous, go ahead.

Mr. Bilous: Great. Thank you very much. Thank you, Minister, and I want to thank your staff, the folks in the civil service, who do an amazing job. You have some of my former staff with you, so I know that you've got the best people on the job.

My questions and my comments are, obviously, related to your ministry. The challenge, which I'm sure you can appreciate, Minister, is that what formerly was JEI is now broken into five different ministries. I appreciate that the former ministry had a role – and I

think, through you, Chair, to the minister, that the current ministry still has the same role – of bringing those other ministries together and working in conjunction with the other ministries when it comes to economic development. I'll appreciate it if you can attempt to answer some of the questions I have and also recognize that I'll be weaving in and out through economic corridors, and I will touch on trade, some other issues. I know that the minister recently came back from Korea on a trade mission. At some point, if not in this block, I'd like to hear some of the outcomes of that mission. I'm a big fan of our trade offices and of trade. Alberta is an export-reliant province, so those types of missions are absolutely critical.

I'll start off in the business plan, outcome 1, page 81. Key objective 1.1 is to work with partner ministries and the Northern Alberta Development Council to enhance economic opportunities in northern Alberta, including the development of economic corridors. I see that NADC has a budget increase of \$500,000. Is that amount included in budget line 4.1, in the \$16 million? I'm curious what the total budget for NADC is. Minister, if you can outline some of the initiatives that they're working on, what specific projects or programs they are supporting. If you have the metrics available, what outcomes have they achieved? Again, the metrics that they currently have. And if there aren't metrics – and I know that Sonya is very big into metrics, so I'd be shocked if you didn't have those – then how do we measure success? If you can speak to that, that would be greatly appreciated.

On page 8 of the NADC annual report from '21-22 it states that, quote: on January 8, '22, the NADC advised the former JEI Minister Schweitzer to reach out to the ministry of transportation to recommend expanding class 1 truck driving programs to serve not only underemployed Albertans but to include employed Albertans or develop a similar program with shared funding responsibilities between the government and northern employers. What developments were made in expanding truck drivers' programs in this budget? Again, this is one of those areas where I appreciate that it may not be yours directly, Minister. The NADC was clear: this was a substantial need for class 1 drivers in northern Alberta, which, of course, is near and dear to your heart, Minister. What steps have been taken to follow up on this? Is there a clear commitment to collaborate with the NADC? What would the support look like? And if you could speak to when this would be implemented or what timelines you have, Minister. Again, how would you measure success in this initiative?

The Alberta government web page outlining Alberta at work states that it's "investing \$30 million over 3 years... for Commercial Driver Grants to address [this] severe shortage." How much of the \$30 million is designated directly to NADC, to their initiative to expand class 1 drivers? Again, the word "mostly" is included, and I'm curious what the word "mostly" means in this context. If the minister can explain what other areas the grant would cover, that would be wonderful. The NADC provided feedback to the Economic Corridors Task Force, another initiative very significant to your neck of the woods, Minister. From the MERX web page titled MERX C0002-22 Economic Corridors Task Force Support, the description reads that "at the Western Premiers' Conference and Council of the Federation... 2019, Premiers collectively agreed to further explore the concept of economic corridors" as it relates to strategic infrastructure, to getting goods to where they need to go.

10:00

There are four objectives that were outlined in the Economic Corridors Task Force: "build on the Pan-Canadian Economic Corridors report by completing a cross jurisdictional analysis of economic corridors in other provinces and countries." Is the task

force included in this budget? What progress has been made? How much of the budget is allotted to completing this analysis?

The second is to "identify and assess the possible economic corridors for Alberta by bringing together industry and policy experts to review potential corridor options." If you can comment, Minister: has this been completed yet? If not, what is the timeline? How are industry and policy experts selected? How much money from this budget is being spent to pay those experts to review the options?

The next is to "report back to government with recommendations on next steps." Has the report been submitted? If not, do you have a date? Can you comment on when that'll be public? Will the public have a say? Who decides on the next steps, and what is the bottom-line cost to Alberta taxpayers?

The final is to "complete an assessment of rail capacity in the province and make recommendations [on that], whether these corridors are sufficient." The assessment was supposed to "include a third-party, independent review of current rail capacity." Has the assessment been completed? If not, when is it projected to be completed? Who's doing the third-party independent review? Again, how much is being allocated from your budget toward this, Minister? And if you can point to which line item this would be a part of if it's in your ministry. I appreciate there is the Ministry of Transportation and Economic Corridors, which it may be part of. Again, in this report there was a comment on a cross-jurisdictional scan, which I think is absolutely critical. Has that been completed? I would love to know who's doing the international analysis. Again, that could be your ministry; that could be trade; that could be Executive Council; that could be the ministry of transportation; or a combination.

Moving on, in referencing northern Alberta, the Alberta government – I'm quoting now – has a web page titled Labour Market Notes that showed the Wood Buffalo-Cold Lake region had a 2.9 per cent change month over month in the labour force participation in 2022, but to date in 2023 that number has dipped into the negative, at negative .01. Additionally, in the regional occupational forecast for Wood Buffalo-Cold Lake, for the occupational demand outlook, 13 out of the 18 categories were below the annual average and in negative numbers. Curious, Minister: what is your department and the government's specific plan and financial commitment to supporting the northern region of Alberta in addressing their specific and unique labour issues?

When it comes to consumer confidence, Minister, the Alberta government published a weekly economic review dated March 10 of this year. It states that confidence remains subdued; consumer sentiment remains muted in Alberta. The Conference Board of Canada index of consumer confidence fell 3.5 points in February. Confidence eased as fewer Albertans were optimistic about their current and future financial situation, and most continue to believe it's not a good time to make a major purchase. Consumer confidence has remained subdued since July of 2022, as higher interest rates and persistent inflation have continued to weigh on household finances. Compared to a year ago, the index was down more than 13 points. How does the government aim to increase consumer confidence and inspire optimism for Albertans in today's economic climate?

A Nanos recent poll from the Coalition for a Better Future asked Canadians if Canada is moving in the right direction rather than the wrong direction in terms of making sure economic policies provide equal opportunities to Canadians. Specifically, asking if the right direction was being taken to ensure Canadians have a high standard of living, 50 per cent said no and only 29 per cent yes. However, if respondents were under 35 years old or from the prairies, the number jumps to 6 out of 10 saying that things are moving in the

wrong direction. Nik Nanos said in his March 12 interview on CTV that, for young people, the challenges of unaffordability, student debt, home prices, inflation, cost of living, particularly in major cities, were causing them to feel like they were getting crushed, not just by rent but groceries and basic needs. Historically, young people used to be the most optimistic and now, unfortunately, are the most pessimistic, negative about finances, and most worried about their future.

Minister, how does the government plan on addressing the needs of all Albertans who are worried about their economic future? Specifically, what will be done to support young people who are needed to contribute to our workforce? How will the government address the crippling double whammy of being in the under 35 group on the prairies, making them significantly convinced things are moving in the wrong direction? What's being done to support their confidence and all consumer confidence?

Thank you, Minister.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Member.

Minister, go ahead.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Madam Chair. As I said to the previous questioner, I can tell you were a previous minister. I think anybody that's watching this today has probably got their head spinning and is wondering how I can keep up with it. That's because I have great officials here at the table, but you obviously know your file very well. I'll try to deal with it as much as I can. Some of your questions, I know, you might not get an answer to. If you don't, I'd be happy to answer that offline. The same goes for the other questioner, MLA Gray.

I think what you said was, you know, a couple of questions you had – first of all, you talked about the working relationship because, of course, things have changed a little bit in the ministries. We've changed some things around to be more effective in government, and I'll talk a little bit about that.

Your second question was I think on page 81, 4.1 – how do I work with partner ministries? – and the increase in 4.1, the NADC, the total budget, how it relates to corridors and what my job is in relation to that. You'll be disappointed to hear that I won't be able to answer a lot of those questions. You asked about truck drivers and how it deals with that, but again I won't be able to answer a lot of those questions. That's a lot to do with transportation. Your questions were on that, and I will tell you that, obviously, being from Fort McMurray, it's of great concern to myself and to all the ministers right now. We recognize how important it is, and with the gap in truck drivers right now, we're encouraging wherever we can to fill that gap.

You asked about MERX as question 4. You talked somewhat about rail capacity, and that's the first time I've heard that come up, but that's something near and dear to my heart as well, and I'm very interested in that.

You talked about some of the labour issues regarding the north and how we're addressing that, and I think you'll be pleased to hear what our ministry is doing.

And the consumer confidence. I would like to talk a little bit about that and young people in particular.

I think those were all of your questions. I don't think I've missed any.

What I will do is say this to you first of all, Mr. Bilous. The relationship with the other ministries is excellent. I'm even on the same floor as the trade minister and the jobs and training minister. We have great relationships. I spent part of the time in Korea with the trade minister, and we've talked about how we can work together and how we do work together, and we have a very good

relationship. And what I would say to you is that I don't think I see any gaps in that relationship as a result of the changes, and I think you'll find that, in fact, we're going to be stronger than ever before because we have so much emphasis in that particular field, which is very, very important. I think we can see that success in what we've done, increasing some of our numbers overall for our program with Canada.

I'll start, first of all, with some key messages on what we do and why we're doing it. Jobs, Economy and Northern Development works with partners right across the province such as regional economic development organizations. I sort of feel sometimes like I'm the quarterback and I'm throwing the ball down the field to somebody that's going to catch it and know what they're doing better than me. But we also work with the federal government and within the government of Alberta to encourage economic growth, support the success of Alberta entrepreneurs and job creators, and, of course, promote the development of Alberta's industries so many more Albertans can prosper.

The ministry serves as the government's driver of economic strategy, delivering programs and creating policies that improve Alberta's competitiveness and encourage economic growth in all sectors. This requires close collaboration with multiple partner ministries. The ministry supports Alberta communities in realizing their diverse economic potential through northern and regional economic development programs and policies such as the northern and regional economic development program.

The ministry works closely with small businesses and entrepreneurs to help them navigate programming and the ecosystem. As just from your line of questioning, we can tell how complicated it is, and sometimes it feels like it's overwhelming to small businesses who don't know how to gear their way through government departments, but that's what we do. We help do that.

10:10

The ministry works closely, as I mentioned, with small businesses and entrepreneurs, because it is a tough system to navigate through, while also working with large companies. We have some special programs requiring concierge services to help secure positive investment decisions, and we work hand in hand with those larger companies to make sure that they make their location Alberta and hire Albertans if indeed strategically it makes sense.

The ministry undertakes initiatives like Alberta at work, that provides a framework to address current and longer term labour market challenges, including attracting talent, delivering responsive programming, and ensuring businesses have access to the skilled workforce required to grow and diversify Alberta's economy.

The Northern Alberta Development Council and northern bursary. I actually just went to Westlock a few days ago and gave a Queen's medal out to somebody that worked on the NADC some time ago, and it's always good to see those people. I sat down with him over coffee at his house, and he talked at length about highway 686, for instance, linking Fort McMurray to Grande Prairie, which would be a major investment, and how they've been working on it for 20, 25 years. It was good to hear of some of the work that was done over that period of time, and he felt great about being recognized for his work on that.

The council itself remains a key partner in championing actions that are helping build strong and resilient communities in Alberta's north, which are so important to all Albertans' future. Then NADC is helping grow Alberta's northern markets, supporting even more economic diversification, and helping northern Albertans, including students and business owners, reach their full potential.

The NADC bursary program is helping to attract and retain skilled professionals to grow and diversify the northern economy.

In 2023-24 Alberta's government will provide \$500,000 to this program. These bursaries have helped students gain new high-demand skills in health care, in business, engineering, and more. And the NADC, the board itself, makes these selections for where the bursaries go, and they're to encourage and develop our northern communities.

The NADC bursary program has provided over 9,500 bursaries to more than 7,000 Alberta students. These students have completed over 70,000 months of return service employment since the bursaries were created. For the 2022-23 academic year the NADC bursary program approved 240 bursaries, totalling nearly \$1.54 million to postsecondary learners. Applications for the bursaries are accepted from January to December of each year. The return service commitments from bursary recipients are expected to represent a total of over 2,750 months of employment in 2022-2023. So it's a big number. This includes 73 bursaries of the 242 Indigenous learners, to support training in areas such as health care, education, social services, and business administration.

The NADC also engages community and industry partners to foster workplace development, job creation, and economic growth in Alberta's northern communities. I actually looked at this file myself when I first got onboard, and as you probably are aware: a great return on investment for the people of Alberta and especially the people in the north. This engagement has included informing the work of the Economic Corridors Task Force to explore options for multimodal corridors, including broadband, utilities, roadways, and rail across the north.

As I mentioned to you before, corridors is the transportation minister's, and he is in charge of that, although I work very closely with him, and I have had an opportunity to meet with many groups on how we can get, for instance, 686 through the winner's circle. The department also delivers the NADC bursary program on behalf of the Alberta government, which is funded by the department and the ministries of Advanced Education and Education. So we work very closely with all of our partners.

The funding for the NADC program has been increased to \$500,000, as I mentioned, in Budget 2023 as part of the government's commitment to implementing affordability measures to support Albertans. Alberta students have experienced a significant increase in postsecondary costs since 2007, when the last affordability review was completed. The NADC bursaries assist with addressing these additional costs and lowering student debt. Starting in the 2023-24 academic year, successful bursary applicants will receive \$1,000 to \$2,000 in additional support as an affordability adjustment.

Now, the link to the business plan. Key objective 1.1 was one of your questions. Of course, developing and enhancing the economic corridors is critical to ensuring Alberta's products can move freely to market. And we know, as mentioned, that we are an export province, and we get our success from exporting the products that Albertans make and dig and create. Alberta's supply chain underpins the province's broad economic activity, enabling imports and exports.

The warehousing and transportation sector is a substantial industry in its own right, and many Albertans don't recognize that, but it encompasses a range of subsectors and activities that play a critical role in the movement of goods and products across the supply chain. Calgary and Edmonton have seen tremendous growth in warehousing, an important part of addressing supply chain issues. I know we can talk about some of those examples. They're international companies, and they've chosen Alberta because of our low-tax situation and our stability. Supply chains are complex, and they are fragile.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister. That concludes the first portion of questions for the Official Opposition.

As there are no independent members present, we will now move to the government caucus for 20 minutes of questions from the members. Member Allard, would you like to combine your time with the minister's?

Mrs. Allard: I think I'll stick with block time, because I have a lot of questions, if that's all right.

The Deputy Chair: Absolutely. Go ahead.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair, and, through you, thank you to the minister for your attendance here today and to the supporting staff. This is indeed an important ministry, and as the MLA for Grande Prairie I'm very happy to see such incredible work being done on behalf of northern Alberta. I have a lot of questions for you, and I echo some of the questions from the members opposite, particularly around NADC. As the former chair of the Northern Alberta Development Council I'm quite passionate about the work that they do.

I'll start off, Minister, with Alberta's rural communities being the backbone of Alberta's economy. I truly believe that. I think of Fort McMurray and Grande Prairie. While they're so diverse in terms of northeast and northwest, are so different, they both drive the economy of Alberta. From natural resources to the local mom-and-pop shop on the street – I certainly benefited from operating restaurants in Grande Prairie for the last almost 30 years – we continue to see more and more diversity outside of the major cities, and I'm excited about that. In part this is due to steps that our government has taken to support rural economic development specifically.

In my area, in Grande Prairie and the region, I've seen a number of businesses and business expansions continue. One thing that stands out to me is the Greenview Industrial Gateway. While that's just a new area for the province, one of the things that I would like you to look at is ways that we can prioritize the north for investment and diversification. Greenview Industrial Gateway, for example: one of their barriers is carbon capture and being chosen to be a carbon capture hub. I'm just going to put a plug in for that, a shameless plug for Grande Prairie. I also want to talk about a couple of companies that stand out to me in the region. Grassroots Realty is one of the fastest growing companies in Canada and is based in Grande Prairie. I think in 2020 it made the list, ranking 51 or 52. Don't quote me. Then there's a DeBolt-based company, Sonar Software, that continues to rank right up there in Canada's top 100. I'm very proud of the work that's being done and very proud to see that in northern Alberta you can have your cake and eat it, too. You can live in the most beautiful part of the province and thrive economically.

Despite all of this growth, I keep hearing that there's more that we can do, and, through the chair to the minister, I'm sure he's aware of that. On page 81 of the business plan key objective 1.4 says that you're going to "support regional efforts to diversify and grow the economy, attract investment and maintain a positive and competitive business environment." That's a lot. I just would like you to provide some detail on the additional work we are doing to make that happen, particularly with respect to the north.

With my time sitting as the chair of the Northern Alberta Development Council, it was interesting to me; a small proportion of the population, but, if memory serves, it's 62 per cent of the land mass of the province. It's a significant challenge in terms of the sparse population, but the land mass – I was really happy to hear you, Minister, talking about highway 686 and that that's on your

radar. I think that certainly in my time as chair that was probably mentioned at every single meeting. I know it's a bit of a frustration for those that have been in the area for generations, who've had this dream to connect Grande Prairie and Fort McMurray with a highway. Again another plug for my region.

I'm going to move on. I'm already running out of time. The film and television tax credit: I wanted to talk a little bit about that and the success that we've had with that and perhaps, through the chair to the minister, what other things we could be doing. I'm very happy to see the success we're seeing from the Alberta film and television tax credit. From small productions to blockbusters, the Alberta film and television tax credit is bringing these opportunities to our province. Not only is this tax credit bringing Alberta to the world, but it's creating good jobs and diversifying our economy. I'm going to reference page 81. You indicate that there's \$125 million allocated for the Alberta film and television tax credit, and I have a number of questions with respect to that, Minister.

10:20

First off, why did you choose a tax credit as the best way to support this industry? I know that was an issue of some debate early on in this term, so I'd be curious to hear your thoughts on that. Can you tell me how that tax credit works? For the benefit of those that are watching, I think there's some interest in why this is getting so much traction. What kind of return on our investment are we getting? I think that the business plan talked about a 4 to 1. How many productions has this program brought to Alberta in the last year or so? Finally, how did you decide upon the annual investment amounts, and what do you expect those to do on a go-forward?

Then back to Northern Alberta Development Council. I wanted to talk a little bit about the bursary. One of the things that we see, at least, I'll say, from my perspective, I see, is that we continue to have workforce incentives that are the same as when I was born, and I'm 52, and the workforce is not the same as it was 52 years ago. I would love to see some innovation around bursaries and what we do there. Return service agreements I don't think are enough. I'm thinking that, particularly in professions like health care and education, people are pursuing careers. They want more work-life balance. I'd love to see some thought around what we can do with respect to the bursary to make that incentive more appealing to somebody who may not be from the area or may not want to return to the area.

I certainly see that the stats confirm that students who are educated in an area tend to stay in that area once they graduate. I'm the parent of three young adult Albertans. All three of them are born and raised in Grande Prairie, and at this point it doesn't look like any of them are going to return, sadly. I'm hoping that that will change, but I think that's a very common statistic, that they go, you know, as far as Edmonton, which is only four and a half hours away, but they don't come back. My kids have gone much farther than that. I hope that they stay in Canada at least.

Anyway, we know that there are skilled labour shortages in some areas of the province, and they're more exacerbated in the north. I'm sure that the minister, being from Fort McMurray, can attest to that as a reality in his constituency as well. The bursary and the program itself seem like a great way to help fill labour needs in the north, and I would argue health care is one of the top priorities in Grande Prairie and, I would assume, in Fort McMurray as well.

On page 81 of the business plan under outcome 1 you mentioned that Northern Alberta Development Council bursary. We can see that the amount of the funding from this program is now up to \$500,000. That's great, and we've talked about that a little bit with

the members opposite and their questions. I would like to just review for those watching. Minister, who is eligible for the Northern Alberta Development Council bursary? Where does someone need to be living in the province to qualify for these bursaries? Again, if memory serves, I think it's about 62 per cent of the land mass, but I just wanted to confirm that. Which school accepts this bursary, or how does that work, and how many students qualified for this bursary last year? You may have answered that in the last round, so I apologize if I missed that. Do you have the breakdown of which fields that they studied in, and how much did they receive?

The other point I guess I wanted to make about the bursary is maybe targeting it to where we're diversifying the economy. So if there's a sector that we know we're going to be short in – nursing comes to mind – are we going to be targeting the bursary to professions that we know are going to be in shorter supply? I think of the trajectory of the aging demographic in our province with continuing care and, you know, the bubble of people that will be going into continuing care in theory. Are we looking at ways that we can target the bursary now so that we're staffed for that in the future?

The other thing I just wanted to note – and I hope I heard you correctly, through the chair to the minister. I heard you say that there were 70,000 months of return service already completed under the bursary, which I think is shocking. If I did my math right, that's over 5,833 years of work. That's pretty remarkable for the people of the north, and I hope that we continue that trend and have strong professions coming into the area.

The other thing. Again, I can appreciate that your ministry is complex and extremely important, particularly to the people of the north, but many of your deliverables, including economic corridors, are in collaboration with other ministers. I really appreciate that because I think that one of the frustrations, as a decidedly private-sector person coming into government for the last four years, is the way that we silo off in government. It just is a thing that happens, so I love to see right in your business plan that you're working collaboratively with multiple ministries to accomplish larger goals than one ministry could on their own. I really think that that's a challenging bit of work, but I appreciate the work that you're doing on that.

I lost my train of thought. We were talking about corridors. Oh, advanced education. I didn't hear a lot of talk about that, but I wonder, Minister, if you have time to comment on the way that you collaborate with Advanced Education in terms of workforce development. I'm thinking about, again, dreams of having a med school in the north. You're smiling, so that's good. I really hope that we can get to that point where we are training the professions that we need in the areas that we need them so they don't have to leave home to get their training. I see some success with Athabasca University and some of the other either remote deliverables or scaling-up opportunities. I think that's really important.

I just wanted to make a couple of comments, and I have 35 seconds left. I see under performance metric 2(b) a trending up on the employment rate. To me, that's a really encouraging sign, and I just wanted to comment on my appreciation to the minister again for all the hard work to make sure that our economy is firing on all cylinders. It's incredible to see.

My last comment or question is under outcome 4.3. It says, "Improved concierge services," and you touched on this in your last answer. I would really be curious to hear what those concierge services to navigate approvals and attract investment look like. [A timer sounded] And that's my time.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Member.

I would like to now turn it over to the minister. Go ahead.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, MLA Allard. I watched you from afar while I was not a politician. I thought you did a very good job as a minister and a great job as an MLA.

First of all, I think your questions were in relation to how we can get northern Alberta firing on all cylinders and get more up there and keep more there as far as people go. I think that's something that I – that's near and dear to my heart. Your second question was in relation to the film and tax credit. I think the third question was back to the Northern Alberta Development Council, which I didn't know you were a chair of. Congratulations on that. That makes a lot of sense to me now. The bursary program and how we do it, how the eligibility happens, and different information in relation to that. Not to summarize all your questions, but I think the last one, number 4, was about advanced ed, and the concierge service was number 5. I'll try to deal with all of those as well as I can.

First of all, the government of Alberta is taking action to support economic growth and prosperity across Alberta by recognizing that communities have a unique and diverse challenge, which requires targeted and tailored solutions. One size does not fit all. I think, you know, previous governments have sometimes thought that everything is the same and should be the same across the province, but it's just not. Our communities are different.

The department recently launched the northern and regional economic development program, or NRED, which provides support to communities and organizations implementing projects that support local economic development, diversification, and job creation. I think that's something very important for the north and to keep in mind that the long-term success of Alberta is contingent on that. NRED provides grants to municipalities, Indigenous communities, and nonprofit organizations for projects that promote regional economic development and diversification right across the province. Applications are accepted through two funding streams: the northern development and Indigenous stream, which is open to projects based in northern Alberta and/or Indigenous-led applications; and the regional development stream, which is open to projects based outside of northern Alberta and led by eligible non-Indigenous applicants. Applications to the program are currently under evaluation, and successful projects are expected to be announced in the coming weeks.

REDAs, regional economic development alliances, are also key players in advancing regional economic development. I mentioned that to the previous questioners, talked about that a little bit. They are based on regional assets and member-identified needs. Their actions support broader economic and job growth across the province. The government is actually increasing funding to these valuable organizations for the next fiscal year to \$125,000 each, which will give them some stability, some ability to continue their important work.

In addition, the department's regional economic development specialists, REDS, provide advice and expertise to municipal and regional stakeholders across the province. As they are stationed in the regions they support, the REDS team has insights and access to local issues and opportunities and work with local stakeholders, having direct access to key partners and local decision-makers, allowing them to gather experience and perspectives to help inform government policy and strategy so that one size does not fit all applications. The REDS team also has an important role to connect stakeholders with like-minded interests. This helps facilitate collaboration for initiatives such as investment readiness; main street rejuvenation, which I think is very important; development of local supply chains, which is an up and comer in our future; and business retention and expansion.

10:30

Now, I would like, just for a minute, since you separated the questions on NADC from the north, to tell you that I don't think anything is more important than our north. I know that our land mass is huge, our population is small, but the amount of economic benefit that's driven out of there and the opportunity for people – and one of the questions from the previous questioner was in relation to how we deal with the negativity of some of the fallout from COVID and just how people are not as positive as they once were or as optimistic as they once were. Well, they should be optimistic because the truth is here, and Alberta is doing very well. We are number one on weekly earnings. We are number one on immigration. We are doing incredibly with venture capital. We're year over year setting records. Alberta is the place to be, and Alberta's north is the centre of that, so I would just like to say that to you.

Getting to the film and television tax credit, I'm not a big believer in tax credits, for the most part, but in this particular case, if they don't spend it, they don't get any money. We get somewhere about a 4 to 1 ratio of return on investment. For every dollar spent, we get about \$4 back in investment in the economy. Some estimates even put it higher than that. I think it's a great opportunity. Remember that these film and television tax credits are for one-off situations. They are for somebody that's got a project. They're going to come in and do that project and get that project done, and they decide where to pick that project based upon economics, which pretty much all companies do, including the film industry.

So it's very good to see that because they get the advantage of what is great in Alberta, which is not just the people but the outside experience. Whether you're down in Canmore, like I was yesterday, in one of the most beautiful areas, or up in Grande Prairie or Fort McMurray, they get the opportunity to film what other people only dream to see, and it brings the world to Alberta and brings Alberta to the world.

The government of Alberta is committed to growing our cultural business industries, and as part of this commitment we implemented that tax credit program. This was in response to industry stakeholders' feedback that highlighted the important role incentive programs play in sustaining existing screen-based sector industry jobs as well as helping to diversify the local economies.

As I mentioned earlier, a lot of the filming is done in rural Alberta, which brings wealth to rural Albertans, and in some of those areas, through the situation with coal and the closures of some of the coal mines in rural Alberta that was done by the previous government, we've seen some communities not do as well as others, so this gives them the opportunity. For instance, in one particular case they built a fire hall in Drumheller, and the film industry continues to build some infrastructure right across Alberta.

Tax credits remain the industry preference incentive for medium and larger productions as they provide greater funding certainty and timely approvals as well as reduced administration burden and red tape. We don't want to spend any money or time on things that aren't necessary, and in this particular case this works very well for this industry.

The tax credit itself works like this. The department administers the program, targeting medium and large-scale productions with total production costs over \$500,000. It offers a refundable Alberta tax credit of 22 per cent or 30 per cent, depending on the eligible Alberta labour and production costs. To be eligible for a 30 per cent tax credit, applicants must meet the additional requirements related to copyright ownership, producer residency ownership, and a minimum threshold for Alberta-based costs. So the more Alberta you are, the better you get back from the government, and I think that makes a lot of sense.

Eligible corporations apply to the program prior to filming. They receive the minister's authorization to participate in the program and have up to 42 months to complete the production and request a tax credit certificate. Upon review of the audited eligible expense for completed productions, applicants receive a tax credit certificate approval. The province's tax and revenue administration then issues the associated refund as part of the corporation's corporate tax filing, net of any corporate tax owing.

So it works that way, and I think it works very efficiently. As you can see, we're very competitive on the international scene. We're very competitive in North America. Up to now Georgia and other jurisdictions have been receiving an unfair amount. We're now competitive, and we're getting Hollywood's attention and the world's attention on Alberta, which is great.

Now, you also talked a little bit about – I want to let you know that the department is going to conduct a review of the bursary so that it remains effective in achieving its outcome. I think that was question 3.

The return service agreements not being enough: I would agree with you on that. I think that if people receive money from the government of Alberta, they should stay in Alberta and work it off and make sure that they contribute more to the people of Alberta, because that's what it's all about. We're here for Albertans.

I think you also mentioned a couple of other questions. We deliver the NADC bursary program on behalf of the government. It is a flagship program. It helps attract and retain those skilled professionals to grow and diversify the northern economy, and it keeps the kids here. My son moved to Edmonton for university, and he's still here. That is an issue, and we've got to look at other ways to do that.

I only have a few moments left, but I want to let you know that Alberta postsecondary students who are interested in working in northern Alberta are eligible for the NADC bursary program. I would encourage anybody listening right now – I'm sure there are thousands of students listening right now – to apply and move up to the north because if you want a great opportunity, if you want a great place to raise your children and to live in the greatest place in the world, it's northern Alberta.

Thank you for your time.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister. That concludes the government members' first block of questions. Are there any other members from the government?

Sorry about that. You have the time, Minister.

Mr. Jean: Well, I would just say that Alberta is the best place to live in the world, and northern Alberta provides more opportunity than anywhere else, and working together: that's what it's all about.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you. That concludes the government members' first block of questions.

Now we move to five minutes of questions from the Official Opposition, followed by five minutes of response from the minister. As mentioned, members are asked to advise the chair at the beginning of the rotation if they wish to combine their time with the minister's time. Member Gray, would you like to combine your time?

Ms Gray: Sure.

The Deputy Chair: Minister?

Mr. Jean: Block time, please. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Go ahead, Member.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much. I have just a general question for this block to start off with. On page 154 of the fiscal plan, which shows schedule 6, operating expenses, where we can see targets for future years, it appears the ministry is anticipating a targeted decrease of \$19 million in 2024 and then a \$13 million decrease beyond that for 2025. I hope the minister might just be able to explain what they're anticipating. Is that a change in flow-through funding, government funding? Like, why are we anticipating less money being spent in the ministry in the future?

Then I'd like to focus the remainder of my time in this block specifically on outcome 2, talking about: "Alberta has a skilled and resilient labour force." There are a number of different training initiatives that you're responsible for. It's such a critical part of the work that the ministry is doing to make sure that Albertans are able to get good jobs, that those who are not attached to the labour market are able to be reattached quickly, and the ministry works as kind of the lead partner for a lot of the labour market development agreement and workforce development agreement funding that comes through from the federal government.

I just want to make sure I'm understanding where things are and ask the minister for an update on what kind of results he's seeing from some of these training programs, because the partnership is now with some of the rejigged ministries that exist. The minister has already mentioned the Alberta jobs now program, and I hoped that he might be able to tell us the latest information as far as the number of employers, the number of employees who have benefited from that and if he has seen any particular trends when it comes to Alberta jobs now, the types of applicants that they are getting. That would be helpful context.

The Canada-Alberta job grant is another piece that has existed for many, many years. The interesting thing about the Canada-Alberta job grant is that it's primarily upskilling currently employed Albertans. There is value in that, but we have in the past tried to encourage more employers to hire new employees by providing, like, a larger grant for the training dollars when someone is hiring unemployed. In previous estimates my understanding is that the uptake on that is low, and I'm just checking in to see, if you have it, how many employees using the Canada-Alberta job grant were unemployed and are starting a new job. Is the ministry providing any focus to try and target that and to use this federal funding in that way versus, again, that there is value but having existing employees take project management training or other types of things, which has been what it's been typically used for most in the past?

10:40

Now, within training for work there are a number of different programs. I believe they have all remained within your ministry, but this is where your help will make sure I understand where things might have split off to. Training for work was made up of a number of different things, including workplace training, immigrant bridging, which may have moved over to a different ministry, and self-employment, and then transition to employment services and integrated training are all incredibly important now.

In the opening remarks the minister talked about the aviation skills grant program, and I believe I heard you say that it was starting soon, that the \$5 million per year for the aviation skills grant program hasn't quite yet begun but that it is starting soon. Would you be able to narrow that down? Is this likely to happen before the election starts, or is this later in the calendar year, do we think? That's a really exciting grant program, and I'm curious how close to completion that particular one is.

Then I also wanted to ask about the Indigenous training partnership. This used to be First Nations training to employment

and Aboriginal training to employment. I would note that a May 2022 Auditor General report, mentioned in the fiscal plan, page 174, really recommended that the department do a better job of measuring results. I hoped that the minister might be able to report back to us on what work the department has been doing to respond to that Auditor General's report and to measure the effectiveness of what used to be FNTEP and ATEP but I believe is now the Indigenous training partnership.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Member.

Minister, go ahead.

Mr. Jean: Thank you. Five minutes of questions. It felt like 15. I'm a little hot on the seat right now. But thank you very much; I appreciate your questions.

If I can just reiterate, I think the first question you had was: why the budget decrease? Maybe you can propose something in the Legislature to give me an increase, but we'll talk about that a little bit. I'll pass that over to the department to talk about that. Maybe the NDP want to come forward with more money for our department because we do such great work. I don't know if I'd be able to support that, but I'd sure try.

The second question, I think, was about federal funding, some of the training programs, and you talked a little bit about De Havilland and WestJet and the Canada-Alberta grant. Of course, you know, federal funding, when it comes, usually comes with strings attached, and we have to negotiate with the federal government on what those strings are and how we can apply those in Alberta.

Alberta jobs now I think was the third question. You talked a little bit about new employees and how that program worked to encourage people to hire new employees that were unemployed and how to get them into the job. Of course, that was a very successful part of the program. You also talked about underemployed and how to get them new jobs or better jobs.

I think the fourth question was about the aviation grant and what we're doing in that with De Havilland and WestJet and the training programs. You're right; it is a very exciting time. It's a great program and a great opportunity for Alberta. I some years ago as a federal Member of Parliament tried to get Air Canada to move their maintenance centre from Montreal to Fort McMurray, and they weren't prepared to do that. I was kind of surprised at that, but maybe we'll have more luck once we become the centre hub for aviation in North America. That's what I'd like to see Alberta be.

The fifth question revolved around the Indigenous training partnership, how we measure results, and, of course, that's Public Accounts. They would have to respond to that. But I will tell you, as you know as a previous minister, that the department continues to work to be better, continues to monitor itself and to get things in place so that they can always brag about things over last year, and I can assure you that nothing has changed in that.

I'm going to turn it over to my officials in relation to the budget decrease because I start to tear up when I hear things like that.

Mr. Rivest: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Member, for the question. Madam Chair, I'm just going to refer to page 84 of our business plan and the statement of operations. The question was on the budget decrease that we're seeing under our expense line item over the next couple of years. In the statement of operations, again, our consolidated total expense for the '23-24 estimate is just under \$374 million, and then, as mentioned, it drops down to \$355 million and then to just under \$342 million.

The big changes that we're seeing there: if we were to go to line item or program 4, strategic economic partnerships, that's where

the decrease first starts to occur. In the '23-24 estimate one of the largest pieces of that line item is the film and television tax credit, with a budget of \$125 million. Then, moving into the '24-25 and '25-26 fiscal years, the tax credit program's budget decreases to \$105 million. The \$20 million decrease there is the primary change that we're seeing as that moves along. The budget change there is tied to the anticipated productions that we have approved at this point in time, so the spending there is linked, essentially, to the productions queued up within that program.

The other program that has sort of the other larger change, I would say, is our program workforce strategies. It actually increases in the '24-25 target year, and then it drops down to about \$114 million in the last year. The primary reason for the ups and downs there is we're winding down the Alberta jobs now program, so as that program progresses over the next three years – it actually ends in the '25-26 year, so the funding is reduced to zero in that year, but it will go from about 4 and a half million dollars down to about \$2 million in the second year.

The other reason for the ups and downs is our coal workforce transition program. Each year we align the budget of the coal workforce transition program to again align with the anticipated layoffs of coal workers, so that program's budget moves up in the '24-25 fiscal and then goes back down again in the '25-26 fiscal year.

That essentially encompasses the primary changes and the reasons for some of the ups and downs in the statement of operations.

Mr. Jean: I've got 11 seconds left. I will just say that I would be happy to provide this information offline. We have a great-news story in relation to Alberta jobs now, and I'd be more than happy to brag about that offline.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.

At this point I would like to call the five-minute break, and we will be returning at 10:52.

[The committee adjourned from 10:47 a.m. to 10:52 a.m.]

The Deputy Chair: Thank you very much. I would now like to resume the meeting.

It is the government members. Member Rowswell, go ahead. Would you like to combine your time, or . . .

Mr. Rowswell: No. I'll do the block. Seems to be working pretty good with that.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you. Go ahead.

Mr. Rowswell: You mentioned how many jobs have been created in Alberta, like, 12 per cent of the population and 25 per cent of the new jobs, and 114,000 more jobs over the last year is quite an impressive number. You know, Alberta is leading Canada out of the pandemic. We've got a lot of job growth – our problem is trying to get people here in the first place – and our advantages like the Alberta advantage of low taxes, reduced red tape, affordable housing, and world-class education system. I've got an example of that. My family had a child graduate in B.C., in the Lower Mainland, and when she was talking to her classmates, she said that they were all talking about that. They said: "Well, maybe we should go to Alberta. You've got higher wages, lower taxes, and you can buy a house." I don't know how many made that move, but they were at least talking about it.

We know that small businesses are a critical marker of the health of Alberta's economy and small business specifically. In

key objective 1.3 you talk about engaging with businesses and stakeholders to develop and implement policies that create an environment that attracts investment and job creation from across Canada and around the world. So when you're dealing with entrepreneurs considering starting a business here, I'm just wondering how you go about engaging with small businesses to find out what they need and what supports are in place for small businesses to help them be successful.

You know, that big step to start a small business is a scary one for most people – I've been there myself – and once you get over the hump, away you go, and you just do your work, and hopefully you're successful. What steps has Alberta taken to create a better environment for small businesses? I know there are a few mentioned there, but if there's something beyond that. How can small businesses support their staff with training and skill development? It's something you've talked a little bit about, but if you want to expand on that, that'd be great.

The next question is relative to – you know, we've had so much good news about new industry coming in and building, like, between the hydrogen things that are happening, you've mentioned the aircraft industry, and there's been so much good stuff happening. I'm happy for all that, but I know in my discussions back in my constituency we always look at: well, what about rural? How are they doing? What can we do to get things to set up and operate out in rural Alberta?

Again, in the business plan on page 81 you talk about engaging with businesses, stakeholders to develop and implement policies that create an environment that attracts investment and job creation across Canada and around the world. I'd like to ask: what are you doing to encourage businesses to come to rural Alberta and create a good-news story for rural Alberta? You know, I've talked about my family quite a bit today, but I had another daughter who was working in Edmonton here, and it was downtown Edmonton, and the pandemic forced her to work from home. Then she moved back out to where we live, or was going to, and she asked if she could keep that same job there, and they wouldn't let her. The fact that you can do all the stuff online and be productive has really made a difference. So that's maybe – you know, I hope that continues so we can have some of these really good jobs that can be done from a rural location.

You know, how will economic corridors – we've talked a little bit about that – help bring businesses to rural Alberta? I'd like you to talk about REDAs. Are they good? Are they useful? Do you have some success stories of how REDAs have helped out some of the rural areas to attract business and identify businesses that could come and then go out and get it? If you can talk about REDAs a little bit, I'd appreciate that.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Jean: Well, I heard a lot of questions there, and I don't have a lot of time, but I'm going to try to get to what I call the meat and potatoes, and I think small businesses are that. I've owned and operated over 20 small businesses. I know they're very difficult to start. I know they're very difficult to run and operate, and they're even more difficult to be profitable. All of the small-business supports – I think, MLA Rowswell, what you actually asked me was about the supports that the government provides, the partnerships that we have. In fact, REDAs are a partnership; I want you to know that. The net in-migration for business: what we're doing to encourage them to come to Alberta and not just in Canada but the world and how we do that. What we can do for rural Alberta, the supports for that. You talked a little bit about economic

corridors and a little bit about REDAs, but I think I'm going to focus on small business because I only have four minutes and 14 seconds left.

I want to let you know that the department has a team of advisers that interact with entrepreneurs through a series of opportunities: inquiries received through the department's Biz Connect web page is one of them, written and telephone action requests received, and attendance at small-business events. I wanted to post up a 1.800 number on the page right now so that people could do exactly that and contact the department, but there are ways to do so, and I would suggest that through the web page would be the best.

The team advises entrepreneurs based upon the information we receive from small businesses; service providers; and partner organizations, associations, including the chambers, small-business associations, downtown business associations, et cetera. We also share information on issues and challenges that small businesses are facing, whether it be COVID or something related to COVID, employment, et cetera, as well as the opportunities that might be out there that they can take advantage of.

Their information is also gathered and relayed to decision-makers and/or ministerial counterparts to guide policy decisions as we go forward into future programs. And you can see that as you see the funding envelopes come out for COVID, jobs now program, and different programs that are geared towards what we hear, and how we react to that is based upon the partnerships we have. As an example, the department recently supported the parliamentary secretary for small business in a stakeholder engagement. He went and did outreach for small businesses even in Fort McMurray – I attended that there – and he went right across the province. During these engagements we were able to hear about the issues, challenges, and opportunities faced by small businesses, and they are large.

Business Link is also an opportunity for small businesses. It is a not-for-profit organization funded by both the federal and provincial governments. It is available to small-business owners in Alberta and provides one-on-one free advice, coaching, and information on supports and includes financial resources. Futurpreneur Canada offers loans up to \$60,000 to entrepreneurs aged 18-39 as part of their loan programs. Entrepreneurs are also paired with business mentors to help support their entrepreneur efforts. That's Futurpreneur.

11:00

Community Futures, which many people know about, has 27 offices located in rural Alberta. It goes to help rural Albertans and the communities and assist rural Alberta entrepreneurs with guidance, business loans, training, and other free resources. It provides flexible loans up to \$150,000, business tools, and expert guidance on how to improve business plans or marketing strategies.

The digital economy program, DEP, as it's known, is a free service funded by the government of Alberta via Business Link, and it's to help job creators take their businesses online. The program is open to home-based or commercial business registered in Alberta.

The Canada-Alberta job grant is an employer-driven training program where government and employers share the cost of training new and existing employees. The government is providing up to \$300,000 per year per employer to help train new and existing employees.

Alberta export expansion program provides funding support to Alberta small and medium-sized entrepreneurs, municipalities as well, and industry associations, Indigenous communities, and economic development organizations, promoting Alberta exports through outbound international business travel and bringing the international buyers to Alberta. I can assure you that, for instance,

Korea, where I recently made a trip, is desperate to have Alberta exports and to be part of the Alberta economy because they've even heard as far away as the other side of the world how great Alberta is doing.

Now, you also asked what steps we've taken to create a better environment for small businesses. Banks and forecasters, I'm pleased to say, are saying that Alberta's economic growth will be among the highest in the country in 2023, and it's no surprise that it will be. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business has ranked Alberta number one among provinces in red tape reduction – we've got an A minus, the highest mark out of any province – and that's seeing a reduction of somewhere between \$2.1 billion and \$2.2 billion in savings to small businesses, because filling out paperwork takes time.

We continue to focus . . .

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Member.

The Deputy Chair: I'd just like to note for the record that after the break I moved to government members as there were no independent members in the room.

I'd also like to apologize to Mr. Nielsen for not allowing an opportunity earlier to introduce yourself, but I would now invite you to do so for the record.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. Good morning, everyone. Chris Nielsen, MLA for Edmonton-Decore.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

It is now the Official Opposition's time. Mr. Bilous, would you like to combine your time with the minister?

Mr. Bilous: No. I mean, I would, but I know the answer.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you. Go ahead, please.

Mr. Bilous: But, you know, having said that, through you, Madam Chair, to the minister, I do appreciate your answers here. I wish that was uniform across the board. I've had less luck with some of your colleagues, but, in all seriousness, I do appreciate your attempt to answer questions, so thank you for that.

I want to talk a little bit about the regional economic development resources. Minister, earlier, to a government question, you talked about NRED, which I think is a great program. If you can just reference which line item it is in your budget and what the total dollar amount for '23-24 is. It sounds very much like the old CARES program, which, of course, your department will be very familiar with as they created it, the community and regional economic support program. If you can just talk a little bit about how the program works for members around the table and those listening at home. The former program was to support regional economic development. The government of Alberta played the role of funding up to 50 per cent of project proposals. What I loved about that program – and I will thank you in advance, Minister, if this is a similar program – is that it's really the local communities that decide what the initiatives are. It's not, you know, someone sitting in Edmonton deciding how the rest of the province should diversify its economy. I appreciate that.

I know that you referenced the Alberta export expansion program. I am aware that that's in the trade ministry, but I'm curious, Minister, if there is any funding in your department for EEP. I will be asking the trade minister this evening about that program. Again, I'm happy to see that program continue, another

example of supports for Alberta companies to export to new markets. That's fantastic.

I am curious, Minister – I know you recently returned from a trade mission to Korea – to know if you can talk a little bit about: did your department engage with Alberta's trade office in Korea to help you design that program?

I'd honestly be remiss if I didn't express my disappointment in the former JEI ministry getting compartmentalized into five different departments. I appreciate, and I've said this to your colleague Minister Glubish, that it's elevated Technology and Innovation. It's given you, Minister, an opportunity to elevate northern development, which I appreciate. However, having department staff scattered between five ministries, we now have trade offices reporting to Executive Council, not the minister of trade, which I think is a shame because there will be either overlap or duplication or just missed opportunities.

We have incredible civil servants that are now plucked out of what used to be a single touch point for business to government, which I appreciate you referenced earlier. But I'm curious how, Minister, you're working with – and I appreciate your relationship with Minister Sawhney. But how are the departments working together? Again, we have a ministry of trade, we have the trade offices that report to Executive Council, and then we have your ministry. What used to be in one house is now in three, so how do we ensure that there isn't a duplication? What level of supports did Alberta's trade offices give you and Minister Sawhney when you went to Korea? Formerly our trade offices played an integral role in planning trade missions, and I hope that we're not losing that by having it scattered.

I'm curious to know, Minister, jumping back to the regional economic development specialists, how they are working with the existing REDAs, the regional economic development agencies, in addition to how they are working with Alberta Innovates. Innovates has boots on the ground throughout the province to support entrepreneurs, and then let's layer on as well the regional innovation networks. I'm just curious about these specialists, where they're housed. Again, I'm a fan of ensuring that entrepreneurs have access to supports, but the REDS are now in the northern Alberta new budget. Are they costed? If you can point to the line item as well as the dollar amount. Then if you can talk a little bit about how they'll be evaluated.

The Deputy Chair: Thank, Member.

Hon. Minister, please go ahead.

Mr. Jean: Thank you so much. Yes. I think what you asked me was in relation to NRED and the CARES program and about local communities. I know that's a big concern to you. When you said, you know, you don't want people in Edmonton making decisions for rural Alberta, I agree with you. I think that one size does not fit all, and we need to make sure that the local decision-making has as much emphasis as possible so they can make the decisions that are best for them and their taxpayers.

The second question was in relation to the Alberta export production program and the trade minister. Of course, that is with the trade minister, and we work, as I mentioned, very closely together in relation to that and other programs.

You mentioned the Korea trade mission. I could spend all day on that and how great it was, how amazing the opportunities are there for Albertans, to be part of that and to make sure that we take some of the technology that's there back here. I think we can always learn.

I think the final one was in relation to REDS, REDAs, and Alberta Innovates. I think that was it as far as the questions go. I

will try to deal with that as much as I can. I do appreciate your comment in relation to the questions and answers. I do think this is a great opportunity to have a conversation about what we are doing as a government and what we can do in the future.

Part of that was, you know, in NRED, the CARES program. We did listen to stakeholder feedback on that CARES program. That's why we came up with a new program that's similar, of course, but based on stakeholder feedback we believe we've improved the program and we're reacting more to what they're asking for.

As you know, the northern and regional economic development, NRED, program gives Alberta municipalities, the Indigenous communities, and nonprofit organizations the opportunity to receive funding for projects that promote regional economic growth and diversification. To build Alberta's economic momentum, Alberta's government has committed up to \$3 million for the NRED program. I think that was in relation to question 1 you had. That's to help deliver business supports, support labour force attraction and retention, enhance Alberta's tourism, and build capacity for economic growth.

I recognize that, you know, you said one ministry has become five, but the truth is we have one government, one set of taxpayers, and, depending on how the Premier and the government decides to organize, it is based upon what our mandate is. We went through a huge number of challenges with COVID, which was unprecedented, and we continue to do whatever we can to listen and to react accordingly.

11:10

Of course, NRED is in line 4.1 of the estimates. Examples of some of the eligible projects include revitalizing central business districts, which is near and dear to my heart. As the former downtown business association president in Fort McMurray and the business revitalization chair for some years in Fort McMurray as well as being on the chamber board, I know how important the cores are to downtowns. We also, though, need to make sure that we create opportunities for the interaction between government and businesses, and we are doing that through a number of different ways.

We are also creating way-finding signage to direct shoppers or tourists, developing strategies to address local labour force gaps and improve Internet connectivity in commercial areas, which is something that we hear all the time. Projects based in Alberta's north and led by Indigenous communities, including First Nations and Métis settlements, had a dedicated applications stream to support their unique economic priorities. I'm pleased to see that in northeastern Alberta we have amazing examples of Indigenous communities and Indigenous entrepreneurs that are tremendously successful. We need to support them in doing so as partners, and we are doing that. We look forward to announcing the successful projects in the coming weeks. These grants are part of a renewed Alberta advantage to make sure that all comers to the province can attract job-creating investments that support economic opportunities for all Albertans going forward.

Just to give you a little background on the regional economic development specialists, the REDS, they provide advice and expertise to municipal and regional stakeholders across the province as they are stationed in the regions that they support. The REDS team has insights and access to local issues and opportunities, and we're trying to encourage that. I've actually been talking to my staff on how we can do that, but having direct access to key partners and local decision-makers allows them to gather the experience and the expertise and the perspectives to help inform government policy and strategy. So we listen, and we act based upon what we hear. The REDS team also has an important role to connect stakeholders

with like-minded interests. This helps facilitate collaboration for initiatives such as investment readiness, main street rejuvenation, and other things.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.

As there are no independent members present, I would now like to turn to government members for their questions. Member Rosin, are you wanting to go back and forth?

Ms Rosin: I will stick to block time as well. I think it's working well for the committee.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you. Go ahead.

Ms Rosin: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Minister. I certainly appreciate all of the work that your department and your ministry is doing and your willingness to give such detailed answers to questions this morning. Recognizing that we only have a five-minute block, I will try to go through these quite quickly.

One of my first questions is regarding labour shortages. As I know you're aware, because you were just in Canmore yesterday to talk about the Alberta Is Calling campaign and the labour shortages facing the tourism and hospitality sectors specifically, it's deep, and it's systemic. I think right now we're operating around a 20 per cent labour shortage in the industry still. We have coffee shops, you know, closing early, hotels shutting down wings. It's been a real problem that's faced the industry for years. Certainly, prepandemic it's been quite a systemic problem we faced.

I specifically want to touch on the Alberta at work program, which is on page 93 of your fiscal plan. I know this program is created to, hopefully, target some of the areas and the sectors in which we have labour shortages in Alberta and find and scale up employees and their skills to meet those demands. What I am wondering with the Alberta at work program is if there's any data collection that accompanies the funding for the program. If so, what information on labour tracking will be tracked? What kind of data will you be using for that program? I'm wondering if Albertans and employers will be able to access that data openly. Additionally, I'm wondering what your department intends to do with any data you might collect in the future, if that will be used to amend the program or better target the program. Just generally how will that data be used to fine-tune the program in the future if it continues?

Moving on, I would like to also highlight key objective 1.2. Your ministry expresses a priority of attracting investment not just from Canada but internationally in foreign investment, so I'm wondering if you can speak to how much domestic and foreign business capital and investments have been made in Alberta the last fiscal year and perhaps, because we are coming up on the end of the government cycle, cumulatively the past four years. I'm wondering if you can also speak to how that compared to previous years. Certainly, there have been a lot of policy shifts with regard to taxation and deregulation, targeted sector strategies, so I'm just curious if you can speak to how that growth has changed these four years compared to the past and what kind of trends we're seeing.

Also on that note, I see that your ministry in your business plan discusses your ministry's economic impact analysis and economic modelling. I'm just wondering what findings your analysis and modelling have found in recent years and what that modelling is predicting for the future of Alberta's economy.

With two minutes left I'll keep going. In your government's fiscal plan I see a 35 per cent increase to GDP since 2020. I'm wondering if you can speak to that growth, how it was realized, and specifically in what sectors it was realized, if that growth was in sectors traditional to Alberta's economy, primarily resource development, or if we're seeing that in any new and emerging

sectors that are not historic to our province. I'm wondering if you could also speak to when the last time Alberta saw growth that high. Certainly, 35 per cent is quite significant. I'm wondering if you can also speak to how that growth compares to other provinces across the country.

My last question, I suppose. In your government's fiscal plan there is also a \$200 million increase to personal income tax revenue, which is interesting considering that we actually recently, I think perhaps through this budget, are lowering the income tax by reindexing it to preinflationary levels. I'm wondering if you can speak to that income tax increase that the government realized. Is that reflective of more Albertans working, or where did that increase come from? If so, I'm wondering if you can just highlight how many jobs have been created in Alberta the past year and perhaps more broadly the past four years.

As well, I see that your fiscal plan – that'd be pages 40 to 41 – tracks job vacancies. I'm just looking here at our numbers. I believe last year they reached over 100,000, which is nearly double what they were just a few years ago, and even with a significant increase to Alberta's net immigration we are still seeing increased job vacancies. I'm wondering if you can speak to that and wondering if that is a sign of Alberta's economic growth or what the cause of that number of vacancies is and more specifically, I suppose, as well what sectors we're seeing those vacancies in and what industries.

With 11 seconds I will not ask my final question because I know that I won't get it in. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Member.

Minister, go ahead.

Mr. Jean: Thank you so much. I think, MLA Rosin, what you asked for in essence was, you know, what we're doing about the labour shortage. I know you have it acutely in your riding, and you've mentioned it to me several times about what we can do, and how do we get more people to fill all the jobs that are available down there? I will assure you that this government is doing everything it possibly can. We have great-news stories. Alberta at work was obviously ahead of the curve of other provinces and other jurisdictions in relation to COVID and the response to that, and we had great successes on that. I think that was one of the first questions you had: how we're addressing it, the access to data, and how we do that. You did mention Alberta Is Calling, and Alberta is calling; we have a great-news story. You also asked about foreign investment, and I'd like to talk a little bit about Korea and what we did there, just the tremendous opportunities there.

You talked a little bit, without saying it, about the just transition from the federal government, and I would like to talk about that, too. I'll try not to become too political, but I certainly think, as I mentioned before to the NDP questioner, that one size does not fit all, and the more decisions that are made locally, the better off we are. I wish the federal government thought that as well. You know, we're not going allow a just transition of our jobs. We're going to make sure that we do everything we possibly can to meet the requirements without seeing our labour force become extinct. The oil and gas sector is a strong economic generator for the entire country, and it certainly gives us the best quality of life in the world right here in Alberta, but I won't waste any more time on that. I want to make sure that I deal with as many questions as I possibly can.

I want you to know, first of all, that beginning in 2022, as you know, we committed \$600 million over three years, from 2022 to 2025, to support workers with skills development, training, and

wage programs as well as enhanced labour market information. Each funded ministry is required to report its results. For JEND the early successes include the Alberta at work funding for the Canada-Alberta job grant, providing skills training for an additional 3,500 Albertans. Thirteen projects were approved for funding across three streams. That's supporting a range of industries, including food service and hospitality, which I know is near and dear to your heart, the supply chain, forestry, tech, and trucking. We've had some questions on trucking, and I would say that we've made some great strides relating to class 1s and class 3s and making sure that more people are working.

11:20

As part of the Alberta at work initiative the Indian Resource Council, the IRC, will deliver the environmental monitoring and drone technician program training to 80 Indigenous participants to build rewarding careers in environmental monitoring and technician positions and help grow the workforce demand for well site reclamation in Alberta. I know that's a big thing in my area, as it is in many areas across the province.

You also asked about foreign investment, but I want to talk about our labour force, which was undergoing significant transition due to the combined impacts of the shifts in oil and gas and the COVID pandemic. In fact, Alberta's 2020 unemployment rate reached 15 per cent. Right now it's at about 6 per cent. We're doing great. That's why the net migration numbers are staggering, and we still are keeping an unemployment that is relatively low compared to other jurisdictions. Alberta has been very successful in coming out of the pandemic with an economic recovery plan, and now, as I mentioned, unemployment is right under 6 per cent.

Now I am going to go to your next question, which was: how much domestic and foreign business capital and investment has been made into Alberta in the past four years? I think that's more or less what you said. The government has rebuilt an investment ecosystem that attracts job-creating investment into Alberta and contributes to economic growth. And I know that because my phone does not stop ringing from people that want to come to Alberta, invest multimillions if not billions of dollars in our great, highly educated workforce. They know that we have here in Alberta some of the most affordable housing in the entire country, whether it's in cities or rurals. You can sell your house in Toronto or Vancouver, move to Alberta, buy five houses. It's an amazing opportunity for people right now.

Additionally, our government has been very successful in attracting job-creating private investments into the province by using the investment and growth fund. I know the department works closely with these individuals and corporations to come here. The government of Alberta committed \$15 million annually to fund the IGF, the first program of its kind launched in Canada to incentivize companies to locate impactful investments in Alberta. We've seen some of those examples here.

While timely aggregate foreign investment figures are not available, Alberta has seen the highest level of nonresidential investment, which includes both from domestic and foreign sources, since 2015. Alberta has seen record levels of venture capital investments; I think it was over \$750 million this year. I think this is the fourth or fifth year we've set a record here in Alberta, so we're very excited over that. Over the past four years Alberta has seen over \$227 billion in nonresidential investment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.

At this time we'll move to members of the Official Opposition, and I'm going to guess you want to use block time. Member Bilous, go ahead.

Mr. Bilous: I don't think we're going to change at this point in the game.

A number of questions. Just off the top, Minister, is it possible to share who received the workforce strategies grants? If you can provide a little bit of details. One of our stakeholders is curious to hear that response.

Then I'm going to jump over to the strategic plan, priority 1, objective 7. It's under ensuring the health and integrity of Alberta's environment and ecosystem on page 14. I'll read the paragraph from that page.

Securing Alberta's position as a leader in regulatory assurance through the Regulatory Transformation project . . . Alberta is supporting community and economic development while maintaining high-quality environmental health in Alberta through legislation, policies and plans. Once fully implemented, the RTP will provide outcomes-based approaches to decisions, be impartial, transparent, and agile with clear accountability, a common risk management framework, and enhanced stakeholder awareness.

I'm curious, Minister, where the regulatory transformation project is living. Is it public? If it's not, will you make it public? I am a big fan of outcomes-based decisions. But I'm just curious. Who's making them, or what is the rubric or the metrics or how decisions are being judged or evaluated? If you can talk about how much of your budget is allocated for this and if you could point to the line item, that would be fantastic.

Under the strategic plan, priority 2, the objective of making life more affordable, page 19:

Implementing regulatory approaches and program delivery models that reduce unnecessary government oversight and emphasize outcomes. By focusing on outcomes, government is getting out of the way of job creators to allow them to continue to grow their businesses while improving . . . services,

and it talks about a modern regulatory environment. I'm curious, Minister, about what your ministry is doing to help government achieve this objective. Again, if you can point to the line item in your budget. If not, I know that the former ministry, before JEND, had a role to play when it was economic development and trade and tourism, so I'm curious about what outcomes you're focused on and how your department is helping government to achieve them.

We've talked and my colleague has asked a lot about labour. I'd like to talk a little bit about it and appreciate that this is going to be a crossministry priority. What is your ministry doing to help address the talent shortage? We're hearing this across sectors, especially in tourism, in agriculture, also in technology, that there is simply a labour shortage. Now, I appreciate the Alberta Is Calling campaign, but if you can highlight some of the other initiatives that you are leading or cosponsoring with your counterparts, that would be great.

Jumping over to tourism, again, I appreciate that there's a separate ministry of tourism, but I would imagine that you're also very interested in that file. There was a report from the web page that talked about the economic impact of tourism in Alberta by region. I'm just wondering if you have any updated information or relevant information in the tourism website for those that are interested in working. I will ask your counterpart Minister Loewen tomorrow evening about this, but if you have any comments that you can make to that specifically, that would be wonderful.

If you can also talk a little bit about Calgary. Calgary has the highest unemployment rate in Canada, sitting at 6.6 per cent. This is, obviously, a significant concern for all of us. I'm curious if you have within your ministry any line items as far as how to help bring jobs to Calgarians. What is the government's strategy? I know that Ontario and British Columbia are experiencing the highest rates of employment in Canada. I'm curious if you can comment on that and

reference why Alberta is not leading that pack. The economic weekly review indicated a significant decline in commercial intentions in Calgary in regard to building permits. Again, Calgary is notably worse off than other parts of the province, so what is your commitment to supporting commercial growth in Calgary and the rest of the province?

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Minister.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Madam Chair. I think what I heard you ask about, first of all, was workforce strategy grants and, secondly, objective 7, which is, of course, the ecosystem and environmental health and the regulatory environment related to that. The third was – and I would put these together – the Alberta Is Calling, along with Calgary, along with Edmonton, our cities. You talked about and asked about tourism, and I've got to give that, of course, to Minister Loewen for that. You'll have to ask him on that.

I would like to start a little bit just with Alberta's advantage, the renewed Alberta advantage, and talk about that a little bit because I think that's so important right now. You know, you asked about what we're doing for Calgary, what we're doing for Edmonton, what we're doing for Fort McMurray and Grande Prairie and all the other cities here because it's not just the major cities that are having some form of restructuring after COVID, and they're not just some of the issues relating to what's going on federally. The renewed Alberta advantage is for every Albertan, every city, every town, whether you live in rural Alberta or in the major cities.

I want to talk about it a little bit. We still have what Ralph Klein described as the Alberta advantage with low taxes, no sales tax, and a business-friendly government. We still have all of that stuff, but now we have added the youngest and most vibrant and most highly skilled workforce in Canada, comparatively very affordable housing, as I mentioned before, an ever more diversifying economy, and diverse, cosmopolitan, and livable cities. I think Calgary has been voted consistently over the years as one of the best, most livable cities in the world. I think last year it was number one in the world with diverse populations that want to come to Alberta, that want to be part of this; a booming venture capital sector – I've mentioned that we've seen records over the last four years – world-class research universities that are getting tremendous investments, as you saw in this budget, from this government; accessible, affordable, and high-quality child care, also part of our mandate to make sure that everybody can participate in the workforce as they want to; the cleanest land, air, and water in the world; and the wonderful can-do spirit of almost 2 million more Albertans who live here than did in the 1990s.

11:30

Now, I say all of that because that belongs to every Albertan, and every Albertan can take advantage of that. We have to recognize that as we move forward for Calgary because, I mean, Calgary saw tremendous restructuring on offices. We will see a change, I think, over time, but that might be painful for some people. We're trying to reduce that pain by making sure the government and the department allocate their time by listening to the stakeholders and addressing those particular stakeholders where they need to be addressed, and that's what we've done.

Some of the things include the employment and training supports and Alberta at work. I want to let you know, first of all, that I can't talk about the workforce strategy grants and who the recipients are because I don't have that at the table today. Oh. Actually, he does have it. Information has changed in the two minutes. Let me turn it over to my official and let him deal specifically with that.

Mr. Rivest: Thanks, Minister, and thanks, Member. Through the chair, we do have a couple of examples of some of the recent recipients of our workforce strategies grants. I'll focus on a couple of the higher level ones. For example, the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers is the recipient of a grant of just over \$1.3 million. The purpose of that'll be to build essential and occupational skills to enable newcomers and others with barriers to employment to build careers in the food service industry. The duration of that project will be about two years, and, as we typically do, we'll be collecting outcome information and reporting on that. One of the key outcomes there is that we're looking for 80 per cent of the participants to be employed after training. That's one of the targets we have for that.

Just really quickly, another big one is with an organization called Prospect. The project there is going to be about a \$1.2 million grant, and the project will be addressing long-term unemployment through an industry partnership designed to deliver a multipronged, integrated workplace learning and employability skill development program. There's quite a bit there, and the area of focus is for the hospitality industry, again, to address labour shortages, something that we've discussed before. That's a big goal and major objective for the ministry. In a similar sense, here some of our key outcomes, again, are that 70 to 80 per cent of the participants will be employed after training. That aligns with our broader training for work program, which has a performance measure in our business plan. Once again, the target there is for 70 per cent of participants, after taking those programs, that they're either employed or in further training as well.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you very much.

I would just like to remind officials, when speaking, if you could introduce yourself at the time you're speaking. Thank you.

I'd now like to turn it over to the government members as there are no independent members. Mr. Stephan, are you wanting to go back and forth with the minister?

Mr. Stephan: No. I can do block.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you. Go ahead.

Mr. Stephan: That's great. Thank you, Minister. I'm really grateful for the opportunity to actually ask questions of this ministry. Jobs and the economy: I know that during the last election this was probably the biggest issue for Albertans. We have prosperity and freedom that we have enjoyed so much – it's our legacy; it's our inheritance – and as I was knocking on doors of the individuals and families in Red Deer-South, there were too many individuals who were unemployed or underemployed. In Red Deer-South, like many areas in Alberta, many of the families and individuals depended on their livelihoods directly from the oil and gas sector, and frankly all Albertans are benefited if not directly, indirectly from the benefits of a strong oil and gas sector.

Unfortunately, under the prior government we saw actually a net decrease, as I understand it, in private-sector jobs. I would sure be interested to hear from a comparison perspective, in terms of a contrast, over the term of this current government: what is the change in private-sector employment when you compare it to the prior government and how we saw so many, as I understand it, either flat or even perhaps a net decrease in private-sector jobs in Alberta?

I mean, that's a number, but to me that really reflects, actually, under it that those are individuals and families that, frankly, suffered quite a bit. As you're trying to provide for a family, all families have different challenges and circumstances under which they suffer and struggle, but if you're not able to provide for your

family, if you don't have that self-reliance, that makes things so hard with that from a personal perspective. I would sure be interested in your ministry to see how over the past four years we have generated so much hope for Albertans compared to over the prior four years.

That's talking about past Albertans who have lived here for a while. I mentioned this yesterday in a member's statement in the Legislature. I had an opportunity to go to a French immersion school a couple of weeks ago in Red Deer-South, and the gym was packed. I felt impressed as I was talking to the young men and women in that gymnasium. I asked them how many of them had come to Alberta from a place outside of Canada. Minister, about half of the young men and women in the gym stood up, and I felt so happy about that. The entire gym actually started applauding because, of course, we admire the courage. It's hard to leave your home, you know, perhaps under trying circumstances. It takes character and courage to come to a new place to start a new life, and I loved seeing those young men and young women who strive to do that.

Minister, I'd sure be interested in connection with the Alberta Is Calling initiative that we are having. Not only are we seeing record migration from within Canada to Alberta as a place of prosperity and freedom, but we're seeing individuals and families from outside of Canada coming to Alberta because it is uniquely a great place of freedom and prosperity. We are so blessed with that. I would be interested to know in terms of helping meet our workforce needs. Of course, we're going to meet it from within Canada, but, you know, so many people are just attracted here to Alberta because it's a place of freedom and prosperity.

I'd be interested to also understand, you know – many Albertans feel we are succeeding in spite of and not because of the federal government. I'd be interested in hearing from your ministry the perspective of how the federal government, instead of perhaps holding us back or dragging us down or seeking to drag us down with them, could actually be a partner in a positive way to not only bless Alberta but Canada as a whole.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Member.

Minister, go ahead.

Mr. Jean: Thank you. MLA Stephan, I tend to agree with you on the federal government. I spent 10 years there. You know, they're there to help, but they don't do much helping for Alberta from what I've seen.

I will just tell you generally that it's true; during the four years of NDP rule we lost about 183,000 jobs here in Alberta. It's a different philosophy, and I understand the different philosophy. It was a new government, but we're not going to see that for a while as long as we have a UCP government.

We've seen just right now there are 100,000 job openings in Alberta. That's why we're doing Alberta Is Calling. We're looking for people to fill those jobs, and there are jobs in every sector. As we heard from MLA Rosin, she needs a lot of people down in her area, and I can't imagine why anybody would want to live anywhere else except maybe Fort McMurray or Grande Prairie. I will tell you it's a beautiful area, and we need a lot of people here in Alberta. We need 100,000 people right now to fill the jobs.

It's also true that over the last 14 months I think we've seen somewhere in the neighbourhood of about 118,000 jobs created here in Alberta. That's through amazing initiatives. Even with record net in-migration numbers – we saw 33,000 people, I think, in the third quarter move to Alberta, choose Alberta as their home – even with record numbers, our unemployment rate is still staying

competitive with other jurisdictions, which says volumes about what's actually happening and taking place here.

11:40

Now, you talked about Alberta Is Calling. I want to talk just a little bit about that. As more jobs are created, businesses need more skilled workers. There's no question that people look at our low-tax, low-regulatory environment as far as making sure that we eliminate red tape and duplication of legislation. They want to come here, and they want to fill the jobs, and they want to create companies and create wealth. The Alberta Is Calling campaign helps to fill those gaps. What we're doing – and not all politicians in other jurisdictions like Alberta Is Calling because they recognize that when you put up a billboard that says, "Alberta Is Calling" and it has a great picture of what Alberta has to offer, people are coming here. We need to make sure that we continue to encourage that and we are more than competitive in providing what people want to have here in Alberta.

We talked about the renewed Alberta advantage, but there are high-demand sectors right now, like skilled trades in my area and Grande Prairie; health care, which is right across the province, and we've got to fix that, and we are moving in that way, in that direction. I think we're doing great things in health care, but accounting and engineering and technology: all of those roles need to be filled. In 2022 Alberta saw the highest employment growth in the country. In addition, Alberta had the highest net interprovincial migration among provinces. You know, it's nothing to sneeze at. We're very proud of that.

I think the other questions you had were in relation to the federal government and the just transition. You know, I don't look at it as very just when you take away people's livelihood. You mentioned it, and I think that the truth is that we've got to work with the federal government. We've got to work in making sure that we follow through with the objectives that they have under their constitutional jurisdiction, but we can do it in whatever way we see fit. We are doing that. You know, on my trip to Korea we looked at hydrogen opportunities; we looked at steelmaking opportunities. Right now we're looking for expressions of interest for a hydrogen corridor here in Alberta, making sure that we move to that net zero that the federal government wants us to move to as quickly as we possibly can if that is, indeed, necessary, which it seems to be.

You know, we've seen the corporations of Alberta rise to the challenge. We've seen tremendous opportunities with hydrogen here. We have a feedstock called the oil sands that provides a great opportunity for so many things to happen, and we are going to be part of the solution. We're going to lead the world on that.

I also want to tell you that the Alberta advantage – we saw the highest weekly earnings continue to be the highest weekly earnings here in Alberta right across the country. Even though some areas have changed, we have stayed number one, and we intend to stay as number one. Since January 2019 the amount that Albertans earn per week has actually gone up by 12 per cent, and Albertans pay less in overall taxes. You know, the NDP were talking about \$20 billion the other day, and I found it. Do you know where the \$20 billion is? The \$20 billion is what Alberta corporations and citizens save every single year because we're the lowest tax jurisdiction in the country. That's where the \$20 billion comes from, and that's probably what the NDP were looking for.

In 2022-2023 Albertans and Alberta businesses would pay at least \$14.8 billion more in taxes if Alberta had the same tax system as other provinces. That's not something that people can take lightly. We know it's very important. A couple earning, for instance, \$75,000 with two children would pay \$1,500 more in

British Columbia and \$3,900 more in Ontario. No wonder people are fleeing Toronto and coming to Alberta.

Alberta has some of the lowest housing prices. In Fort McMurray, I know, I saw a five-bedroom house go the other day for \$250,000.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.

At this point I would now like to turn it over to the Official Opposition for their rotation. Member Bilous, go ahead.

Mr. Bilous: Thanks. Minister, in my last five minutes with you I just want to talk a little bit about the film tax credit. Again, I appreciate that it's working. It's working well. You've said this yourself. My frustration is that the government is picking and choosing which tax credits to implement. On the one hand the government talks about how great the film tax credit is, which it is. I applauded your predecessor on the introduction of the film tax credit that we didn't get over the finish line when we were government. Yet the government, until the last moment, was going to introduce a digital media tax credit, which got pulled. I know this for a fact, that it got pulled likely a week before the budget dropped. The challenge with that, Minister, is that that tax credit would have applied to postproduction. Again, we recognize what the film tax credit is doing. That would have assisted on that end. As well, of course, you know, many Albertans and people living around the globe are watching the series *The Last of Us*, which, of course, was filmed in Alberta but, again, based on a video game that should have been developed in Alberta, and those are permanent, long-term jobs. That's my preamble.

Curious if we've heard from stakeholders that they would like to see year-round application periods for the film tax credit. I'm not sure if you can comment on that. Is that something that your department is looking at as opposed to the application windows? I'm curious to know if the Alberta film tax credit is combined with any federal film incentives. Is there a way to leverage programs federally to help make Alberta even more attractive?

I know that tourism lives in another ministry, Minister, but I'm just curious if your ministry, in conjunction with tourism, is tracking the tourism and productions as far as the impact. When a film like *The Last of Us* or a series is filmed here, are we capturing the dollars, the economic impact to the province from having those productions here? Again, I think – and I will ask this of your colleague tomorrow evening. To try to capture the tourism benefit from the expansion of film within the province: how do we gauge that? Are they being tracked at all?

As you're well aware, technical workers in the industry are needed. Many left the province years ago when there were cuts. I'm curious if you're working with the postsecondary minister to train and track graduates and workers in the film industry. Is there funding that's available? What kind of commitment can you make, again, acknowledging that you're working crossministry? Have there been ongoing consultations, reviews with partners to ensure that we also have the right regulations and legislation in place? Are there any current barriers that are being faced that you could spearhead with your colleague the minister of red tape reduction?

I will also now jump to questions around labour. I'm going to reference really quickly the – sorry. I'm looking for the document title. This is jumping back to the government of Alberta's economic review and indicators website. There's an Excel document titled data indicators that shows change in employment. Last December we were up 11.9 per cent, January 2023 was up to 20.7 per cent, and then in February we dropped to 1.6 per cent. This is especially troubling when, again, we see that the city of Calgary has the highest unemployment for the country. If you can comment on that.

I will save my export question for the trade minister.

Average weekly earnings declined in Alberta from \$1,284 in November '22 to \$1,264 in December. That's not the direction that we want to be going. If you can comment on that, that would be wonderful.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Member.

Hon. minister, please go ahead.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Madam Chair. I think what I heard you say, MLA Bilous, is that you asked the question on the film tax credit. I want to let you know, first of all, that it's open year-round. We do it in bundles just simply because of the administration, but it is open year-round, so people can apply for that. We've seen great uptake on that, and I expect to see that grow as people hear about it. I actually have a friend in the film industry, a special effects company that's been going on for a long time, and he had actually heard that Alberta was actually a place – he's in Georgia. He'd heard – I talked to him a couple of weeks ago – that Alberta is the place to go now. I'm glad to hear that the word is getting out there.

You also asked about the digital media tax credit. You talked a little bit about tourism and production and how that's affected and what we see as far as monies back for that, whether postproduction is eligible – and it is. Some things are eligible for postproduction.

11:50

You talked about legislation, regulation, and red tape reduction, and that was very refreshing to hear from you. Red tape reduction is very important. We don't want to see any fewer services, any less safety, but we do want to see the elimination of duplication and unnecessary things that are in legislation after years and years of compounding it. You also asked about labour and some of the things that are going on there.

I'll start with the film and television tax credit. You know, I would just say that since the launch of it in 2020, we've seen it grow very rapidly, providing significant economic impact. In fact, I would say that it's helping revitalize some parts of rural Alberta with these productions, using local resources, businesses, accommodations, and contractors, supporting thousands of jobs and spending more than, as I've mentioned before, \$356 million in communities right across the province. And it's exciting because, as I said, we're showcasing Alberta to the world and bringing Alberta to the world, which – I think many people don't recognize what we have to offer here, and that is bringing and helping us with the Alberta Is Calling campaign.

Treasury Board and Finance approved an additional \$50 million budget increase in '23-24 for that program and removed the \$10 million per project cap, and that was to ensure competitiveness and making sure that we continue to attract those large Hollywood producers. In fact, I even had an opportunity to talk to somebody from India, from Bollywood, that wants to come to Alberta, right across from the other side of the world, just because we're so competitive and because this has seen such an amazing opportunity. It's grown the creative and cultural industries by \$1.5 billion. As I mentioned, 111 films and television projects, which are expected to spend \$860 million, almost, in Alberta. Now, the removal of the \$10 million per project cap in 2021 has also incentivized seven large-scale projects to apply to the program, including three in 2022-23.

Now, you also asked about the digital tax credit. There are so many things you asked that I want to get to, and I'm just going to say that, you know, this tax credit, a media tax credit for digital, needs to be directed to Minister Glubish. I know he's been very aggressive on this file, and of course he wants to see as many

opportunities come to Alberta and Edmonton and Calgary and the rest of Alberta as we possibly can. I will say this, though. I'm incredibly proud to see the growth in venture capital under our government. The Canadian Venture Capital and Private Equity Association actually released their 2022 year in review Canada venture capital market overview, and Alberta saw well over \$729 million in venture capital investment in 2022. This is an increase of 20 per cent, or \$122 million, from 2021. Of course, that is part and parcel of the digital media tax credit opportunities that people have if they come here, and they are coming here. But we need to do more, and we're consistently doing more.

You mentioned regulation and legislation, and I know the department has their ears open all the time on ways and how to improve things and how to make things better, how to remove that regulatory burden that you talked about with the red tape reduction. And I will say that, most notably, Alberta was one of the few provinces that had an increase in venture capital investment in 2022. Ontario, Quebec, and B.C. stagnated while Alberta grew. That's because our government's job, in my mind, is to bring people to Alberta, not just support the people that are here but bring people to Alberta, and the great things in the renewed Alberta advantage will keep them here once they get here. They won't want to sell their house; they will want to stay here, enjoy the mountains, enjoy all the things that Alberta has to offer. We know that our investments are working, the renewed Alberta advantage is working, and we're hoping to continue with that.

Remember, MLA Bilous, that Alberta has the youngest population in Canada and the most educated population in Canada. We have the lowest taxes in Canada. We have no PST. We have global, cosmopolitan, livable cities with comparative – oops. I'm down to three seconds, and I wanted to talk about downtown Calgary.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.

As there's no independent member present, I would now like to invite members from the government caucus to ask questions. Mr. McIver, would you like to go back and forth?

Mr. McIver: No. I'd like block time, please. That's always better.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you. So for the remainder of the meeting, please go ahead.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Chair. I appreciate that. We covered a lot of ground this morning, Minister. I'll touch on a couple of things in the time we've got, and I may leave some of my block time so that you have a little bit of time to answer the questions. Let's see how that goes, if that's okay with you.

Mediation services: 96 per cent in '21-22 of collective bargaining cases with the assistance of a ministry-appointed mediator were settled without a work stoppage. That seems good, but I think the target is 98 per cent. So I guess two questions. How did you manage to keep that high a number, but how are you actually going to get up to what your target is? What steps do we take to ensure that the best available mediator is signed on to giving labour negotiation? I'm sure that that makes a difference, and someone in your ministry probably has some expertise there or you do. I would be interested in hearing some of that either way.

Workplace partnerships program. The line 2.2 on page 141, the labour force policy and engagement, indicates a funding framework to support projects that are important to those areas through workplace development partnerships. In '23-24 we see an estimated investment of \$8.767 million. Can you confirm some of the previous year's projects that the funding supported and why they are important? I'll also ask: what kind of projects are we looking to

fund during the latest round once this budget is approved? How are the projects funded by these partnerships informing government policy? I'm looking at not a lot more time here.

Page 145 of government estimates: there's \$75 million in revenue for the labour market development. What kinds of programs are being funded? What controls does the federal government have over this funding? I'll just leave it open ended. What else can you tell us about that? Based on the limited number of time left, about three and a half minutes out of the seven, I'll call that the end of my block, with the chair's permission.

The Deputy Chair: Absolutely.

Go ahead, Minister.

Mr. Jean: Thank you very much, MLA McIver. I just want to say thank you publicly for all the assistance you've given me in my new ministry and the advice you've given me on downtown Calgary just recently, and I hope you continue with that. I think together we're going to build a better Calgary than what we have right now. We, of course, saw unprecedented times, but your advice on that and your advice on jobs and how to get our downtown going has been very helpful to me. I want to let everybody know that.

The first thing is mediation services. I know that this is something that we can brag about, and certainly it's not where we want to be; we want to be perfect. The mediation services branch maintains a roster of contract mediators that are skilled in labour mediation – I can promise you that is not my expertise – many of whom, though, have been practitioners in this area for decades, and we have a ton of experience there.

These mediators are selected by a committee of professionals who have worked in the sector, including external committee members, who assist in selecting high-calibre professionals to do this work. Mediation services staff have also all worked in the areas of labour relations for decades – and I've been very impressed with the resumé's I have seen – and are able to support the contract mediators with advice, data, and acting as a sounding board on complex files. As you know, some of these files become very complex, and we need to make sure that we deal with them with a great attention to detail. As MLA Stephan said, these are people's lives, and they're very important to get it right.

You also asked what steps are planned to improve beyond the 96 per cent to 98 per cent success rate and then, hopefully, up to 100 per cent if we can. Well, in the fiscal year 2022-23 there have been

no work stoppages, and none are anticipated, which is great news and goes to, really, the crux of the issue, which is success at making sure that all parties are happy, or at least they're mutually dissatisfied to the same degree to continue on. The success rate is partially dependent on external factors such as economic climate and rate of inflation in any given year, but ongoing engagement with mediators supports their continuous learning and development. As I mentioned before, the department is always there to learn from the lessons of yesterday and make sure they apply it to tomorrow so that we get better.

Mediation services encourages discussion and mutual support between the mediators and holds an annual mediator meeting to facilitate this and to get it right and to learn best practices. At the annual meeting trends are reviewed as well as upcoming sectors that will be potential candidates for mediation in the following year so that they can get ahead of the curve and make sure that they do everything they possibly can. Mediators are encouraged to participate in ongoing mediation training and development. I think that deals with mediation as far as that goes.

I will move on to the next question, which was the workforce partnerships program. What I would say to you: in response to some of the previous year's projects that this funding supported, the government continues to work with our partners and our job creators to ensure that skills and training opportunities available to Albertans meet the needs of the labour market and help Albertans find secure employment, permanent full-time, as much as they possibly want or part-time as they do need.

The workforce partnerships program grants enhance the workplace human resource development and labour market adjustment . . .

The Deputy Chair: I apologize for the interruption, but I must . . .

Mr. Jean: I need more time, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: . . . advise the committee that the time allotted for consideration of the ministry's estimates has concluded.

I'd like to remind committee members that we are scheduled to meet this afternoon, March 14, 2023, at 3:30 to consider the estimates of Executive Council.

Thank you to everyone, and this meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 12 p.m.]

