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The 30th Legislature
Fourth Session

Standing Committee
on
Public Accounts

Labour and Immigration

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Fourth Session**

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Phillips, Shannon, Lethbridge-West (NDP), Chair
Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC), Deputy Chair

Hunter, Grant R., Taber-Warner (UC)
Lovely, Jacqueline, Camrose (UC)
Pancholi, Rakhi, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)
Panda, Prasad, Calgary-Edgemont (UC)
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)
Schmidt, Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (NDP)
Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UC)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)*
Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UC)
Toor, Devinder, Calgary-Falconridge (UC)
Yaseen, Muhammad, Calgary-North (UC)

* substitution for Peter Singh

Office of the Auditor General Participants

W. Doug Wylie	Auditor General
Rob Driesen	Assistant Auditor General

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 Public Accounts

Participants

Ministry of Jobs, Economy and Northern Development

Tim Haysom, Executive Director, Employer and Program Services

Sonya Johnston, Assistant Deputy Minister and Senior Financial Officer, Financial Services

Shawn McLeod, Deputy Minister

Myles Morris, Assistant Deputy Minister, Safe, Fair and Healthy Workplaces

Ministry of Trade, Immigration and Multiculturalism

Gosia Cichy-Weclaw, Assistant Deputy Minister, Workforce Strategies

Andre Rivest, Executive Director, Financial Services

9 a.m.

Tuesday, February 21, 2023

[Ms Phillips in the chair]

The Chair: Good morning, everyone. I'd like to call this meeting of the Public Accounts Committee to order and welcome everyone in attendance.

My name is Shannon Phillips. I'm the MLA for Lethbridge-West, and I'm the chair of this committee. As we begin this morning, I'll invite members, guests, and LAO staff at the table to introduce themselves. We'll begin with those in the room. We'll begin with the government-side caucus, go around the table, and then we'll go to those of us, like me, who are joining us online.

Mr. Smith: Good morning. Mark Smith, MLA, Drayton Valley-Devon.

Ms Lovely: Good morning, everyone. MLA Jackie Lovely for the Camrose constituency.

Mr. Morris: Good morning. Myles Morris. I'm the assistant deputy minister of safe, fair, and healthy workplaces at Jobs, Economy and Northern Development.

Ms Johnston: Good morning. I'm Sonya Johnston, ADM of financial services and senior financial officer for Jobs, Economy and Northern Development.

Mr. McLeod: Good morning. Shawn McLeod, deputy minister, Jobs, Economy and Northern Development.

Mr. Rivest: Good morning. Andre Rivest, executive director, financial services.

Mr. Haysom: Tim Haysom, executive director of employer and program services.

Mr. Driesen: Morning. Rob Driesen, Assistant Auditor General.

Mr. Schmidt: Marlin Schmidt, Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Ms Renaud: Marie Renaud, St. Albert.

Ms Pancholi: Good morning. Rakhi Pancholi, MLA, Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Robert: Good morning. Nancy Robert, clerk of *Journals* and committees.

Mr. Huffman: Good morning. Warren Huffman, committee clerk.

The Chair: Okay. Now we'll go online. I see a number of members, including the deputy chair, so we'll start with you. We'll go with the government members to introduce themselves after that, please.

Mr. Turton.

Mr. Turton: Yes. Good morning, everyone. Searle Turton, MLA for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain and deputy chair of this committee.

Mr. Hunter: Good morning. Grant Hunter, MLA for Taber-Warner.

Mr. Yaseen: Good morning. Muhammad Yaseen, MLA, Calgary-North.

The Chair: I see Mr. Panda and Mr. Stephan.

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

The Chair: Mr. Toor, your mic is muted, so if you just wouldn't mind introducing yourself once again.

Mr. Toor: Good morning, Chair. Devinder Toor, MLA, Calgary-Falconridge.

The Chair: And Mr. Stephan.

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

The Chair: I do not know if I've missed anyone. If I have, please go ahead and introduce yourselves.

Ms Cichy-Weclaw: Morning. Gosia Cichy-Weclaw. I'm the ADM responsible for immigration and multiculturalism.

Thank you.

The Chair: Very good. If anyone joins us later, we will just simply leave a message to the clerk, and we can make sure that you get introduced for the record.

We will now note for the record the following substitutions: MLA Smith for MLA Singh.

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 Leg. Assembly website. Those participating by videoconference are encouraged to please turn on your camera while speaking and mute your microphone when not speaking. Members participating virtually who wish to be placed on the speakers list are asked to e-mail or send a message to the committee clerk, and members in the room are asked to please signal to the chair. Please set your cellphones and other devices to silent for the duration of this meeting.

We'll now move to approval of the agenda. Are there any changes or additions to the agenda?

Hearing none, I'll ask that someone in the room move that the Standing Committee on Public Accounts adopt the draft agenda for today's meeting as distributed. I'll just look to the room. Mr. Smith. Thank you, Mr. Smith. That is so moved. Any discussion?

All in favour? Are there any opposed? I did not hear anyone in the room, so I just want to test that – when I called “all in favour,” I didn't hear anything, but I heard everyone online. I did hear everyone introduce themselves.

Ms Robert: It's because no mic is turned on.

The Chair: There we go. I heard that, Nancy, but not the all-in-favour piece. I'll just leave that. I'm going to assume that – if somebody could give me a thumbs-up that that was all-in-favoured.

Ms Robert: Sorry. Madam Chair, it's Nancy. I wonder, perhaps, since you're having audio issues, if you call the question if perhaps people in the room could raise their hands just as an indication to you. Would that be okay?

The Chair: Yeah. That's fine, too.

Are there any opposed? Seeing none, that motion is carried.

Now we'll move to the approval of the minutes. We have minutes from the February 14 meeting of the committee. Do members have any errors or omissions to note? Looking to the floor and online.

Seeing none, I'll ask that someone move that the minutes of the February 14 meeting of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts be approved as distributed. Looking to the room, I see it moved by Member Pancholi. Thank you. Is there any discussion on this motion?

I'll call for all in favour. Okay. Heard that; thank you. Are there any opposed? Seeing none, that motion is carried.

I'll now welcome our guests from Jobs, Economy and Northern Development who are here to address the labour and immigration annual report from '21 and '22, the outstanding Auditor General recommendations. I invite officials from the ministry to provide opening remarks not exceeding 10 minutes. Your time begins when you start speaking. Thank you.

Over to you, Deputy.

Mr. McLeod: Good morning. I'm pleased to be here today to discuss the 2021-2022 annual report for Alberta labour and immigration. It's actually Jobs, Economy and Northern Development now, but at the time of this fiscal year it was labour and immigration. As you are likely aware, the annual report highlights initiatives that previously fell under the ministry I've just described, some of which now fall under Jobs, Economy and Northern Development but also other ministries such as Trade, Immigration and Multiculturalism as well as Skilled Trades and Professions.

In addition to the folks who have introduced themselves today, I'd just like to highlight that Gosia Cichy-Weclaw is online. She's introduced herself. At the time she was in labour and immigration responsible for multiculturalism and immigration. She currently resides in the Trade, Immigration and Multiculturalism ministry. And in the audience we also have Scott Beeby, executive director of business supports, joining us today.

The COVID pandemic was a once-in-a-generation event, and the ministry of labour and immigration was there to support workers and job creators as they navigated this public health crisis. In fiscal 2021-22, the second year of the pandemic, the ministry continued to support Albertans, helping them earn a living while safeguarding their own health and the health of their colleagues and loved ones. This included several supports for Albertans and job creators to ensure the safety of workers and the compliance of employers to reduce the spread of the virus as well as helping to keep businesses and our economy afloat during challenging times.

Some of those programs such as the emergency isolation support program were needed almost immediately to support Albertans who had to isolate due to COVID-19 until federal support such as the CERB took effect. The critical worker benefit helped us recognize thousands of hard-working Albertans who delivered critical services to support our province during the pandemic, and the small and medium enterprise relaunch grant, or SMERG, helped support the recovery of businesses impacted by the public health restrictions.

To support Albertans' health and safety during the pandemic, we passed the employment standards amendment act, also known as the COVID-19 vaccination leave, to allow all provincially regulated employees the option of three hours of paid, job-protected leave to receive the COVID-19 vaccine.

As Alberta emerged from the pandemic, the ministry began to focus on economic recovery and diversification as well as the long-term vision for work in Alberta. To that end, the ministry launched the single largest jobs training program in Alberta's history, Alberta jobs now, in the summer of 2021. The program allowed employers to apply for grants to cover 25 per cent of an employee's salary for a 52-week period up to a maximum of \$25,000 per employee. Employers who hired people with disabilities received a grant of 1.5 times higher than the amount for other new employees. The grant could be used to cover salary or training costs. As of fall 2022

approximately 19,000 Albertans were working in positions approved under Alberta jobs now.

In 2021-22 we also expanded the Canada-Alberta job grant eligibility, making an additional \$18 million available to serve Alberta businesses in a time of need. The program allows employers to upskill new employees, retain staff and keep positions, and offer training for career growth within the organization or support the transition of staff to new roles. In '21-22 the program served nearly 12,000 learners and more than 3,000 employers across Alberta.

We also continued to connect Albertans to jobs through training and employment services delivered across the province. Our various training for work programs such as integrated training, self-employment training, and transition to employment supported more than 4,500 Albertans in gaining skills to support meaningful and long-term employment.

9:10

As pandemic-related travel restrictions began to lift and borders reopened, we also took steps to promote Alberta's advantages and benefits as a place to work and raise a family. This included the rebranding of the Alberta advantage immigration program and the introduction of new immigration pathways, including the rural renewal stream and the rural entrepreneur stream. These streams are intended to help rural Alberta communities build their capacity to attract and retain newcomers and entrepreneurs to contribute to local economies by providing a streamlined path towards permanent residency. The accelerated tech pathway was also introduced under the Alberta express entry stream, providing a fast track to permanent residency for highly skilled tech professionals who want to live in our province and work in Alberta's growing tech sector.

In February the ministry hosted the inaugural Premier's summit on fairness for newcomers, which brought together immigration stakeholders and regulatory bodies from across the province to discuss actions in support of newcomer success and, in turn, Alberta's economic growth. The summit was a one-day event with presentations and panel discussion on important issues and challenges faced by Alberta's newcomers, including foreign qualification recognition, integration and settlement, and the importance of immigration to Alberta's economy and workforce. Approximately 300 individuals attended the summit, both in person and virtually, representing immigrant-serving organizations, professional regulatory organizations, newcomers, and community development organizations.

Along with newcomers, the government is also making it easier for Canadians to gain their certification in Alberta with the passing of the Labour Mobility Act in December 2021. This act helps reduce red tape by creating a consistent approach to recognizing out-of-province credentials, allowing more highly skilled Canadian certified professionals to come to Alberta and get to work on making the most of their potential.

The ministry of labour and immigration also led the government's antiracism work in '21-22. In June 2021 the Alberta Anti-Racism Advisory Council released its recommendations on how to address racism in the province, which helped inform the government's new antiracism action plan. This work is helping ensure Alberta is a place of opportunity where everyone feels welcome and free to pursue their dreams.

On February 24, 2022, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. This triggered a global humanitarian crisis, with Alberta heeding the call to support the Ukrainians displaced by war. Multiple government departments co-ordinated a provincial approach to Ukrainian arrivals, led by the ministry of labour and

immigration. This included enabling access to important settlement and support services that these individuals required as they arrived in Alberta.

Through everything we undertook in '21-22, the government remained committed to working with employers, workers, and partners to ensure safe and healthy workplaces. This included beginning work to update the occupational health and safety code, with a view to improving outcomes while empowering innovation. The government also expedited responses to COVID-related occupational health and safety complaints.

In order to strengthen Alberta's competitive advantage and make it the most attractive destination for investment and job creation in North America, the ministry of labour and immigration streamlined its certificate of recognition, or COR, program. COR is awarded to employers who develop health and safety programs that meet standards established by occupational health and safety. A COR demonstrates that the employer's health and safety management system has been evaluated by a certified auditor and meets provincial standards. Through the government's commitment to reduce red tape, the COR program simplified and combined program standards, eliminating redundancies and obsolete program requirements. And the results were impressive, with a reported 22.6 per cent reduction in requirements for the program in the '21-22 fiscal year.

The ministry and its agencies, boards, and commissions have also reduced overall regulatory requirements by 16.9 per cent since the government's red tape reduction initiative began in May 2019, making it easier for job creators to do business in Alberta while keeping employees safe and healthy in the workplace.

In closing, I want to thank you for the opportunity to provide an overview of the accomplishments of the ministry of labour and immigration in fiscal '21-22. As outlined, the ministry undertook a number of initiatives that supported Alberta's workers and job creators while strengthening our workforce and our economy as we emerge from the pandemic.

Thank you. I look forward to answering your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Deputy.

We'll now move to the office of the Auditor General. I believe Assistant Auditor General Rob Driesen is in the room for any opening comments. You have five minutes, Mr. Driesen.

Mr. Driesen: Thank you, Madam Chair. Our work on the ministry in fiscal '21-22 included examining the financial reporting of the department and the financial statements of the Workers' Compensation Board. We issued an unqualified audit opinion on the WCB's fiscal '20-21 financial statements.

We have two outstanding recommendations with the department from performance work we reported in the past year. In May 2022 we recommended that the department improve performance reporting processes related to its First Nation training to employment and Aboriginal training to employment programs. We found that performance measures and targets were not regularly reviewed for continued appropriateness. Program monitoring was informal, and no detailed results analysis was performed. Program reporting was internal and focused on program outputs rather than on the achievement of program objectives and lessons learned. The department has provided us an implementation plan, which we are currently examining to determine if planned improvements would adequately deal with our recommendation.

In November 2022 we issued a recommendation to the then ministry of jobs, economy, and innovation to complete processes to verify eligibility of approved applications on the small and medium enterprise relaunch grant program. We found that inadequate verification

processes were completed to conclude on eligibility of approved program applicants. The department assumed responsibility for this program as a result of the government restructuring in October 2022. We have not received an implementation plan as of yet from the department and look forward to receiving that from them soon.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to our normal questioning rounds. Just to remind everyone, we are in the four rounds: 15 minutes, then 10, 10, 10, and then three minutes to read questions into the record. A normal two-hour meeting.

With that, we will begin with the Official Opposition for 15 minutes.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, all, for being here today. The Alberta jobs now program created a stream for employers to hire disabled Albertans, which is great to see, by the way. Employers hiring a person with a disability can apply for a grant of up to 37.5 per cent of the new hire's salary or up to \$37,500 per employee, whichever is less. Can you tell me: in the first two intakes how many disabled employees were hired?

Mr. McLeod: AJEND provided this enhanced payment. Approximately 2 per cent of employees hired identified themselves as persons with disabilities.

Ms Renaud: So 2 per cent of 12,678 people were disabled employees?

Mr. McLeod: I believe that's correct.

Ms Renaud: Okay. Can you tell me how many were in the first round?

Mr. McLeod: I think that number covers the first two tranches.

Ms Renaud: The first two rounds. So it could have been, like, 1 per cent in the first round, maybe? Fair enough?

Mr. McLeod: I don't know . . .

Ms Renaud: Sure. Okay. Let's say that it was below 2 per cent. We'll settle there.

Mr. McLeod: I don't know the distribution. I'll just . . .

Ms Renaud: Can I just ask you this question? After the first round I know that there was some discussion in the annual report that eligibility or that criteria were changed. Did you make any changes based on the really dismal number of disabled employees that were being impacted by this really great program?

Mr. McLeod: We didn't make any changes with respect to that, and the challenge that we faced with that program and the feedback we got is that it's frequently challenging for people to come forward and self-identify within a workplace, so although there was in some measure or way of measuring it only 2 per cent of the employees, we don't know for sure what the actual access to the program was.

Ms Renaud: Could you walk me through the process? This is a huge investment, a big program. The government is really proud of this. Can you walk me through the process that your ministry undertook to develop this stream for disabled employees? Who did you consult to make sure that you got it right?

Mr. McLeod: I don't remember specifically who we consulted, but I do remember conversations internally within the department about

specifically attempting to access or facilitate access to this program for disabled employees. The principal policy decision was to increase the amount of the financial subsidy, and the principal sort of challenge that we faced – and there were conversations. I'm just not familiar exactly with what those conversations were.

Ms Renaud: Okay. I know that in the annual report there was mention of – you know, there were quotes from people talking about this program. There was an article on CBC, May '21, talking about the CEO of Helcim, who gave advice to the government while structuring this program. So there's got to be a record of who the ministry consulted, because there's a lot of expertise on inclusive employment out there, a ton of it, and a lot of disabled employees and employers that are, I'm sure, willing to provide advice to government. Could your ministry undertake to find out who was consulted to develop the stream for disabled employees and employers?

Mr. McLeod: We can do that.

Ms Renaud: Okay. Thank you very much.

Could you tell me how many disabled Albertans were – you already told me: all together 2 per cent. How many of that 2 per cent had previously been unemployed?

9:20

Mr. McLeod: I don't know whether we have that number broken down.

Ms Renaud: Okay. Could you undertake to find that out for me?

Mr. McLeod: If we have that number, we can.

Ms Renaud: Okay. The program is very specific about the two streams, right? It could be a new employee, or it could be an existing employee. What I'm getting at is: of the 12,678, 2 per cent of those were disabled. How many were already employed in that organization or company, and how many were new employees? If you could get that and give that back to the committee, that would be great.

Also, could you talk about the range of accommodations? Did you collect any information about what employers undertook to accommodate disabled employees? That's really important learning for any organization, what accommodations were required by employers to make this a success. Could you tell me a little bit about that work, collecting that information that your ministry did?

Mr. McLeod: I'm not specifically familiar with whether we collected that work, but to the extent we did, I can provide you with that.

Ms Renaud: Okay. You mentioned earlier that, you know, it was difficult for people to perhaps self-identify. I'm assuming those would have been employees already employed within an organization or a company. Could you tell me what other processes were in place or what process did your ministry put in place to identify that, yes, indeed the employee was disabled? Was there a box they had to tick? Was it some kind of self-disclosure? Was there an accommodation requirement? How did the ministry know that that 2 per cent of 12,678 were actually disabled?

Mr. McLeod: In the application process there was . . .

Ms Renaud: Just like a box?

Mr. McLeod: Correct. I don't know if it was just a box, but there was an indication as to whether the individual qualifying for that particular position was disabled.

Ms Renaud: Okay. You may not be aware that there are, like, really extensive processes in other government departments and programs to identify disability, to verify that someone is, in fact, disabled. If you could undertake to find out what it was that your ministry undertook or what process was in place for an employee to identify the disability and perhaps talk about any accommodation, that would be most helpful.

Just one more question about the design. Before the design or during the design – I know I've mentioned this before, probably ad nauseam, but there are a couple of structures within government already that are in place to provide advice to ministries. One of those is the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. They've been around for a while. That is their function. I'm just wondering: did anyone from your ministry reach out to that body to talk about this really great program that was going to create employment for disabled Albertans? Any conversation whatsoever?

Mr. McLeod: Mr. Rivest just advised me that during the period between intake 1 and intake 2, because we were trying to sort of learn in terms of the uptake, et cetera, direct outreach was made to industry associations, chambers of commerce, and disability-focused organizations in the summer of '21 to seek feedback on the program and how to encourage more employers to hire persons with disabilities to the program. There was outreach made. I can provide you further information, as you've already requested.

Ms Renaud: That would be great. If you could provide the committee with a list of the organizations that were contacted, that would be great.

Okay. I'm going to go back to another area here. The ministry told us that the \$263 million program – we know \$152.5 million is committed in this reporting period – would do a few different things. One, it would encourage employers to hire and train new staff, gain current or updated skills; two, it would focus on the hiring of under- or unemployed Albertans; and employers were also able to fill available positions with employed Albertans if there was a business need. Could you tell me what process your ministry undertook for businesses to identify that business need, to change that criteria, and what were they required to include in terms of information?

Mr. McLeod: The change, effectively, was to allow greater flexibility in the program. With respect to the specifics on the business need, I'd have to go and check that.

Ms Renaud: Okay. You will check, then, and get back to the committee on: what were the specific needs that businesses had to identify to be exempt from that criteria or to sort of circumvent that criteria? Correct? Okay. Perfect.

The annual report indicates that the Alberta jobs now program resulted in 12,678 new hires over two intake periods. Of the 12,678, how many jobs in total were filled by unemployed Albertans?

Mr. McLeod: We have it on a percentage basis: 62 per cent of the jobs filled were by unemployed Albertans.

Ms Renaud: So 62 per cent were filled by unemployed Albertans. Okay. Terrific.

And of the 12,678 positions filled by this program, how many of the positions were vacant positions as opposed to newly created positions?

Mr. McLeod: I'm not sure if we tracked that. Once again, if we did, we can get you that.

Ms Renaud: Okay. So if you could get back to the committee on: of the 12,678, how many were new jobs, and how many were vacant positions?

Okay. The annual report notes that the Alberta jobs now program was designed to assist employers responding to labour shortages. Employers, according to the annual report, indicated that as vacancy rose, they struggled to fill those vacancies. At the time that the program was designed, what data was used to support those statements? As we noted in the research briefing, there was anecdotal information, but there was no specific data. What was used to support, like, the labour shortage? We heard from the ministry that there were huge labour shortages in some sectors. What did the ministry do to identify those sectors? What data was used to support the creation of this program?

Mr. McLeod: Yeah. We have a group within the department that is specifically responsible for labour market information, so that was the principal group. We certainly looked to that. In addition, we had a whole host of information around various sectors and people in those sectors, the number of people in the sectors, that type of information.

Ms Renaud: Of the 12,678, do you have a breakdown of what sectors those positions were created in?

Mr. McLeod: We do.

Ms Renaud: Would you be able to table that with the committee?

Mr. McLeod: It may be that I can quickly provide it here.

Ms Renaud: That's okay. I'm running out of time, and that'll eat up too much. If you could table that with the committee, I would appreciate that very much.

Mr. McLeod: That's fine.

Ms Renaud: Okay. I asked this question sort of about the program for disabled employees, but I'd like to ask it about the larger program. Changes were made to the program design for the second intake to support, and we know the program was fine-tuned a third time. So, going into the third intake, which this report does not cover, I'm wondering if you could walk us through the process and who was involved in making those changes.

Mr. McLeod: The process, really, was an internal review of the activity to date, the feedback we received from employers and others during the hiring process, a continual sort of monitoring of the environment, I guess, more broadly, because there was feedback we were getting with respect to the program. Also, I remember at the time the minister meeting specifically with a number of groups to effectively get feedback with respect to the program. So that was principally sort of the process that we used.

Ms Renaud: Any feedback whatsoever from employers regarding disabled employees?

Mr. McLeod: I don't remember specifically that feedback, but once again we can perhaps include it as part of . . .

Ms Renaud: I guess what I'm getting at is that for the amount of attention and announcement around this, I guess, piece of this Alberta jobs now program it's kind of dismal. Two per cent is pretty dismal, and I would suggest that after the first round you probably knew it was pretty dismal. I'm asking, you know: what happened when you figured out that it wasn't really working the way you thought it was? What did you do differently?

Mr. McLeod: I think I've undertaken to sort of give answers to those questions, and I'm happy to do that. I would also say – and

my colleagues just reminded me – that there was one specific change. One of the pieces of feedback was that, on average, folks with disabilities were working fewer hours than able-bodied individuals, so we reduced that requirement from 30 hours to 15 hours to attempt to accommodate that need. That was the one specific policy change that was made based on feedback.

9:30

Ms Renaud: Okay. So you reduced from 30 hours a week to 15 hours a week. And that was based on what?

Mr. McLeod: Based on the feedback that on average people with disabilities were working fewer total hours in a week than someone who . . .

Ms Renaud: Just out of curiosity, where did you get that feedback?

Mr. McLeod: I don't have the specific organization's name, but . . .

Ms Renaud: Could you get that for the committee? That would be great. I would appreciate that.

Now, you are already going to provide the committee with a breakdown of the sectors. Can you tell me: do you have a breakdown generally, you know, of how many of these 12,678 new jobs or existing jobs were in large corporations as opposed to small and medium businesses?

Mr. McLeod: The demographics for the program were small organizations with one to 49 employees, 83.6 per cent; medium-sized organizations, 50 to 499 employees, 14.86 per cent; and large organizations with 500 or more employees, about 1 and a half per cent.

Ms Renaud: Okay. How about nonprofits?

Mr. McLeod: I don't know whether we have that specifically or not.

Ms Renaud: If you could get that number for nonprofits, that would be great.

Mr. McLeod: If we have it.

Ms Renaud: I am out of time, so I will stop there. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

We'll now move over to our friends on the government side, 15 minutes. Your time starts – I think the clock is just elapsing now for the Official Opposition time. They'll cede that time, and we'll start with the government members for 15 minutes, please.

Ms Lovely: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I just wanted to say that the folks who live in the Camrose constituency are often interested in how much red tape is being reduced by our government. They ask me these questions quite frequently. It's something that I'm very proud of, the work that's being accomplished. On page 63 of the annual report you indicate that the department reduced 1,800 requirements over the course of the year. How did reducing these 1,800 red tape requirements actually make things better for Alberta workers and employers? And on page 63 and 64 you state in several places that you created portals to help reduce red tape. Can you explain how these portals create efficiencies and help people who are accessing your programs and services?

Mr. McLeod: I certainly can answer that question. Thank you for the question. I don't know whether we do these sorts of informal

things at these types of meetings, but I'm going to do it anyways. I just wanted to let you know that I'm a graduate of the college in Camrose and have a new daughter-in-law who has lots of family in the Camrose area.

Ms Lovely: Thank you.

Mr. McLeod: We have that in common.

Yes. In answer to your questions, yes. A number of the red tape reduction initiatives in '21-22 made things better for Alberta workers and employers. The ministry continues to remove regulatory barriers and reduce costs for Alberta job creators, modernize our legislation, and improve the delivery of government services while ensuring effective regulatory oversight over health and safety protections. For example, the partnerships in injury reduction program simplified and modernized the partnership standards, resulting in an improved certificate of core recognition program for all stakeholders, as I mentioned in my opening comments. The reductions included rescinding certificate of recognition options that were complex and expensive for employers. The program also reduced duplication within standards such as simplifying site sampling requirements, reducing the cost and time of an audit for the employer, and eliminating out-of-province employer health and safety performance reports.

The ministry also eliminated the requirement for employers to record an employee's daily hours. Now employers have the flexibility to record hours at intervals that work with the business operation requirements.

Land agent licensing completed an in-depth review of all forms and policies to identify areas for reducing burden while maintaining program standards and compliance. Land agent licensing was able to reduce regulatory requirements for both applicants and the general public who interact with the office.

Additionally, the department undertook administrative burden reduction projects related to improving service delivery and speeding up approvals for Alberta workers and employers.

The Alberta advantage immigration program expanded services available to online applicants by an online portal, creating a one-stop service shop for clients. This work resulted in efficiencies that allow for more expedited processing of these types of applications. Streamlined application assessment processes reduced time spent on assessing files and resulted in more timely decisions for clients while still maintaining program integrity. The employment standards portal eliminated the need for paper permit and variance applications. The education outreach and partnership outreach form was streamlined to require only essential information and allow stakeholders to indicate their specific preferences. Paperless certificates of recognition are now produced as a secure electronic form, rather than as a printed paper certificate. Employers can access the document or reprint their certificate of recognition directly through the WCB's online services. This change significantly decreases red tape and increases efficiency as employers no longer have to wait for their certificates of recognition to arrive in the mail.

In addition, in December the government committed to reviewing the OHS legislation and associated regulations. The purpose of this review was to improve outcomes while reducing administrative burden, simplifying requirements and language and removing duplication to improve clarity, evaluate if outcomes can be approved through the use of performance-based requirements, update technical provisions to reflect current best practices for OHS, and align the OHS code with other provinces where applicable. The OHS accounts for a substantial portion of the department's regulatory requirements. The review presented an

opportunity to reduce administrative burden for employers and workers; for example, by shifting from prescriptive to performance-based requirements where appropriate, removing the need for unnecessary approvals, and harmonizing with other jurisdictions.

In terms of your specific question with respect to the creation of portals, the ministry continues to improve its efficiency, both internally and externally, by providing online mechanisms or portals for stakeholder delivery and effectiveness. For example, the portals allow Albertans and job creators to submit applications, report situations related to employment standards and occupational health and safety legislative requirements. Portals make it easier for Albertans to access government services by enabling the filing of complaints or submitting application reports anywhere, at any time online, allowing users to save progress and return later or cancel or abandon their submission, and automatically prescreening for jurisdiction and referencing users to other agencies where necessary.

Internal benefits include: reducing the time spent entering data by automatically transferring data into our compliance management systems, reducing errors and improving data quality by relying on enhanced data validation, and removing the requirement for manual entry. This allows the staff to spend more time on front-line services for Albertans. I could just say with respect to this that it's sort of a step-by-step process, but in particular the automation process I think is really effective, and we're really proud of some of the work that the department has done in that regard.

Ms Lovely: Well, thank you so much. I'm very proud of the work that you and your team have accomplished.

Let's switch gears a little bit now and focus on the jobs now program. On page 20 of the annual report you indicate that changes were made to the second intake of the Alberta jobs now program to increase uptake. Can you tell me more about the changes to the program and how the changes supported the province's economic recovery?

Mr. McLeod: As I've already discussed to some degree in the first round of questioning, direct outreach was made to industry associations, the Chambers of Commerce, and disability-focused organizations in July and August of 2021. The purpose of that outreach was to seek feedback on changes to the program and how to encourage more employers to hire persons with disabilities to the program. In intake 2 improvements were made to the program to help Albertans get back to work and help more employers find the help they need to assist with economic recovery.

Opening the program to Alberta businesses and nonprofits that were incorporated or registered for less than a year was one of the changes that was made. Reducing the minimum number of hours employees had to work under the program from 30 to 15 hours per week was one of the changes that were made. While the focus was on hiring unemployed and underemployed Albertans, employers were able to fill available positions with employed Albertans if there was a business need, which was already discussed in the first round of questioning.

Finally, reducing the number of positions that employers could apply for for an intake from 20 to 10 was an attempt to spread the program around amongst more employers themselves.

Ms Lovely: Thanks again for the good work that you and your team have accomplished.

Let's go to labour mobility. On page 32 of the report it talks about the work that your department has done to reduce barriers for Canadians licensed in other jurisdictions. You mentioned that the department has been working with other Canadian jurisdictions on

this issue. Can you expand on some of the changes that you've implemented? And in the next paragraph the report says that the average processing time decreased by 40 per cent from 2019 to 2020. What was the average processing time for 2021? And, finally, how was this decrease achieved?

9:40

Mr. McLeod: Part of the sort of crossjurisdictional work that we do: a pan-Canadian labour mobility working group operates under the forearm of labour market ministers and works towards removing barriers to labour mobility across provinces and territories. In 2021 the working group focused on improving communication and transparency of labour mobility requirements to ensure that workers in regulated occupations can benefit from opportunities in other jurisdictions and from streamlined certification processes for domestic mobility applicants.

In terms of the processing time for 2021, that information is not yet available. We're currently compiling that information and will provide it when it's available.

In terms of the 40 per cent decrease, how that was achieved, during 2020, in response to the pandemic, many regulatory bodies moved to remote work and increased their online services, making it more accessible. This, in particular, allowed us to decrease processing times as a result.

Ms Lovely: Thank you so much.

With that, I'd like to turn my remaining time over to my colleague MLA Mark Smith.

Mr. Smith: Thank you. Just for MLA Lovely's knowledge my daughter also graduated from Camrose, the University of Alberta program there.

Ms Lovely: It's Camrose day today.

Mr. Smith: Yeah, it is.

Well, I'd like to turn your attention to the Alberta advantage immigration program, if I could, for a few minutes here. On page 36 you mentioned that you created a new tech pathway under the express entry stream for the Alberta advantage immigration program. Now, what is the difference between a stream and a pathway? What are the advantages of creating the tech pathway? Why did you create a pathway for that particular sector?

Lastly, on page 38 of the annual report you give some numbers on the Alberta advantage immigration program retention. I see that the percentage of the Alberta advantage immigration program nominees who are still residing and working in Alberta one year after obtaining permanent residency is over 85 per cent. Why is retention a good measure of this program?

Thank you.

Mr. McLeod: Thank you for the questions. With respect to the difference between a stream and a pathway we'll probably have to do some work on choosing some different terminology in the future because – I agree – it certainly can be challenging for people to understand that. I think that in many ways people view those terms as interchangeable. In this case, however, the accelerated tech pathway, as opposed to the tech stream, is an alternative approach towards selection of candidates through the Alberta express entry stream. The general Alberta express entry stream, so the broader stream, uses selection factors to send notifications of interest based on dynamic economic priorities, which has minimum criteria such as a comprehensive ranking system score of at least 300.

In addition, the stream also uses one or more of the following selection factors that increase the chance of selection, those being:

having an Alberta job offer; being a graduate of a Canadian postsecondary institution; having a parent, child, or sibling who is a Canadian citizen or permanent resident living in Alberta; and/or having French as a first language. The accelerated tech pathway assures the same minimum criteria but also allows persons to express interest in being selected through a web form, so they can self-identify as someone who is interested in the tech world. The web form is based on additional criteria serving sector needs such as the person's primary occupation being an eligible tech occupation and the job offer from an Alberta employer being an eligible tech industry job. When the form is received, AAIP will send prospective eligible candidates a link to apply to the program. Once a person applies based on the link, the AAIP assesses their eligibility for pathway and, if eligible, issues an Alberta express entry stream nomination.

The advantages of creating the tech pathway and why we did it I think was your second question. This program really was designed in response to demand within the province and demand to both grow the sector but also demand from the sector saying they were simply short of people, so it was one of the tools that was used to help with that. It was designed to support economic recovery by accelerating the growth of the tech sector in the province and strengthening Alberta's tech workforce. The pathway has minimized the employer role in the process for recruiting foreign tech workers while providing maximum benefits to employers operating in a tech industry and provides an expedited process to employers as an alternative to the federal labour market impact assessment process. Tech professionals from across Canada and overseas with a job offer in an in-demand tech industry occupation are fast-tracked by the AAIP, getting them to permanent residence sooner. In addition, the AAIP will provide a work permit support letter to the employer to get their worker here faster while they wait for their permanent residency status. There are time and cost savings for employers because the pathway has no employer fees, and if the worker needs a work permit support letter from AAIP, it saves the employer the time and the cost of the LMIA process, being the labour market impact assessment process, that has to be complied with otherwise.

Your final question, I think, was referencing page 38 of the annual report, where we give some numbers with respect to retention under the AAIP and why that's important. It is important to monitor the outcomes of these nominations. Provincial nominee programs across Canada are designed to meet regional labour market needs. Really, fundamentally, what we're trying to do is that we're trying to get people to come to Alberta, and obviously we'd like them to stay, so if we monitor whether they're staying, that's sort of the best way we can figure that out, and if we have a high retention rate, it's obviously a bonus. So we're really happy to see that retention rate. We traditionally over time have had a very high retention rate in Canada with respect to our new Canadians that come to the province, so it's just been a real success, and we hope that that continues in the future.

Mr. Smith: How much time do I have? Three seconds. We'll cede it over to the opposite.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

We'll now go to the Official Opposition for 10 minutes, please.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Chair. My first set of questions deals with the critical worker benefit program, which is discussed on page 21 in the annual report. On May 7, 2020, the federal government announced \$347 million of funding for Alberta to provide wage top-ups to critical workers. That money flowed to the

province on June 1, 2020, and by the end of the summer of 2020 B.C. and Ontario had already completed the rollout of their programs, yet phase 1 of Alberta's program didn't conclude until March 2021. Why did Alberta's critical workers have to wait almost a year longer than workers in other provinces to receive the wage top-ups that the government committed to?

Mr. McLeod: As announced in 2020 but then also announced at the time that the critical worker benefit program was rolled out in early 2021, there was activity that was undertaken. Specifically, a total of \$12 million for a wage top-up for health care workers was made at that time, and there was also an additional \$18 million for designated workers caring for Alberta's most vulnerable made at that time. During the 2020 time period there was activity going on with respect to that program, specifically with respect to those two initiatives, and then there was a request made of the department to go and continue to work not only to help with, you know, the work that we'd done with respect to those two programs but also to reach out across ministries and develop a comprehensive plan with respect to this program.

So both the initial work but also the work that took place ultimately resulted in a program. We were hoping to have it sooner, but that's ultimately the time it took us to get that program together and get it through the approval process and roll it out. I would also say that – and I don't want to, I guess, use this as an excuse – it probably was as busy a time as our department has ever experienced, so I think that contributed to it a little bit as well.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, that's cold comfort to the people who had to wait, to know that the department was too busy to write them \$1,200 cheques.

The annual report says that the number of eligible workers across all eligible sectors was ultimately lower than the best estimates available to partner ministries. Now, according to the figures in the report the ministry provided the critical worker benefit to approximately 140,000 Alberta workers. They expected to provide many more, but the report doesn't say how many more. How many more workers did the government expect to qualify for the program?

9:50

Mr. McLeod: We were intending to spend the entire amount of the money and ultimately came very close to doing that. The challenge that we really faced was that we were using the best data we had, but it was not as solid as we . . .

Mr. Schmidt: I'm just looking for a number. If you could just tell me a number.

Mr. McLeod: We can get you the specific number.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you very much.

Mr. McLeod: Actually – sorry. Andre has it for you.

Mr. Schmidt: Okay.

Mr. Rivest: Yeah. Thanks, Shawn, and thanks, Member, for the question. The \$465 million, which was the total amount for the entire program, would have provided a benefit to approximately 380,000 workers. Ultimately, with the amount that was spent across the entire program, we ended up providing a benefit to just under 344,000 workers.

Mr. Schmidt: Three hundred and forty-four thousand workers. Okay. That is across all government.

How much did labour and immigration pay out to private-sector workers? That was specifically under your mandate.

Mr. Rivest: Correct. Labour and immigration in the first phase paid out \$121.3 million and in the second phase of the program \$63.6 million.

Mr. Schmidt: Yeah. Sorry; I wasn't clear. My question wasn't about the number of dollars, but how many people did you expect to qualify for the program for private-sector workers versus how many actually received the benefit?

Mr. Rivest: Yeah. I'll have to get back to you with those specifics.

Mr. Schmidt: There are 37,000 Albertans that you expected to get the benefit who ultimately didn't. This is important because eligibility requirements were a significant point of contention when the program rolled out. The government set the number of hours to qualify at a level three times higher than most other provinces. The eligibility period also did not include people who were working during the first wave of the pandemic. Many workers who thought that they were critical workers – food delivery drivers, workers in retail allowed to stay open during the most stringent public safety measures, like hardware and liquor stores – were not eligible for the program. Ultimately, the government spent less than you were expecting to, suggesting that the eligibility criteria excluded people who even the government thought should have qualified. So how were these eligibility criteria set?

Mr. McLeod: The eligibility criteria were set based on, principally, the desire to get funding into the hands of low-wage front-line workers who were working and providing essential services during the pandemic, in essence. Those were the basic considerations with respect to the program.

Mr. Schmidt: There were 37,000 fewer people on the list than you expected. Were there 37,000 people who ultimately didn't qualify, or would you say that you set the eligibility criteria too high?

Mr. McLeod: I don't think it was the eligibility criteria; it was our estimate of attempting to figure out how many people were in the various buckets and how to design the program in a way that allowed a reasonable estimate of the number of people who would apply relative to the funding that was available.

Mr. Schmidt: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. McLeod: It turned out that that was simply very challenging, and we oversubscribed throughout the program to attempt to address that issue. But each time when we did it, we didn't want to have a huge number of people disappointed, so we tried to get a number of eligible people that fit the program. Once again, we significantly oversubscribed, but at the end of the day there was about 5 per cent of the program that was underspent.

Mr. Schmidt: Right. So it's oversubscribed but underspent, which definitely could have been the unofficial motto of the government for the last three years.

Mr. McLeod: It wasn't over . . .

Mr. Schmidt: Who did the government consult with to set up the eligibility criteria?

Mr. McLeod: We consulted both internally and externally with respect to folks in industry. Once again, the principal . . .

Mr. Schmidt: Can I get a list? Do you have a list that you could table with the committee?

Mr. McLeod: We can table information with respect to that.

Mr. Schmidt: Okay. Thank you very much.

Mr. McLeod: The principal issue was not – I think we understood the labour market. I think we sort of understood the various buckets. Once again, the principal issue was attempting to figure out how many people were in that bucket and how many people would ultimately apply.

Mr. Schmidt: Okay. We'll dig into this a little bit more. At some point during the fiscal year in question it must have become clear that not all of the money allocated to the program was going to be spent, and that meant thousands of Albertans expecting a little help from a government that had committed to help them would be left on their own. Was the minister informed prior to the conclusion of the program that not all the money allocated to this program was going to be spent?

Mr. McLeod: Ultimately, as I say, a relatively small percentage of the money was not spent although we did our very best to spend all the money. The minister, as is normal, is apprised of all relevant sort of business that he should know about.

Mr. Schmidt: At the time the minister was informed, was a possibility of expanding eligibility to spend all of the money allocated ever considered?

Mr. McLeod: We didn't expand eligibility. What we did was that we went and expanded the basic buckets, the various pieces within the sector, that we were including in the program to try to maximize the spend. That was the way we increased the opportunity.

Mr. Schmidt: Sorry. Can you translate that into nonbureaucratic speak? What do you mean by expanding the buckets?

Mr. McLeod: I'll just read from this. Eligible private-sector workers in the second phase included truck drivers, agricultural workers, security guards, cleaners, funeral workers, employees at quick service and dine-in restaurants, and taxi and limousine services, which were not included in the first phase of the program.

Mr. Schmidt: Right. But, I mean, even during the second phase of the program it must have become clear that you weren't going to spend all of the money allocated, so was there any consideration of expanding the eligibility beyond what had already been expanded in phase 2 so that all of the money could be spent?

Mr. McLeod: We ran the program for two phases. We expanded the eligibility by occupation type, effectively, in the second phase. There was, as I say, approximately 5 per cent of the money that was left at the end of the program, and a decision was made to not go ahead with . . .

Mr. Schmidt: Who made that decision?

Mr. McLeod: The decision was made by government.

Mr. Schmidt: Specifically?

Mr. McLeod: The decision was made by government, ultimately in consultation with our minister and perhaps others.

Mr. Schmidt: Okay. It's incredibly frustrating.

So how much money was ultimately unspent? Sorry; you said 5 per cent.

The Chair: I've just lost the audio, but I think the time was up. Is that why? Okay. Very good.

We'll go to the government side for 10 minutes, then.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair. We'll focus our time for a few minutes here on the rural renewal and entrepreneur streams. We see on page 33 that in 2022 the government of Alberta launched two new immigration streams, the rural renewal and rural entrepreneur streams. Can you expand on who was eligible for each stream and what they have achieved since their launch? How did these streams differ from other active streams, and what has been the uptake of these new streams?

Thank you.

Mr. McLeod: Gosia, I'm just going to ask you – if not, I can do it, but are you available to answer that question, Gosia?

Ms Cichy-Weclaw: Yes, I am. For sure.

In terms of the eligibility for the rural entrepreneur stream there are a number of criteria that an entrepreneur needs to meet, and they relate to work experience. They need to have a minimum of three years of work experience in an active business as the owner, manager. They need to complete a minimum of high school equivalent to the Canadian standard.

They need to have a business plan with projected financials, with language requirements, and this is CLB 4 that is required for this particular category. They have to have a minimum net worth of \$300,000, with all assets being the candidate's or partner's own personal holdings. They need to invest a minimum of \$200,000 into the business, and there is a requirement around the ownership and creations of the job. There is a requirement that we need to create at least one full-time job for Canadian citizens or permanent residents.

Finally, they need to have a community support letter from a participating rural Alberta community, because this program is a partnership between the government of Alberta and communities. Communities are expressing interest in being part of this program, and they are enrolled, and then they are posted on our website so potential entrepreneurs across the world are aware which community is interested in them starting a business in this community.

10:00

In terms of achievement both the rural renewal and rural entrepreneur programs were launched on February 16, 2022, during the Premier's Summit on Fairness for Newcomers, so within the annual report time frame. It was just a few weeks when the program was in duration. That time was just spent to promote the program, and communities were starting to get ready to become part of the program. So we didn't have intake as expected because the program was just launched at the end of the fiscal year.

Mr. Smith: Okay. Let's start looking at employment rates, okay? Page 41 of the report shows the employment rate in the province over the past few years. I see that the employment rate bounced back significantly from 2020 to 2021. What factors do you think allowed for this increase to happen? How did this employment rate compare to other provinces? The report mentions that municipalities such as Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Camrose, and Drumheller had the lower employment rates in the province in 2021. What factors do you think contributed to these lower employment rates? Based on previous statistics, have these

municipalities consistently had a lower than average employment rate?

Mr. McLeod: Thank you for the question. As with many things employment related, there are a variety of factors related to that. In this case that rate is driven by a number of factors, including the economy, demographics, social factors, and others. A strong economy in particular can have a positive impact on the employment rate, but demographic factors like aging population and related things like that can certainly have a negative impact on it, so it's sort of a multifaceted indicator. Certainly, according to the '21-2030 Alberta occupational outlook labour demand and supply forecast for Alberta both employment levels and the total supply are expected to steadily rise over the next 10 years. As a result, the outlook suggests that the employment rate will remain stable over the coming years, which is obviously a good thing for us.

In terms of how this compares to other provinces, maybe I'll just start by defining it so that folks understand it. The employment rate is the number of persons employed expressed as a percentage of the population 15 years of age and older. In January 2023, outside the reporting time period but just for reference, Alberta had the highest employment rate of all provinces at 66.1 per cent, with Canada's employment rate being 62.5 per cent. This has typically been attributed to a relatively young population, with the average age in Alberta being 39, but also generally to the strength of the economy as well.

Finally, with respect to your question related to specific municipalities, Camrose, Drumheller, Lethbridge, and Medicine Hat have historically had lower employment rates relative to other economic regions in Alberta. The primary contributing factor to lower employment rates in these regions is an older population, with a higher proportion over 65, which I've indicated is part of the calculation but, obviously, a group that tends to be employed at a lesser rate.

Mr. Smith: Thank you.

I'll pass my time over to MLA Yaseen.

Mr. Yaseen: Good morning. I hope it's not as snowy as it is in Calgary for everybody else out there. It has probably snowed about at least a foot and a half over the last 24 hours.

My question here relates to OHS operations, occupational health and safety. I note on page 44 the number of inspections conducted each year, and I specifically note the year 2020-2021. In that year there were significantly more inspections done from the year before and the year after. I'm thinking that that may be related to COVID inspections, or was there a different reason for that?

Mr. McLeod: Thank you for the question, MLA Yaseen. I'm going to ask Myles Morris to provide an answer to your question.

Mr. Morris: Thanks, Deputy. In short, the pandemic brought about a new hazard to deal with in the workplace. That played out in terms of our inspection activity. Certainly, within the first year of the pandemic our inspection numbers rose significantly and did come down a bit the second year but were still higher than prepandemic levels. The primary driver is that there was a new issue on the scene, and we developed processes to make sure that we could keep up with that new issue in terms of our inspection activity.

Mr. Yaseen: Okay. Well, thank you.

I also see that the number of OHS written orders for 2021-2022 dropped heavily since 2019. What is the reason for that?

Mr. Morris: Thank you for that question. We're always refining our approach within occupational health and safety. Our officers have a variety of tools at their disposal to ensure that compliance

with legislative standards is met. Writing orders is one of those tools; however, we have noticed that there are many situations where our officer, in the course of conducting an inspection, can basically get compliance on the spot. Noting a noncompliance, asking work-site parties to take corrective action: it's done on the spot, and no orders are written. That's a more efficient process. It gets what we need in terms of getting compliance with legislative standards and gets work-site parties back to doing their regular work quicker. So greater use of that rather than jumping straight to an order is a primary explanation for that difference.

Mr. Yaseen: Well, thank you for that.

The number of businesses contacted for the first time also seems highly variable. Why was 2021-22 such an outlier compared to the previous two years? What's the long run . . .

Mr. Huffman: Mr. Yaseen. Mr. Yaseen, can you hear me?

Mr. Yaseen: Yeah.

Mr. Huffman: The timer sounded, so the time has run out there.

Madam Chair, can you hear me?

Mr. Deputy Chair, can you hear me?

Mr. Turton: Yes. Yes, I can hear you.

The Chair: I can hear you. Sorry.

Mr. Huffman: Oh, okay. Great. Thank you.

The Chair: Yes. Absolutely.

Mr. Huffman: Okay. The timer has run out, so we'll be going over to the Official Opposition for the third rotation.

The Chair: Okay. Sometimes I can't see when the — if it's Mr. Yaseen speaking, I can't see if the timer has run out, but I can if it's the deputy, and I also can't hear it. But I guess that's a problem that we can solve later.

We'll now go over to the Official Opposition for 10 minutes, please.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Chair. What a treat to see a minister ask questions about the report that he signed off on here at Public Accounts.

Anyway, the critical worker benefit program in Alberta was designed so that employers applied for the benefit on behalf of their employees. This is a stark contrast to other provinces, which designed their programs to allow for employees to apply directly. The government also committed more than \$30 million, when they announced the program, to employers for their so-called administrative costs, but the report doesn't mention how much was ultimately given to employers for their administrative costs. What was that number?

Mr. McLeod: Andre Rivest is going to answer your question.

Mr. Rivest: Thanks for the question. To answer the first piece around the administration costs, what occurred was that in order to deliver through employers, we added 7.66 per cent in terms of funding onto the payments that we were providing, and that was to cover the costs of CPP and EI that they may have, in terms of payroll expense, to provide the benefit to their employees. Each payment that went out was essentially the \$1,200 payment. Ultimately, it became a payment of \$1,292 per employee, and that was given to employers to cover those costs. As you mentioned,

they were clearly supporting the government and their employees by delivering the program.

Mr. Schmidt: What was the total spend, then?

Mr. Rivest: The total spend – we’d have to go back and provide you with a calculation, but ultimately it would just be a percentage of the overall amount spent on the program itself.

10:10

Mr. Schmidt: So if I took 7.66 per cent of \$465 million, that would give me an approximate estimate of how much was spent?

Mr. Rivest: Right. But . . .

Mr. Schmidt: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Rivest: . . . the \$465 million, too, just to be clear, was the total program allocation, and the amount spent was a lot less.

Mr. Schmidt: Right. So \$430 million was the total spend, so if I multiplied that by 7.66 per cent, I would get the administrative costs.

Mr. Rivest: That would be the rough amount. Now, I don’t have the specifics with me, but I do know there were a few employers that chose not to accept that additional payroll funding, so they did ultimately return that back to the department.

Mr. Schmidt: Okay. How many additional employees would have received the benefit if you hadn’t topped up employers’ administrative costs?

Mr. Rivest: The number of employees that would have received the benefit wasn’t affected by the payroll cost that was calculated into the program. Once again, to go back to the question in terms of the overall uptake, the uptake was not what we were hoping and what we expected in terms of the total amount, but it wouldn’t have prevented us from providing the benefit to every eligible worker had there been enough applying for the program.

Mr. Schmidt: So what mechanisms were in place to ensure that employers were applying on behalf of all their eligible employees?

Mr. McLeod: I think the principal mechanism that was in place was communication with respect to the program, so we attempted to ensure that all Alberta employers were aware of the program and, as a result, allowed them to apply.

Mr. Schmidt: Was there any audit or confirmation done of employers applying on behalf of all of their eligible employees? Was any of that verification work done?

Mr. McLeod: We are doing verification work currently. We think that the principal outstanding matter relates to whether that funding was in fact transferred from employers to employees. We don’t have any reason to believe that it wasn’t. We don’t have any evidence that it wasn’t, but that’s the only remaining, outstanding sort of audit type of work.

Mr. Schmidt: You weren’t looking for it, so of course there’s no evidence for it. You never find evidence for things you’re not looking for.

Was there any way for employees to know whether their employer had applied on their behalf?

Mr. McLeod: There was. We not only advertised the program, but we published a list of all employers who were participating in the

program, so you certainly were able as an employee to understand whether your employer might have applied.

Mr. Schmidt: Sure. But maybe my employer doesn’t like me and didn’t apply for me specifically, because you had to apply individually. How could I as an individual employee working at an eligible outfit know that the employer had applied on my behalf specifically as an individual?

Mr. McLeod: Go ahead, Andre.

Mr. Rivest: Thanks, Deputy. Thanks for the question. So just to expand on that, employees and folks were able to contact the department with any questions that they might have. We received a significant number of inquiries related to the program. Primarily, the inquiries were related to eligibility criteria and just essentially asking whether or not they were eligible for the program, and in all of the communication that we received through call centres and through direct contact with the minister’s office and through the department, there was no indication and there weren’t any sort of questions or flags being raised around folks indicating that they believed they were eligible and that they hadn’t received the payment.

In addition to that, as the deputy mentioned, we’re currently undertaking the postpayment verification, reaching out to a sample of employers, but the program did have in place what we referred to as a certificate of grant recipient. So the employers in the private sector that labour and immigration had delivered to were required to fill out a form and submit it as part of their grant agreement, essentially indicating that all of the eligible employees that they had applied for had received the benefit, and we’d receive that form from all of our employers. There was only a select few who we had to do some additional follow-up on, but virtually all of the employers on the private-sector side had provided that to us, which gave us further confidence that the employees had received their benefit.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you very much.

I quickly want to shift now to the Fair Registration Practices Act and the fairness for newcomers office, which is discussed on page 39 in the annual report. How many foreign-trained professionals are currently living in Alberta but are not working in their profession because their qualifications aren’t recognized? Just looking for a number.

Mr. McLeod: I don’t have that number for you today, but we can do our best to try and provide it.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you very much. A follow-up would be great.

Now, one of the objectives in the act and the office is to ensure that regulatory bodies provide an interim registration decision within six months. In the baseline survey summary published in December 2021 it was indicated that this was an objective that many regulatory bodies struggled to meet and that future reporting on this objective would be forthcoming. There’s no further reporting that I could find on the open government website. What was the timeline for reaching a hundred per cent compliance with this objective?

Mr. McLeod: Gosia, are you able to help us with that question?

Ms Cichy-Weclaw: The baseline was done in 2020, and a few regulators were identified as not meeting the interim decision timeline of six months. The fairness for newcomers office has worked with those professional regulatory bodies to help them

streamline processes and ensure that they are compliant with the act. In 2021 there were follow-up surveys done, and the data were analyzed, and that work is now with Skilled Trades and Professions since October.

Mr. Schmidt: When can Albertans expect the next report on the progress or lack thereof being made on these important objectives?

Ms Cichy-Weclaw: The other department is working on it. I don't have a time frame. We can get back to you on this question.

Thank you.

Mr. Schmidt: Okay. The baseline survey indicates that the six-month decision timeline is self-reported. What mechanisms are in place to ensure that the data that the regulatory organizations are submitting to you is reliable?

Mr. McLeod: Gosia, can I ask you to continue on this line of questioning?

Ms Cichy-Weclaw: The data was collected under the legislation. Yes, they are self-reported data. They are analyzed by the team. If there are any questions on the data, there are follow-up meetings set up with regulators to ask follow-up questions. In instances when information might not be clear or where the department had needed clarifications, there were different mechanisms to seek other information and confirm that the information is correct that was received.

Mr. Schmidt: Okay. Thank you.

Foreign qualification recognition is discussed on page 40 of the report. How many people were successfully placed in work that matched their skills and knowledge through this program, and what was the target number?

Ms Cichy-Weclaw: These programs that are discussed on page 40: they were intended to develop online tools. We didn't measure how many Albertans were actually successful in obtaining jobs because that was not the objective of the programs. The mentorship connection program was to develop online tools that could be used in small areas, in rural areas, and help people to understand mentorship concepts and online alternative career processes . . .

Mr. Huffman: Pardon me. The time has expired there again. Thank you.

Ms Cichy-Weclaw: Yes. Thank you.

The Chair: Yes. Once it goes beyond 30 seconds, I actually can't see the little window. Thank you for that.

We'll go to the government side for 10 minutes, please.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you. I will continue with my last question, which is related to the ministry of labour, not the ministry of multiculturalism and immigration. The number of businesses contacted for the first time also seemed highly variable. Why was 2021-2022 such an outlier compared to the previous two years? What is the long-term average for that?

Mr. McLeod: Myles, can I get you to continue with that, please?

10:20

Mr. Morris: Sure. Thank you for the question. Just some context around the new-employer visits or new-employer contacts. When that program was set up, it was set up based around having staff conduct in-person visits to new employers to provide information about occupational health and safety and employment standards.

Through the pandemic one of the things that shifted is that, like just about everywhere else in the world of work, we made greater use of technology and began accomplishing the objectives of that program through phone, through videoconference, and it enabled us to significantly expand our reach in terms of contacting new employers.

The content of the discussions with the new employers remains the same. The types of information provided about occupational health and safety and employment standards remain the same. It's just that we're able to do a lot more and a lot more efficiently using technology now, so we would expect, you know, the numbers to continue to be larger than they were previously.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you.

Still looking at page 44 of the annual report, it mentions that changes to part 13 and part 20 of the occupational health and safety code came into effect on December 1, 2021. Can you tell me more about the process the ministry used to determine these changes, and what was the feedback you received on the changes to part 13 and part 20 of the OHS code from Alberta industries and businesses?

Mr. McLeod: Myles, can I ask you to answer that question as well?

Mr. Morris: Sure. Thank you, Deputy.

In December 2019 the government committed to reviewing OHS legislation and associated regulations. The purpose of that review was to maintain or improve safety outcomes while reducing administrative burden; to simplify requirements and language; to remove duplication to improve clarity; to evaluate if outcomes can be improved through the use of performance-based requirements; to update technical provisions to reflect current best practices; to resolve inconsistencies or drafting errors that had occurred over the years to ensure that the legislation is implemented as intended; and then to align, where possible or where applicable, with other provinces. As part of that review, we looked at requirements for health and safety committees and representatives as well as radiation safety. The intent was to develop a framework for these areas in the OHS Act while moving technical details to the OHS code.

With respect to part 20, which relates to radiation in the OHS code, front-line department staff recognized that there was duplication between the former OHS Act and the Radiation Protection Act. This created confusion because many work sites did not recognize that both acts applied to radiation hazards at the same time. While there was considerable overlap between the two former acts, the requirements were not identical, which contributed to further confusion, and the process was to move forward to reconcile those differences and have all of those rules contained in one place, being the OHS code.

From a process perspective, the department conducted consultations in the summer of 2020. This included an online survey as well as virtual stakeholder sessions. The survey was open to the public. It received a total of 320 responses for the OHS changes and 12 for the radiation changes. This included 47 unions, labour associations, industry associations, employer groups, and health and safety or professional associations whose input the ministry specifically asked for.

With respect to part 13, which is health and safety committees, the department had heard that health and safety committees are a vital part of workplace health and safety. However, the requirements were seen by many to be overly complex or detailed and inflexible and made them difficult to comply with. This was especially true for work sites with multiple employers.

With these insights from stakeholders, changes to the health and safety committees and health and safety representative requirements

were made to help provide more flexibility when forming committees or establishing a health and safety representative that empowered workers to be involved in their work site's health and safety cultures. Essential elements of health and safety committees and health and safety representatives were maintained as the enabling framework in the act, and some of the technical requirements were moved to the OHS code, where they exist now.

The feedback has generally been positive with respect to these changes. With respect to the changes around radiation protection, I think it's a smaller set of stakeholders that deal with that issue in workplaces, but those changes have been generally well received. Feedback with respect to health and safety committees has generally been positive in that greater clarity is now provided to work-site parties.

Mr. Yaseen: Well, thank you for that detailed answer.

Also, one more question here, referring to page 44 again. The report mentions that a review of the OHS code started after updates to the act were completed. Can you tell me more about this cyclical plan to review the OHS code?

Mr. Morris: Yes. Thank you for that. Under the OHS Act the minister is required to publish a plan for the review of the OHS code every three years. The OHS code is a ministerial regulation that contains all of the technical requirements and rules that workplaces must follow to keep workers healthy and safe. Technical requirements in the code require regular updates to keep pace with changing workplace practices, evolving technologies, and other emerging issues and also to ensure interjurisdictional harmonization to support labour mobility and trade.

It's important that these reviews and updates are done on a routine basis to ensure that the code's requirements keep pace with those standards and don't become out of date. The OHS code review plan is published and provides Albertans with an understanding of the OHS code review work that is being conducted on a year-by-year basis, and that enables interested stakeholders to kind of plan and organize how they are going to participate in the process.

Mr. Yaseen: Okay. Well, thank you very much.

I will now pass on my remaining time to MLA Toor.

Mr. Toor: Thank you, MLA Yaseen, and thank you, Chair. I want to start by saying thank you to the department and the officials for joining us today and answering the very important questions to Albertans.

My question will be on the certificate of recognition program. Actually, I was glad to see on page 53 of the annual report that by the end of 2021-2022 for the certificate of recognition program, or the COR program, its requirements were reduced by an impressive 34.6 per cent. The question is: can you expand more about this program overall?

Mr. McLeod: This is a matter that Myles is responsible for, so I think I'll ask him to continue with this question.

Mr. Morris: Sure. Thank you, Deputy, and thank you for the question. The certificate of recognition program was established in 1989 to encourage Alberta employers to build occupational health and safety management . . .

The Chair: Okay. Very good. Thank you.

We'll go over to the Official Opposition side, please.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the officials for being here today to answer our questions. I want to begin by asking about the Anti-Racism Advisory Council, which is mentioned very briefly on page 19 of the annual report. Just for confirmation, the Anti-Racism Advisory Council was first established in 2017, and then, of course, recommendations were made by the council, which took some time to be disclosed to the public, but the ministry took over responsibility for the council in the fiscal year under consideration. Is that correct? Okay.

During the fiscal year of 2021 how often did the advisory council meet, and what support did the council receive directly from your ministry in their work?

Mr. McLeod: Gosia, can I ask you to take this question, please?

10:30

Ms Cichy-Weclaw: The council meets typically four times a year. The responsibility for the file was transferred to the ministry of labour and immigration in July 2021.

In terms of the support that the council received, we support council – the department has a secretariat that plays a support function in terms of support with the minutes, with the development of agenda, with the preparation and logistical aspects in terms of the preparations for those meetings. That kind of support was provided to council so that the meeting can be conducted and discussions can be held by the council.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you very much. Sorry if I cut you off. We just have short time here.

Later in 2022 the action plan for the antiracism work was released by government, so presumably the work was being done in the fiscal year under consideration, in 2021, and I'm wondering what role the council actually played in developing the action plan that was released by government and how much the ministry worked with the council to actually develop that action plan and what plans there were to fund the actions in that plan.

Ms Cichy-Weclaw: In terms of how we worked with the council, we received the council's recommendations. They were disclosed in 2021 to the public, and we used both recommendations as foundations for the development of the action plan. There was a thorough analysis conducted in terms of each recommendation that was provided by the council, and all those recommendations laid foundations, and some were reflected in the action plan that was released in 2022. The draft action plan was shared with the council prior to release in 2022.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you for that.

Obviously, the ministry, then, is still playing a key role in co-ordinating, and we know the action plan contains, you know, work that has to be done across many ministries, including what was labour and immigration, so what role is the ministry continuing to play now? At that time what was the plan to actually co-ordinate that work, and what were the targets and performance measures to ensure that that action plan was being completed?

Ms Cichy-Weclaw: The ministry had an ADM committee that is comprised of a number of departments across the government of Alberta. Info meetings were held to discuss council's recommendations and also the development of the action plan, and that was a very co-ordinated effort that government undertook to ensure that the action plan that's going to be released reflects the very comprehensive work that is done by the department and also reflects recommendations received from the council.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you. If I may, it was quite disappointing to see how little the work of the advisory council, the antiracism work, was reflected in this annual report, considering it is a major commitment by the government. It should be at least a major commitment. It should be reflected in the work of the ministry that is leading that council work. That's a recommendation for the ministry going forward.

I want to go back to the Alberta advantage immigration program streams and, in particular, talking about the rural renewal stream and the rural entrepreneur stream. As I see from the annual report on page 36, you know, it indicates that there's no real uptake on that yet or nothing to report, I suppose, on that uptake. What are the targets for those two particular streams from the ministry in terms of applications and approvals?

Ms Cichy-Weclaw: In terms of rural renewal how the stream works: it's really a two-step process, and it's really a community-driven stream. The community applies to government of Alberta, to Alberta advantage immigration program, and they put forward the application indicating that they want to be part of the program. Since the launch of the program in February 2022 we have approved over 60 communities to participate in the program. Once the community is approved, they start the recruitment process, and they attract workers from abroad. We are expecting a very steady flow of applications given the number of communities that are involved in this program.

In terms of the rural entrepreneurial stream the program works somewhat similar. It's also driven by the communities. They need to be interested in the program. They identify to us that they want to participate, that they are ready to welcome entrepreneurs, or that they have some businesses that they potentially are thinking that could be sold, and they interact directly with entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs need to come and do an exploratory visit, and then once . . .

Ms Pancholi: Thank you very much. Sorry. I'm just going to cut you off a little bit just because of time.

It doesn't sound like there was actually a target, though. It sounds like it's being driven by perhaps interests from the rural communities, but there's no target by the ministry. That sort of does answer my question.

I'm going to go to page 36 as well on the same topic, about the graduate entrepreneur and foreign graduate entrepreneur streams. The annual report indicates that there was no uptake and that changes were made to improve uptake, and I'm wondering what changes were made to improve uptake in those two streams going forward.

Ms Cichy-Weclaw: We changed criteria in both of those streams. In terms of the foreign graduate we worked with the designated agencies. There are two designated agencies that help promote the program, and they help also to ensure that applicants who apply to us are ready. We worked with those agencies. They identified some areas for improvement, and we adjusted criteria. We lowered the language benchmark from CLB 7 to CLB 5, and we also extended the education. Initially we were looking to target entrepreneurs who graduated within the past two years, and we extended this criteria to the 10-year time frame to help with intake. We also made some changes to the international grad stream, which is focused on Alberta graduates, and we removed the work requirement. As such, you can apply just after school to the program, and also we allowed those who already started businesses to apply to the program.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you very much.

I'm going to switch gears now to go back, actually, to the jobs now program. I want to go back to a response that the deputy provided around how they targeted which labour markets or which sectors would require or be eligible for this. I'm curious because in both the economic recovery plan that was issued by the government of Alberta, it indicated, at least on paper, that child care was a key part of economic recovery, yet we know that the child care sector was not eligible for the jobs now program despite there being a significant labour shortage at the time and continuing to this day to the point that the GOA is now actively recruiting child care educators. Why was the child care sector excluded from this critical program when child care was supposedly a key part of the economic recovery plan of this government?

Mr. McLeod: I don't have a specific response for you right now. We had many, many discussions on various sectors that would be included and wouldn't be included based on the volume of people by occupational code. I'd have to go back and refresh my memory as to the discussion in that regard, and I can get back to you.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you. If you can also indicate – you know, there's a difference between nonprofit and private child care operators. Indicate if there was any distinction between the two. I don't believe either were eligible for the jobs now program.

I'm going to go, actually, to the Auditor General's report related to the First Nations training to employment programs. Specifically, the annual report on page 28 indicates some of the programs that received funding, but it doesn't indicate how much funding was actually provided to each of the programs, the First Nations training to employment and the Aboriginal training to employment program. How much was allocated to each of those programs?

Mr. McLeod: I think Andre can give you that information.

Ms Pancholi: Given time, perhaps I'll just ask that you table that information with the committee afterwards as well as whether that was a full budgeted amount for those programs that was actually spent. If you can table that information.

What are the targets and the objectives and performance evaluations for these two programs, or now the one program?

Mr. McLeod: We are continuing the work with respect to the Auditor's program, but generally these programs are partnerships with First Nation communities, both on- and off-reserve, and it's a capacity-building, it's an employment-related program. The goal is to increase employment both on- and off-reserve.

The Chair: Okay. I believe the time has elapsed, hon. members.

We'll go over to the government side, please.

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Chair. I just want the deputy to continue the same answer on the certificate of recognition program.

10:40

Mr. Morris: Thank you. You had asked in general terms what the certificate of recognition program is all about. It's a program that was established in 1989 to encourage Alberta employers to build occupational health and safety management systems and take a proactive approach to reducing the human and financial costs of work-related injuries and illness. The program is voluntary and is delivered through the combined efforts of the department, 10 certifying partners, and the Workers' Compensation Board. Employers can earn a certificate of recognition after a successful audit of their OHS management system by a certified auditor that meets the scoring and quality requirements established by the

provincial program standards. So in general terms that's what the program is about.

In addition, I would add that achieving the certificate of recognition enables employers to be eligible for rebates or savings on their workers' compensation premiums.

Mr. Toor: Thank you.

How did this benefit Alberta employers?

Mr. Morris: Well, from the department perspective, we think there is tremendous value in employers implementing a health and safety management system that meets program standards and is subject to audit. Taking a systems approach to preventing injuries and illness pays off immensely in terms of preventing injuries at the work site. In addition, as I mentioned, the program results in employers becoming eligible for additional savings through the workers' compensation system.

Mr. Toor: Thank you.

My next question will be for the employment standards complaint resolution. If you look at page 54 of the annual report, it indicates that the average days to begin an employment standard investigation decreased significantly from 26 days in 2020-21 to just 12 days in the past year while the number of complaints remained relatively stable. So the question is: can you tell me how the ministry was able to significantly improve the performance in this area?

Mr. Morris: Thank you for that question. Timely resolution of employment standards complaints is a priority for the department and the employment standards program. Over the fiscal year in question and previous years the department worked to maintain timely, fair, and quality services to employers and employees. Really, in terms of the reduction in the amount of time to begin an investigation, there were a number of factors that came together kind of all at once. The department and the program had made significant efforts to streamline our internal processes to reduce the time it takes us to get things moving and to do our work, so that played a big part of that.

In addition, while you noted that the complaint levels in 2020-21 and 2021-22 remained relatively stable, for both of those years the number of complaints received was down a fair bit from prepandemic levels. So that did enable us to get caught up on our timely service delivery and get things back to a place where Albertans are receiving much quicker service and now being able to maintain those levels.

Mr. Toor: Thank you.

If you also look at page 55, same page in the same annual report, it indicates that not all the situations lend themselves to a voluntary resolution. So the question is: what sort of situations wouldn't lend themselves to a voluntary resolution?

Mr. Morris: Thank you for the question. Voluntary resolution is the preferred or first approach for employment standards officers to resolve disputes. Through education and sharing information, both parties to a complaint are in a position to resolve their differences and reach compliance. We find that this approach is more efficient, less time consuming, and provides fair outcomes for both parties. That said, as you note, there are circumstances where voluntary resolution cannot be achieved. This can include complaints where parties wish to have the matter reviewed by an appeal body, or there are also some unfortunate situations where businesses have ceased operating and simply there's no way to resolve things voluntarily because there's no employer to pay to resolve the complaint.

Thank you.

Mr. Toor: Thank you very much.

The rest of the time I can pass on to my colleague MLA Panda.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, MLA Toor, and thank you, Chair. Can you hear me?

Mr. Huffman: Yeah, we can hear you in the room. Thank you.

Mr. Panda: Thank you.

On page 22 of the annual report – I'm referring to the Canada-Alberta job grant program – I noticed that there was a significant increase in the number of Canada-Alberta job grant applications approved. It went up from 5,031 in 2020-21 to 9,024 applications approved in '21-22. The annual report also mentions that changes were made to the program eligibility in February 2021. Can you tell me more about the program changes that were made and how those changes benefited Albertans and Alberta employers?

Mr. McLeod: Thank you for the question. The Canada-Alberta job grant, as you may know, is a federal-provincial partnership through which employers and government share the cost of training Alberta employees. CAJG aims to increase employer investment and training, productivity, worker skills, and worker retention. I would say that it's really the sole, real employer-funded program on an ongoing basis that the government has. The initial '21-22 budget for CAJG was \$13.4 million; additional mid-year adjustments brought the total budget to \$31.4 million in response to principally higher employer demand for the program. The program is funded using a combination of labour market development agreement and workforce development agreement allocations.

In terms of the portion of your question referencing changes, in February 2021 temporary program changes were made to encourage economic recovery in response to the pandemic. The changes expanded eligibility criteria, making the program more accessible to small employers and family-owned and -operated businesses. There were three specific changes, or significant changes, with respect to the eligibility criteria: first, mandatory training allowed employers to fund required courses that are legislated or mandatory for a job, including training for truck drivers; family members allowed employers to fund courses for employed family members within a business; and small businesses allowed employers with fewer than four employees, including the owner, to invest in their own skills development.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Deputy.

I'll get back to you if time permits, but I also want to ask another important question about the Alberta immigrant mentorship innovation grant. That's a great program, which is intended to support immigrants to use their personal skills and contribute to Alberta's economy. Could you tell me more about the grant program and also about the organizations or types of organizations that received such funding, briefly?

Mr. McLeod: The Alberta immigrant mentorship innovation grant supports organizations in delivering mentorship programs. It helps newcomers find meaningful employment based on their work experience, education, and skills. It does this by matching newcomer professionals with mentors. New Albertans can establish professional connections that help them find meaningful employment and strengthen Alberta's workforce. The grant is intended to support immigrants to use their professional skills and contribute to Alberta's economy. The grant also aims to increase employer and community capacity to provide mentorship programming and to have a positive effect on labour attraction and retention efforts. Maybe I'll just quickly say with respect to ...

The Chair: Thank you, hon. members.

We'll now go to the Official Opposition side, please.

10:50

Ms Pancholi: We're reading questions. Is that correct?

Mr. Huffman: That's correct.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you.

Can the department please table with this committee, just to cut off the last conversation we had, any performance measurements that have been developed or are in the works related to the First Nations training to employment programs that will provide Albertans with some indication as to how those funds are being used and what the outcomes are of those programs?

Page 31 of the annual report indicates that the IQAS issued almost 18,000 assessment certificates, which is 1,000 fewer than the year before and 4,500 fewer than in 2019. Can the department indicate why they believe there's been a decrease? Have there been fewer requests for assessments, or what does the ministry attribute that decrease to?

With respect to the Alberta advantage immigration program streams what is the average length of time for approvals of applications in 2021 by stream, and how does this compare with other provinces and jurisdictions?

With respect to red tape reduction page 63 of the annual report states that in 2021 the ministry reduced 1,812 regulatory requirements as part of its red tape reduction objectives. Please table with this committee a detailed list of each of the 1,812 regulatory requirements that were eliminated or reduced in 2021.

With respect to the fair practices registration what are the barriers preventing regulatory bodies from achieving the six-month decision time frame? In the opinion of the ministry is it staffing, and if so, did the government make any estimates as to the additional cost to the regulatory agencies for achieving these timelines? And who does the government anticipate to cover those costs? Is it government or the members of the regulatory agencies through their membership fees?

I'll turn over the remaining time to my colleague MLA Renaud.

Ms Renaud: Thank you.

The jobs now program: would you please table with the committee the average earnings of the 2 per cent of disabled employees in the jobs now program and what the range was, so the low end and the high end, as well for nondisabled workers, so the 98 per cent of the 12,687, what the salary range was for those 12,687 positions, the low and the high? As well, the ministry agreed to give us a breakdown of the 12,687 jobs by sector. Could you also break that down by geographic sort of areas, whether it was Edmonton, Calgary, rural, suburban? Were there any sector targets, and if so, would the ministry please table those sector targets for the jobs now program?

Thank you.

The Chair: Anything more from the Official Opposition?

Seeing none, we'll go over to the government side, please.

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. The government side has no read-in questions at this time.

The Chair: Okay. Very good. Thanks very much, everyone.

I'd like to thank officials from the Ministry of Jobs, Economy and Northern Development and the office of the Auditor General for their participation in responding to committee members' questions. The committee asks that any outstanding questions be responded to in writing within 30 days and forwarded to the committee clerk.

Now, moving on, hon. members, at our meeting last week, on February 14, the committee was advised that a draft annual report to the Legislature on the committee's activities during the calendar year 2022 would be prepared. The draft report was posted on the committee's internal website on Wednesday, February 15, for our review. I would like to open the floor to any comments, questions, or motions in relation to that annual report to the Assembly for 2022. I'm not seeing any discussion on this matter right now. I'm just going to look to the floor one more time because I'm not in the room, giving people a chance to pipe up.

Okay. I'll ask that someone move that

the Standing Committee on Public Accounts approve the draft 2022 annual report of the committee to the Legislative Assembly as distributed.

Mr. Smith: So moved.

The Chair: Thank you. I can't see the floor now that the motion is up on the screen, so thank you for that.

Now we'll go to discussion on the motion. I'm going to rely on the clerk. I don't think anyone has signalled that there are any members wishing to discuss.

Mr. Huffman: No, Madam Chair. There have been no members.

The Chair: Okay. Very good, then. We will now call for the vote. All in favour? And now I'm in a position where I can neither see nor hear the committee. Oh, I need to unmute. All in favour? Are there any opposed? All right. Seeing none, then, that motion is carried.

Friends, we'll move on to item 6 on our agenda. As this may be the final meeting of the committee prior to the dissolution of the 30th Legislature, the committee should consider how it will approve the minutes of today's meeting. A process recently followed by some other committees has been to authorize the chair to approve the final minutes after they've been distributed to committee members for their review. I'll open the floor for a discussion and a possible motion.

Mr. Clerk, if you could let me know if there's anyone signalling, that would be helpful at this point.

Mr. Huffman: Does anyone have any comments?

Ms Pancholi: I'll just . . .

Mr. Huffman: Oh, sure.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll just indicate my agreement with this. I know some of our other members sit on other committees, and we have seen this process followed, where the chair approves the final meeting minutes. I don't see any concern with that.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'll look to the floor, then, for an hon. member to move the motion that

the Standing Committee on Public Accounts authorize the chair to approve the minutes of the February 21, 2023, meeting of the committee after they have been circulated to committee members for review.

Is there any discussion on – sorry. First I need someone to move it.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll move that motion.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Is there any discussion on this motion?

Mr. Huffman: Not hearing anything in the room.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Clerk.

I will, then, call for a vote. All in favour? Are there any opposed?
Seeing none,
that motion is carried.

Thank you.

We'll now move on to other business. Are there any other items for discussion under other business?

Mr. Stephan: Thanks, everyone.

The Chair: Thank you, Member Stephan.

Seeing none, then I'll call – first is that the date of the next meeting is at the call of the chair.

I'll now call for a motion to adjourn. Would a member move that the meeting be adjourned?

Mr. Smith: So moved.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Smith.

With that, all in favour? Are there any opposed?

Thank you. This meeting is now adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 10:58 a.m.]

