



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
First Session

Standing Committee
on
Alberta's Economic Future

Ministry of Labour and Immigration
Consideration of Main Estimates

Wednesday, November 6, 2019
9 a.m.

Transcript No. 30-1-8

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

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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

Allard, Tracy L., Grande Prairie (UCP)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UCP)
Bilous, Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (NDP)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)*
Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP)
Horner, Nate S., Drumheller-Stettler (UCP)
Irwin, Janis, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP)
Issik, Whitney, Calgary-Glenmore (UCP)
Jones, Matt, Calgary-South East (UCP)
Reid, Roger W., Livingstone-Macleod (UCP)
Rehn, Pat, Lesser Slave Lake (UCP)**
Rowswell, Garth, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright (UCP)
Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UCP)
Toor, Devinder, Calgary-Falconridge (UCP)

* substitution for Deron Bilous

** substitution for Whitney Issik

Also in Attendance

Ganley, Kathleen T., Calgary-Mountain View (NDP)
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (NDP)

Support Staff

Shannon Dean	Clerk
Stephanie LeBlanc	Clerk Assistant and Senior Parliamentary Counsel
Teri Cherkewich	Law Clerk
Trafton Koenig	Parliamentary Counsel
Philip Massolin	Clerk of Committees and Research Services
Sarah Amato	Research Officer
Nancy Robert	Research Officer
Michael Kulicki	Committee Clerk
Jody Rempel	Committee Clerk
Aaron Roth	Committee Clerk
Karen Sawchuk	Committee Clerk
Rhonda Sorensen	Manager of Corporate Communications
Jeanette Dotimas	Communications Consultant
Tracey Sales	Communications Consultant
Janet Schwegel	Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Participants

Ministry of Labour and Immigration

Hon. Jason C. Copping, Minister

Maryann Everett, Assistant Deputy Minister, Workforce Strategies

Sean McLeod, Deputy Minister

Jody Young, Assistant Deputy Minister, Safe, Fair and Healthy Workplaces

9 a.m.

Wednesday, November 6, 2019

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

**Ministry of Labour and Immigration
Consideration of Main Estimates**

The Chair: Thank you, everyone. I'd like to call the meeting to order and welcome everyone. The committee has under consideration the estimates of the Ministry of Labour and Immigration for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2020.

I'd ask that we go around the table and have all MLAs introduce themselves for the record. Minister, please introduce the officials that are joining you at the table. I am Glenn van Dijken, MLA for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock and chair of this committee. We will continue to my right.

Ms Goehring: Good morning. I'm Nicole Goehring, the MLA for Edmonton-Castle Downs and the deputy chair of this committee.

Mr. Jones: Matt Jones, MLA for Calgary-South East.

Mrs. Allard: Good morning. Tracy Allard, MLA for Grande Prairie.

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

Mr. Horner: Good morning. Nate Horner, MLA, Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Reid: Good morning. Roger Reid, MLA, Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Copping: Morning. Jason Copping, Minister of Labour and Immigration. To my far left I have Deputy Minister Shawn McLeod. On my immediate left I have the director of financial planning, Andre Rivest. To my right, the assistant deputy minister of workforce strategies, Maryann Everett, and sitting beside her is the assistant deputy minister of safe, fair, and healthy workplaces, Jody Young.

Ms Gray: Good morning. I'm MLA Christina Gray, representing Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Ganley: Good morning. MLA Kathleen Ganley, representing Calgary-Mountain View.

Mr. Nielsen: Good morning, everyone. Chris Nielsen, MLA for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Deol: Good morning, everyone. Jasvir Deol, MLA for Edmonton-Meadows.

The Chair: I'd like to note the following substitutions for the record: MLA Deol for MLA Bilous and MLA Rehn for MLA Issik.

Please note that the microphones are operated by *Hansard*, and the committee proceedings are being live streamed on the Internet and broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV. Please set your cellphones and other devices to silent for the duration of this meeting.

Hon. members, the standing orders set out the process for consideration of the main estimates. Standing Order 59.01(6) establishes the speaking rotation while the speaking time limits are set out in Standing Order 59.02(1). In brief, the minister will have 10 minutes to address the committee. At the conclusion of his comments we begin a 60-minute speaking block for the Official

Opposition, followed by a 20-minute speaking block for the government caucus.

The rotation of speaking times will then alternate between the Official Opposition and the government caucus, with individual speaking times being set to five minutes that, when combined with the minister's time, makes it a 10-minute block. Remember that discussion should always flow through the chair at all times regardless of whether or not the speaking time is combined. Members are asked to advise the chair at the beginning of their rotation if they wish to combine their time with the minister's time. If members have any questions regarding speaking times or the rotation, please feel free to send a note or e-mail to either the chair or the committee clerk.

A total of three hours has been scheduled to consider the estimates of the Ministry of Labour and Immigration. The scheduled end time of today's meeting is 12 p.m. With the concurrence of the committee I will call a five-minute break near the midpoint of the meeting; however, the three-hour clock will continue to run. Does anyone oppose having the break? Thank you.

Ministry officials may be present and at the direction of the minister may address the committee. Ministry officials seated in the gallery, if called upon, have access to a microphone in the gallery area. Pages are available to deliver notes or other materials between the gallery and the table. Attendees in the gallery may not approach the table. Space permitting, opposition caucus staff may sit at the table to assist their members; however, members have priority to sit at the table at all times.

If debate is exhausted prior to three hours, the ministry's estimates are deemed to have been considered for the time allotted in the schedule and the committee will adjourn. Points of order will be dealt with as they arise, and the meeting clock will continue to run; however, the timer for the speaking block will be paused.

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

The vote on the estimates and any amendments will occur in Committee of Supply on November 19, 2019. Amendments must be in writing and approved by Parliamentary Counsel prior to the meeting at which they are moved. The original amendment is to be deposited with the committee clerk, and 20 copies of the amendment must be provided at the meeting for committee members and staff.

I now invite the Minister of Labour and Immigration to begin with his opening remarks. Minister, you have 10 minutes.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and good morning, everyone. I'm here today to discuss the Labour and Immigration 2019-20 budget estimates and 2019-23 business plan. I've already introduced my colleagues at the table, but in the gallery I also have with me Ms Janet MacEachern, chief of staff; Ms Rachel Stein, chief of staff to the deputy minister; Ms Brittany Baltimore, press secretary, Labour and Immigration; and Ms Amanda Krumins, assistant director of communications for Labour and Immigration.

Over the past several years Albertans have been concerned with the direction our province was going. They were concerned with unemployment, they were worried about overspending, they felt that the Alberta advantage was slipping away, and this past spring they made it very clear they wanted change. Our government was given a clear mandate to restore jobs and the economy. Budget 2019-20 is a balanced plan to create jobs, grow the economy, and protect vital services, and Labour and Immigration's 2019-20 budget supports that goal. My ministry budget is focused on ensuring that spending is targeted where we are getting the most bang for our buck.

Given Alberta's current economic circumstances one of our most important priorities is supporting Albertans to train for and find good jobs. We are being efficient with our spending and making sure that spending is going to programs and services where it will make the most difference in the lives of Albertans. We are supporting government's goal to chart a path back to balance through targeted reductions and thoughtful reallocations, away from wasteful, inefficient, and unnecessary spending. The story of our budget is not only about where we've made the hard decisions to cut; it's also about where we've committed to invest. We are focused on making life better for Albertans while living within our means.

I want to take this opportunity to walk you through the biggest changes in our budget and provide you with information regarding what we are doing, why we're doing it, and who it affects. First, I'd like to talk about training supports. We are investing in training that leads to full-time employment, especially for Albertans who have been adversely affected in the economic downturn. This includes oil and gas workers, coal workers, indigenous communities, young people, and newcomers. For example, the Canada-Alberta job grant, which helps employers train their staff, including young graduates, is part of this plan; the training for work program, which can assist recent graduates with short-term skills training and work experience, leading to employment; and the indigenous training program, including both aboriginal training to employment and First Nations training to employment; and these programs that offer short-term training opportunities leading to employment.

In addition to these training supports, we're also supporting the coal workforce transition program. We are committed to supporting Alberta workers impacted by the phase-out of coal. Approximately 1,100 workers were affected by the coal phase-out when the program began. A total of 219 individuals received assistance from Alberta Labour and Immigration between January 2018 and August 2019, for a maximum of approximately \$9.6 million in grant support. Another 73 received tuition vouchers from Advanced Education, representing a total of approximately \$870,000. We are pleased to say that the funding for the displaced worker program will continue through the technology innovation and emissions reduction fund. We will ensure that those impacted by the policies of the previous government will not be left behind.

Now I'd like to turn my attention to STEP, or the summer temporary employment program. While we are continuing our focus on programs that work, we've also made a choice to live within our means. One of the biggest decisions that we made in our budget was to eliminate the program known as STEP. This program provided funding to eligible employers to hire high school or postsecondary students into summer jobs that lasted between four and 16 weeks. They received a wage subsidy of \$7 per hour. In total the program cost our government approximately \$10 million a year in grants and \$500,000 a year to administer. Eliminating STEP after the 2019 program year will save approximately \$32 million over four years. The STEP program was an inefficient use of government funds to support student employment. We're taking a more cost-effective and lasting approach to this goal. Although STEP subsidized short-term employment for students, the jobs were not necessarily in their field of study. Other programs and supports are available to support long-term employment and help students take the first steps in their careers.

9:10

STEP participants make up a small proportion of students in Alberta. In 2018 there were 169,000 high school students in Alberta, and in the same year STEP supported about 370 students under 18 years old. That's less than 1 per cent. In 2017-2018

Alberta's postsecondary institutions had 263,000 part-time and full-time students, and in 2018 STEP supported about 2,700 students aged 18 or older, again roughly 1 per cent. The money was also not targeted to employers that required the money to hire. Many of these employers may have hired these students whether they received the subsidy or not. While we sympathize with employers and students who are hoping to receive funding in 2020, Albertans elected us to get the province's financial house in order. Difficult decisions are required in all government expenses, and in this case other resources and programs are available to support employers and youth.

In addition to government programs tailored to supporting young people looking for jobs and job training, we've taken action to make hiring students more affordable year-round with a job-creation student wage, changes to general holiday pay and overtime rules, the job-creation tax cut, and cuts to red tape that can cost businesses thousands of dollars per year. In essence, our focus is on reducing the costs for employers so they can hire more Albertans, including students and youth.

In addition to eliminating unnecessary and inefficient spending, our budget is also investing where it can to make a real difference. One of these areas seeing an increase in funding is immigration. Alberta has always been the destination of choice for thousands of talented and qualified people from around the world, but the world is changing, and the same old strategies aren't enough. Alberta is in a global race for the best and the brightest newcomers. We need talented, ambitious, and entrepreneurially driven newcomers. Period. Unfortunately, we are falling behind when it comes to competing with other countries. A big reason for that is that the province's last immigration strategy was developed in 2005.

One of the core planks in our platform, which is supported in this budget, is a modern, updated strategy for economic immigration. We have already taken steps to remove obstacles that have held back immigrants in Alberta for a long time. The Fair Registration Practices Act, which we passed in June, eliminates unjust barriers to registration in regulated professions and trades for new and foreign-trained Albertans. The act creates a fair registration practices office, also known as the fairness to newcomers office, to work with regulators to speed up and simplify the assessment process. The office will also publicly identify regulatory bodies with unreasonable barriers and hold them to account. To establish the new office, as well as supporting other activities as part of the new Alberta advantage immigration strategy, Labour and Immigration's budget will allocate \$2.5 million to support these initiatives. This is an important step towards making Alberta a place where skilled newcomers can integrate easily, work in their chosen professions, and contribute to the economy and to the province.

Another change in our budget relating to immigration is the introduction of a fee for the Alberta immigration nomination program. The AINP is an economic immigration program to nominate individuals for permanent residence. Nominees must have skills and abilities to fill job shortages in Alberta and be able to provide for their families. This fee will improve processing efficiency by ensuring government resources are directed towards applications that are eligible, paid, and fully committed. An application fee is common in most other provinces, and this will better align Alberta with the rest of Canada while supporting an immigration framework that prioritizes Alberta's current economic needs.

As I said earlier, Budget 2019-20 focuses funds where they make the most difference. When it comes to safe, healthy, and fair workplaces, this means keeping Alberta workers safe on the job. We want the world to know that Alberta is open for business, but we also want them to know that our rules and regulations are world-

class and that in Alberta we don't cut corners when it comes to treating workers fairly and protecting their safety. As such, we will continue to proactively work with employers to ensure they are in compliance with our regulations and codes through education and inspections. In support of our government's mandate to targeted reductions in spending, several grants in this area have been reduced or eliminated in this year's budget. These include the farm health and safety producer grant program and the occupational health and safety futures and OHS innovation and engagement grant programs.

Last night I was honoured to attend the Alberta Fire Fighters Association legislative reception. There is no higher form of public service than to risk one's life in the maintenance and protection of public safety, and I was proud to speak about our government's platform commitment to establish a fund to provide benefits for families of first responders who tragically die in the line of duty and to boost support for first responders who have been diagnosed with posttraumatic stress disorder as a result of their service. That commitment is reflected in our budget. We are committing \$9 million over the next three years, starting in 2020-21, to implement first responders' support and the heroes fund. That funding will support our government's platform commitment to create a heroes fund modelled on the federal memorial grant program for first responders. We've also committed to work with the government of Canada to improve services for first responders.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

For the hour that follows, members of the Official Opposition and the minister may speak. The timer will be set for 20-minute intervals so members are aware of the time duration that has expired.

I would call on MLA Gray to begin with your time with the minister. Would you like to combine time?

Ms Gray: Yes, I would, if the minister is amenable.

Mr. Copping: Yeah.

The Chair: Yes. Please proceed.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much. Thank you very much, Minister, for your opening remarks. To begin, I want to say thank you to all of the staff who are here to support the estimates process. I will apologize in advance if at any point I cut someone off. I have a lot of questions and the time goes very fast, which I know from my experience previously with estimates. I will try where possible to be specific with questions, and I really appreciate everybody's time today.

I'm going to start by going through the expenses by vote just to check my understanding for some of the items that are there. What we're seeing overall is a 3 per cent decrease in spending by the Ministry of Labour, but for individual line items there are significant variances, so I just want to talk about a few of these to begin with. Starting with 2.1, settlement and integration, the funding that helps increase the availability for newcomers to successfully settle and integrate in Alberta, including the funding that goes to immigrant-serving agencies, I note that there's a decrease of 8 per cent, but, Minister, in your opening comments you mentioned an increase in investment in immigration. Are there other line items that include immigration-related services?

Mr. Copping: There are two other line items, which includes item 2.5, labour qualifications and mobility. This item helps to ensure that workers from across Canada and internationally receive recognition of their qualifications so they are able to apply their

skills and work to their full potential in Alberta's labour market. This includes the international qualifications assessment service, IQAS, and that really looks at education credentials. It includes foreign qualifications recognition, and Labour and Immigration, our department, works with stakeholders to improve the system, whereby internationally trained individuals' credentials are recognized by professional regulatory organizations and employers. That also includes a fairness to newcomers office. The office, again, which is part of the Fair Registration Practices Act: the intent is to work with trade and professional licensing bodies to streamline, simplify, and accelerate foreign credential recognition, with the goal of giving applicants for licensure a clear answer within six months or less of their application. This is item 2.5.

The next item is 2.4, labour attraction and retention. That also includes supports and involves immigration. A number of programs and services which touch on newcomers include the Alberta immigrant nominee program. The hon. member is pretty much aware of what it deals with, but it's our economic . . .

Ms Gray: Yes. Thank you.

Mr. Copping: Yes. Immigration program outreach: this involves workforce strategy staff to deliver online and in-person presentations in support of partnership with settlement agencies, postsecondary institutions, and the federal government on Alberta's immigration pathways. It includes the investment attraction support, where we provide information and support through workforce programs and services to help investors find and attract and retain workers needed to establish their businesses; the immigrate to Alberta information service, which is a telephone and e-mail contract service providing information on programs available to support both temporary and permanent employment and settlement in Alberta, including the AINP and the international qualifications assessment service.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Minister.

Line 2.1: I believe that this is the direct program grants to support settlement, integration, and language projects grants. What amount is allocated to those grants in the 2019 year, and how does that compare to the 2018 year?

9:20

Mr. Copping: There's \$7.43 million associated with the grants in 2019-2020, and that's a reduction of roughly \$760,000 that was in the grants for last year.

Ms Gray: Okay. Thank you very much.

Is the intention to keep those grants as two-year grants to better allow our immigrant-serving agencies to plan for the future?

Mr. Copping: We are looking at continuing primarily with the two-year grant program, and we're also exploring whether we can extend those as well. As the hon. member will know, this program is largely based, you know, on what the proposals are that come forward. Just by way of background for the members of the committee, a lot of the grant funding that we do is proposal based, so we ask newcomer organizations, "Where are the needs?" in a particular area, and we can target these needs. There's also federal funding coming in for this and provincial funding for this, so we look at where areas are targeting the needs. Proposals will come in, and we'll assess the proposals and find the best proposals. Some of the proposals are for one year. Some of the proposals are for two years. When we look at the proposals, we'll say: does it make sense to do a three-year? This is from the funding standpoint of doing – that's also on the proposal. But some of the proposals are only for

one year, and sometimes it only makes sense to do one year, particularly if it's brand new and we want to test it. There is variability and variation on that.

Just by way of background, you know, IRCC in this space – this is for Alberta, correct? – is \$128.5 million. Our approach when we look at this item, the objective, is to help increase the ability of newcomers to successfully settle and integrate. We're focused primarily on an economic stream, but it's also that we look at providing stopgap measures because – and just for our other colleagues . . .

Ms Gray: I'm going to interrupt you, Minister.

Mr. Copping: Okay.

Ms Gray: But thank you. The work we do to try and complement the federal funding I think is really important, and I'm glad to hear that that's continuing.

Mr. Copping: Yeah. If I could just say that it's really important. When you take a look at our overall funding approach, because we're actually a stopgap and there's lots of other funding and it's on a proposal basis, you know, the impact of a small reduction of \$760,000 is, quite frankly, negligible because we work based on the proposals, and the best proposals are the ones that get funded.

Ms Gray: Okay. I think that that will answer my next question. We know that the language requirements for AINP are increasing as per requirements set out by the federal government. Will this grant be targeted to increase language training availability for newcomers, who may be looking to use AINP? As you've mentioned, it's on a proposal basis. So I will just leave this thought with you, Minister, and your team, that I hope the province will look at extending supports for English language learners.

Also – and you don't need to respond to this – the Alberta labour force profiles: immigrants in the labour force hasn't been published and updated since 2017, so I would encourage the ministry to continue to provide that updated information to Albertans so that they know about immigrants in the labour force and some of the information, like the statistics around employment of immigrants in Alberta.

But thank you. That answers some of my initial questions around settlement and integration.

Workforce development partnerships, line 2.2, specifically is there to help “ensure Alberta can respond to skills shortages” through partnerships, collaboration with different groups. There's been a significant decrease here of 37 per cent. I would note that it's in this line item, if I understand correctly, that things like job fairs for regional economic needs can be funded. I will point out to you, Minister, that right now there are no job fairs listed on the government of Alberta's website, so I'm concerned a little bit about the decrease in spending. Can you speak to why there's nearly a 40 per cent decrease in workforce development partnerships that directly help local communities as well as industries and employers to meet very specific labour market needs?

Mr. Copping: Okay. Well, thank you for the question. I'll take your previous comments under advisement. Just to let you know, in terms of item 2.1 we will continue to accept proposals that include ESL in the future. That still is on the radar.

In regard to workforce development partnerships we've allocated just under \$4.5 million for that in this year's budget. You're quite correct. This helps to “ensure Alberta can respond to skill shortages through collaborative efforts with industry, communities, employer

groups, organizations, industry sectors, and municipalities with common labour market needs.” This is a joint approach.

Programs and services include regional workforce consultants, which is Labour and Immigration staff, which will liaise with employers to gather and provide labour market information. They also will educate on the tools and resources to aid in recruitment and retention. Then the labour market partnership grants use federal and provincial funding to support workplace human resource development and labour market adjustment strategies through project partnerships with industry associations, provincial organizations, regional and local organizations, and, again, with the municipal government.

When we took a look at, you know, where we're going to make choices – because, really, this budget is about choices. How do we provide the best services? And then, in our case, how do we connect Albertans to jobs – right? – while at the same time managing our overall expenses so that we're not leaving the next generation with a burden of debt and so that we actually have a path to a balanced budget in four years? One of the lenses that we looked at this through in terms of making the choices is: what programs provide the most direct path to a job?

I'll take a step back in terms of that. When you look at the overall budget, you know, for training for work – and this is line item 2.8, right? – that program, the funding is largely maintained; some minor variations on it. But for training for work, those types of programs, we get proposals based on an area of shortage, and we fund those proposals. Individuals get training in that program, and that leads to an actual job. On many of those programs we have a target of 70 per cent. Quite frankly, the organizations don't get paid, right? There's a performance contract that has a placement of 70 per cent. So, you know, when we talk about what is the most efficient use of dollars – right? – the training for work is a very good example. There is a need, we have an unemployed person, we put them into the program, and 70 per cent get a job and it's a long-term job.

The reason I provide that background is that when we take a look at the workforce development partnerships – and don't get me wrong. These are good partnerships in terms of how we're doing projects. Again, it's project based. It's submitted by local areas. Some of them want to do job fairs, and we have people on the ground working with them to help them do that. So we're going to maintain people working on the ground with them. There's not as much grant funding, but the best proposals we will fund. When you take a look at, again, from pathways to jobs, yes, these programs that we support there like job fairs, for example, provide a pathway, but it's more removed than training for work, which leads directly to a job. So we've reduced funding in this area, and that's part of the rationale behind it.

I'd also like to point out that we still have \$2.5 million throughout this budget. So just in terms of the LMP grants, LMP grants are not just reflected in this line item; they're also in line item 2.4. Again, there's going to be no single stakeholder group that's going to be impacted because it's project based. Then part of our rationale with this is: we are reducing our funding, but how do we support more programs? Well, we don't necessarily need to provide all the . . .

Ms Gray: Thank you, Minister. I think you've answered my question.

Mr. Copping: Okay. Sorry.

Ms Gray: No. I appreciate the enthusiasm.

Under the policy and labour market information the decrease is 2 per cent. I heard you speaking in 2.2 that you are keeping the

regional workforce consultants, those boots on the ground, and the decrease here in labour market information is on the lower side, which I think is good. My comment here is that there are some labour market reports that I went looking for that have not been updated. The outlook and supply reports: I would expect to see those coming out around this time. They should be released every two years. They were last published in 2016. And the short-term employment forecast, which is published yearly, was published on October 1 last year, September 22 the year before. The 2019-2021 short-term employment forecast, which really helps to highlight the 10-year long-term labour forecast, is not available yet. Do you know if those reports will be published soon?

9:30

Mr. Copping: The long-term supply and demand outlook was just approved, so it will be coming out very shortly.

Ms Gray: Wonderful.

Mr. Copping: The short term – I'm just looking to my officials. I've seen it.

Mr. McLeod: I think it's coming out shortly as well.

Mr. Copping: Okay. It just hasn't been released yet. It's almost there.

Ms Gray: Right. Thank you very much.

My last question. There's the Alberta supply outlook model, that looks at education and skills. It was originally done for 2015-2025, and it seems to me that there have been significant policy changes in Advanced Education that could seriously impact that labour supply outlook model: a lot of the assumptions around enrolment and graduation now that we're seeing increasing tuition, now that we're seeing cuts to the grants to our postsecondary universities, will there be as many programs available, those types of things. This is really a comment – perhaps if you wouldn't mind someone getting back to me in writing – around how the Advanced Education policy changes that we see in Budget 2019 might impact the assumptions of the Alberta supply outlook model for education and skills, because I see that there could be potential large changes there. If that can be returned in writing, it would be much appreciated.

I will move down to 2.4, labour attraction and retention. Again, we're looking at a 4 per cent decrease, so a small change there. I'm not going to ask you any specific questions on that item.

Line 2.5. IQAS continues to be on a cost-recovery basis. Is that correct?

Mr. Copping: Not entirely. It's only the international stream, and the larger percentage – I just can't remember the breakdown – is not the international stream. It's not entirely on a cost-recovery basis.

Ms Gray: In that line as well . . .

Mr. Copping: Sorry. I got that wrong. It's the inverse. The larger is the cost recovery. There's a smaller piece, but it's still not entirely cost recovery.

Ms Gray: Okay. Thank you for that.

Also under 2.5 it talks about the Fair Registration Practices Act, the fairness to newcomers office. The legislation essentially starts us on a journey, but there haven't yet been any changes that would impact a newcomer at this point. With the office being stood up and the regulations being developed, that's where we may start to see

actual gains made on behalf of newcomers. That is my understanding.

Mr. Copping: Yeah. We're working through the regulations right now, and we're in the process of developing details for the office. Our intent is to have it set up early 2020 in terms of the office and then have the regulations. We'll have to go through so that we can start moving forward on that.

Ms Gray: Absolutely.

Mr. Copping: You're quite right. It's a journey.

Ms Gray: Well, it's a complicated file, with 70 PROs representing a hundred regulated occupations. I'm looking forward to seeing progress on that. My question is: of the \$2.5 million, will any be given to PROs in the form of grants? There have been innovation fund project grants in the past to specifically work towards foreign qualification improvements.

Mr. Copping: There is a potential for that. You know, we have \$900,000 selected for grants. Just a portion of that may actually be used for that. But, again, we don't want to put the cart in front of the horse on this one. As we work through with the different regulatory bodies – and as the hon. member is aware, there's a wide range of them – some of them have actually got their processes set up, and the change that we're making will actually be minimal in regard to changes they may need to make to the process. Others, which are the much smaller ones, have much less capacity to make some of the changes that we're asking, so they may require some assistance at that point in time. But, again, we're going to have to look at it on a proposal basis and prioritize what makes the most sense and the number of people we can impact the most.

Ms Gray: Okay. Labour market programs, 2.6: this line item would include the Canada-Alberta job grant. The funding flows through from the federal government for that. My question is on the specifics of the delivery of the program. There were program changes to allow for 100 per cent training costs to be covered if someone was hiring someone who had previously been unemployed. Can you tell me if we've seen an uptick of spending in that category, how the breakdown of the Canada-Alberta job grant spending looks?

The Chair: That's the first 20 minutes concluded. You may continue.

Mr. Copping: By way of background, we have some data in terms of the Canada-Alberta job grant, the applications. Over 2017-2018 there were 38 employers and 40 trainees; over 2018-19 there were 52 employers and 66 trainees. So we saw an increase in that.

Ms Gray: An increase is positive. We'd like to see more there, but I appreciate the update. I see that you have a little bit more to share.

Mr. Copping: I just wanted to confirm – and you are correct – that if hiring and training an unemployed Albertan, up to 100 per cent of training costs would be covered by the government. There's a max, though, of \$15,000 per employee under the program.

Ms Gray: Perfect. Thank you very much, Minister.

For 2.7, the summer temporary employment program, I'm wondering if you can tell me for this year, the last year that STEP will be in place, how many applications were received in each category: nonprofit organizations, incorporated small businesses,

municipalities, First Nations, Métis settlements, school boards, and then publicly funded postsecondary institutions?

Mr. Copping: These numbers aren't final, as the hon. member is aware. With the program, often you fund at the very end.

Ms Gray: Yes. To be clear, I'm requesting how many people applied, not how many were funded.

Mr. Copping: We don't have the breakdown of the number of applications.

Ms Gray: Okay. If you wouldn't mind following up with me.

Mr. Copping: We do have the preliminary breakdown of the number of individuals.

Ms Gray: Thank you. If you wouldn't mind following up in writing on that, that would be helpful to me.

I will just ask for more of an explanation. Each year when STEP was running, knowing how popular it is but also how the funding was on the back end, the department had gotten very good at kind of determining how many to approve at the front end so that we were paying out roughly \$10 million. But I note that for this funding year \$8 million of the \$10 million is being paid out. Why is there that \$2 million gap when I know that there was approval for more employers to try and reach that \$10 million? It seems like a very large miss.

Mr. Copping: As you are aware, the program was costly to administer, right? Quite frankly, the department had to do multiple takes to push money out the door associated with that. In terms of the program for this year, doing the multiple tasks and pushing money out the door on this wasn't an approach that we were taking. In terms of this year we funded 1,080 employers and 2,553 positions. That is what we actually funded this year based on the preliminary numbers.

Ms Gray: So 2,553?

Mr. Copping: Yeah, 2,553 students.

Ms Gray: Okay. Thank you, Minister. We can chat more about STEP later.

A quick question, though: was the \$500,000 administration fee included within that \$8 million, or is that \$8 million just in money out to employers?

Mr. Copping: It was extra.

Ms Gray: Okay.

Mr. Copping: Just by way of background, if you go back to the \$10 million, it wasn't \$10 million. That didn't include administration, so it was \$10.5 million that was allocated for the program historically. The \$500,000 was administration.

9:40

Ms Gray: Yeah. The way we framed it was \$10 million for employers, for those students. The administration fee was – you're right – absorbed by the department.

Line 2.8, skills and training support. I appreciate some of the language you've used already around this being the most direct path to a job, how the initiatives inside 2.8, including training for work, are so effective, but I do note a \$2 million decrease in spending on this line item. Would that \$2 million decrease be directly related to training for work? Is that coming from other programs?

Mr. Copping: Actually, the decrease is \$1.59 million in that. The vast majority of it, over \$1 million, is associated with income support for learners. By way of background, the program services, these training opportunities, include training for work, income support for learners, and the aboriginal training to employment and First Nations training to employment. Those are the three main programs associated with this line item, and the bulk of this is in the training for work line item. The majority of the reduction associated with this income line is the income support for learners, which is a reflection of demand.

As you know, our department works very closely with other departments in terms of the demand, and this goes back to support services, you know, identifying potential clients who are closer to the job market but would need training to do that and who don't have the funding to be able to support themselves while they're going through that type of training. That's the purpose of the income support for learners.

The anticipated demand this year is less than it was for next year, so we actually backed \$1 million out of our budget, and it will not affect clients.

Ms Gray: If more applications come through, then additional dollars will be found to fund that?

Mr. Copping: Yes. Then we'll have to fund that. Again, as you are aware, with this type of budget, because a lot of the stuff is proposal based and you develop different training programs throughout the year, as you do that, then there is the ability to move money around. The current budget anticipates fewer people applying for the income support for learners, and as a result we actually dropped the budget.

Ms Gray: Okay. Thank you.

Related to that, I'm going to switch topics just a little bit to talk about revenue, specifically because a lot of the funding you're talking about comes from our labour market development agreements, or WDAs. What we know and what is stated in your fiscal documents is that across this budget \$64 million, new dollars, are flowing from the federal government intended to support Albertans looking to enter into the labour market. Those monies, signed with Labour as the lead, are shared across four ministries. The ministry of labour is focused on meeting the needs of employees and employers and building a skilled workforce, but the money is also used by Advanced Education, focused on adult learning systems and financial supports for adult learners; Community and Social Services, which leads employment, disabilities, and community-based supports; and Indigenous Relations, which works with indigenous communities, organizations, the government of Canada, industry, and other stakeholders to enhance the quality of life of indigenous people. Those are the four players when the money comes in.

What I see in this budget is that although 64 million net new dollars are being added across this budget, Labour is reducing their labour market development revenue by \$2 million, and instead we're seeing all of those new dollars flow into Community and Social Services, \$6 million; Indigenous Relations, \$2 million; and the bulk of the money, nearly \$60 million, is going to Advanced Education, a ministry where we're seeing reduced supports for Albertans across the board, with reduced grants going out to universities and reduced spending.

So I'm particularly concerned that the ministry of labour, which is focused on meeting the needs of employees and employers, which provides programs like training for work, which you've already highlighted as very good at helping attach people to the job

market, particularly the ministry of labour, which, while Alberta still has 6.6 unemployment – why are we not seeing an increase in spending to help unemployed Albertans reattach to the labour market? Why is all of this money going, in my view, to paper over a gap in spending in Advanced Education? Even though that \$60 million is going to Advanced Ed, they still are reducing their spending by \$110 million overall.

Mr. Copping: Well, thank you for the question. As indicated, training for work: we maintained funding for that. Then part of it is also that, you know, as you indicated – right? – the federal money is actually spread out through multiple departments. The reason for that is because you can't take a single lens in terms of: how do we create jobs for Albertans? From Labour and Immigration's standpoint, we use a lot of that funding – training for work is a great example – to be able to do that but also take a look at, on the front end, when we're providing training for Albertans through Advanced Education, training in areas where there's demand.

You may have heard – I'm getting a little bit outside of the Labour and Immigration piece, but I just want to talk about it a little bit. My colleague in Advanced Education is focused and our policy is focused on skills/trades: how do we increase education in skills/trades, which leads a pathway to jobs? A number of programs have been announced on that to be able to lead a pathway to jobs. We're training people in the right place the first time to, as they actually get that training, move into jobs where there is demand. So you can do it that way. You know, our department, Labour and Immigration, is focused, where we have funding, on when there's a mismatch, someone doesn't have the skill set in a particular area, right? Then how do we actually match that back? Training for work is a great example of doing that.

But there are different ways you can approach it, in the one way and a focus on skills for training, because we understand that there's going to be a gap in the future there. We need that to grow our economy because having the right person with the right skills at the right time will support growth overall, which is beneficial for all Albertans. So we've taken a different approach in terms of doing that. We're still maintaining funding for training for work, also in terms of, you know, funding for welcoming newcomers and making sure that they have the skill sets they need to participate fully. Also, it's just as important that we have the right skill set. For example, we have shortages in rural Alberta in a number of occupations. Veterinarian is a prime example. If we don't have a veterinarian that can support our farmers and do the work that they do, then we can't grow our economy. That's one example.

It's a balancing act in terms of ensuring that we use all of the federal funding, which we are – we're using all the federal funding that's coming to Alberta – but putting that in different buckets to ensure that we grow jobs for Albertans, right? That's why they actually spread it out already, in terms of the LMDA, into multiple departments, because there's a recognition that there are different ways and different levers, and it needs to be a whole government approach, not just Labour and Immigration.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Minister.

Of the 64 million new dollars – I think you are taking a single lens because \$60 million of that is going into Advanced Ed. Now, each ministry serves different groups of people. With 6.6 per cent unemployment in Alberta, the services that the ministry of labour provides are particularly important for those who are currently on EI or those who perhaps no longer qualify for EI and are still looking for work. So I see a significant issue with the ministry of labour essentially taking \$2 million less from this flow-through funding and all of the money going to Advanced Education, an area

where spending is overall decreasing by over \$110 million. That \$60 million is essentially papering over cuts in another ministry rather than providing services to Albertans. I think that's particularly concerning because meeting the needs of employees and employers and building that skilled workforce is the core responsibility of the ministry of labour.

9:50

Mr. Copping: I would like to point out that the funding that we're getting through the labour market development agreement and for the workforce development agreement includes: Labour and Immigration has just under \$22 million for LMDA, and then for the WDA it's \$34 million. This is largely consistent. The only difference, as you pointed out, is \$2 million. That's going to be used up by Advanced Education, and they're focusing that on programs such as Careers: the Next Generation. That program is designed to lead to full-time careers for individuals going into skills in areas of shortage. From a government standpoint we believe that is a more efficient approach . . .

Ms Gray: I apologize for interrupting. I absolutely agree that that programming is good, but the intention of this agreement signed with the federal government of Canada is to essentially provide more funding to our province during a time of high unemployment, more supports for employers and employees. With what is happening in this budget, with the cuts that we are seeing across various ministries to pay for the \$4.7 billion corporate tax giveaway to large, profitable corporations, we are seeing fewer services being delivered by Advanced Education, because they are decreasing their overall spending by \$110 million. So I have serious concerns about this.

I will change my question slightly to ask: with the implementation of the new WDA agreement, have we achieved full implementation of the performance measurement strategy? We either needed to do it by April 1, 2019, or there was an extension to 2020. Are we still implementing?

Mr. Copping: The short answer is yes. We're still on track, actually, and working towards that and ensuring that the metrics are in place in accordance with the agreement.

Ms Gray: Okay. Thank you for that.

Line 2.9, coal workforce transition program. I'm very pleased to see that this program is continuing to be funded and, I heard you say, will be funded into the future through TIER. Right now the amounts estimated for next year and the year beyond were the same as what was in our 2018 budget, so my question is just: is the work continuing to happen to assess changing needs as we find out more and are working with the companies to make sure that these supports are there when workers need them?

Mr. Copping: Yeah. As you're aware, this provides financial supports to coal workers affected by the phase-out of coal-generated electricity, and there are three streams on this: bridge to retirement; bridge to employment grants, re-employment grants which combine with employment insurance; and relocation assistance. There is some lumpiness – I know it's not the technical term, but I'll use that term anyways – in this because it's driven by the employers and what their shutdown plans are and what the plans are of the individuals when they do this in terms of the transition out.

We're continuing to work closely with the various companies who are involved in this. ATCO Power, Capital Power, TransAlta, Maxim Power, Westmoreland Coal Company are the companies involved in this. We're continuing to work with them in terms of what their plans are, and you'll see some variability not only this year versus budget, but you'll also see variability going forward in

this line item over future years. That's based on our best guess in working with them in terms of what their plans are for reducing their operations.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Minister. That's ideal, and that's what I wanted to check just because the numbers were unchanged from 2018.

Mr. Copping: Yeah. Just one other thing is that when the numbers were put in place, it was a guess because you had the three streams, and the bridge to retirement is the most expensive stream. What some people are . . .

Ms Gray: Would you be able to tell me how much of the money spent in 2018 went towards the bridge to retirement?

Mr. Copping: Yeah. I can get that in a second. But people are changing streams and finding other employment. They're using different streams like bridge to re-employment as opposed to bridge to retirement, so that's going to impact the dollars associated with it.

To date it's approximately 95 per cent that are bridge to re-employment.

Ms Gray: Sorry. So 95 per cent are bridge to re-employment?

Mr. Copping: Re-employment. Five per cent, bridge to retirement.

Ms Gray: Does that mean zero per cent in relocation assistance?

Mr. Copping: No. I think there were a couple. Actually, if you give me a sec, I can find the exact numbers. Sorry. There were six for relocation assistance, 211 bridge to re-employment, and 23 bridge to retirement. That's as of October 2019.

Ms Gray: Awesome. Thank you very much for that updated information.

Okay. I will move to line 3.1, labour relations. This is an area where we're seeing an increase. Would you be able to speak to that? Is that – that's not the labour relations hotline? No.

Mr. Copping: Just a sec. There is a small increase, \$105,000 budget increase, which is primarily associated with increased policy work in this particular area. That's what it's devoted for. This group, as you know, in addition to doing policy work, administers mediator and arbitrator rosters to assist in resolving labour disputes and provides information on collective bargaining and strategic advice on the labour code.

Ms Gray: Okay. No. And with work expected to continue as in your business plan, that makes sense.

On that same topic, though, or related to that topic, line 4, the Labour Relations Board is seeing a 5 per cent decrease. Are you considering the impact of changing legislation and how it will impact the Labour Relations Board? For example, with them now supervising mandatory votes through the certification process, that's a legislative change you've already done which might impose more work on the Labour Relations Board. Other changes may as well. Are there concerns about their ability to have a reducing budget during a time of Labour Relations Code changes?

Mr. Copping: I just want to go back to your previous question because I was looking through just to confirm. The employee labour relations support program is under that previous line item, but that was not the reason for the increase. It was more the policy associated with it.

In regard to item 4, the Labour Relations Board, you know, we had a conversation with a lot of our boards and agencies. You won't see them in all, but if you actually look through all the other line items, we had a conversation with them on their ability to do reductions without impacting services. They got back to us and were able to take roughly a 5 per cent reduction that primarily focuses on supply and services as sort of the area. You won't see that on the Fair Practices Office. There are other reasons associated with that, as you may be aware. But in the conversation that we had with the boards and agencies, they indicated that they could actually do that reduction without an impact on personnel and without an impact on services by looking at different ways to do things.

Ms Gray: Okay. I guess I'll just add the comment that as you change labour relations legislation, that might impact the work that is happening at the Labour Relations Board, which you are familiar with.

Speaking of the employee labour relations support program, we talked about it briefly in a question period question. Can you tell me where your request for proposal process is in hiring the law firms that will provide free legal advice? As we're not in a question period format, can we also just talk about making sure that there is a balance of legal representation given the dynamics in labour relations, there being an employer side and an employee side? Minister, we can move on and maybe come back to this in a later block.

10:00

Mr. Copping: I can speak to the issue. I'm looking for the information because we've received a number of phone calls to date, and I was just looking for the information that provided the details of the phone calls.

Ms Gray: Oh, good. I would be interested in the number of calls.

Mr. Copping: By way of background, this particular item was a commitment that we made in our platform, and really the intent is to provide advice to employees who have questions under the code. It's being done under the Department of Labour and Immigration. We have received five phone calls and 18 e-mails to date since the inception of it. Most of the calls have been in relation to requests for just general labour relations information. None of them were highly specific, so we didn't need to do anything further in terms of a detailed procedural legal issue. Sometimes . . .

Ms Gray: Thank you. Sorry. If you wouldn't mind just speaking to the balance. If we are hiring law firms, will you be looking to make sure that there are employer-side as well as worker-side law firms that are contracted to provide legal advice?

Mr. Copping: We're looking to find law firms generally to provide advice, period. Like, it's an open call. We haven't made any decisions yet. It's procedural matters – right? – for the most part. The reason why I wanted to share the calls we've gotten to date is that sometimes the individuals were asking about how we do certification: so go talk to the union. Some of the individuals, you know, were sent to the Labour Relations Board because they had specific questions about: how do I file an application with the board? Others were sent to employment standards because it had nothing to do with – in terms of the call line, that's the type of calls that we're getting at this point in time. It's still relatively new.

But, you know, the purpose of having up to one hour of legal advice is really to deal with, like, procedural issues at the board that you just can't answer, someone to do that. I understand what you're saying, which is quite true, that there's the labour side and there's

the union side. The problem is that this is employees asking questions who are unrepresented. This is why they need to talk to a lawyer and, then, from their perspective – really, what we want the lawyers to say is: here is the procedure. It's not coming from one side or the other: that is my point. Right? It is: this is the procedure that you need to do in front of the board if you want to speak to a particular issue. That is the intent. I appreciate that there are both. We have an open process. We haven't made any decisions at this point in time on this, and we're still looking at how we're going to set that up and what the need is going to be.

Ms Gray: Okay. Certainly, be mindful, because there's a lot of concern about the potential for bias in this.

We will move on to 3.2, occupational health and safety. In your business plan, Minister, you have removed the targets for things like lost-time claim rates, disabling-injury rates, and in your budget you have reduced spending on occupational health and safety by – I'm going to ballpark – roughly \$3 million, over 5 per cent, in a year where we're actually seeing our lost-time claim rate and disabling-injury rate increase. My initial comments are, first, that without having targets indicating where we're trying to get to in the future, I think that's certainly a concern. Secondly, why are we reducing our spending on occupational health and safety when, especially with the recent changes to the legislation, increasing awareness initiatives, we're seeing increasing rates of Albertans being hurt and killed?

Mr. Copping: Well, thank you for the question. Before I get to the metrics, I want to talk about the budget because you raised an issue in terms of the budget.

Ms Gray: The decrease in spending in occupational health and safety.

Mr. Copping: In 2019-20 just under \$55 million is devoted to this line item, and as you know, on occupational health and safety our work here is to monitor legislative compliance to ensure adequate protection for workers. Safety is a critical component and a key objective of our government and this department. When we talk about some of the budget adjustments, what we impacted, we are reducing and eliminating the occupational health and safety grant programs that allow the ministry to focus investment on OH and S. These are the grant programs.

We had 10 vacant positions in that particular area, right? Part of the area is that, again, safety is critically important. We also need to manage our budget. So how do we focus on that while we focus on keying in on the worst performers? We're eliminating funding for, on the research side, a number of programs in terms of the reductions. Although research is important to be able to understand what's going on down the road, you know, other organizations are funding that as well, so some of that research will continue on. We wanted to focus our resources in terms of the ongoing education through our health and safety officers and enforcement for, quite frankly, the worst offenders.

The biggest element of the reduction is the reduction to the farm health and safety producer grant program, which we reduced. We reduced that, quite frankly, to recognize that there is not an uptake of that program. In addition to that, we also recognize that AgSafe continues to be funded at \$1 million a year. We did a three-year, as you are well aware, grant last year in terms of doing that, so they continue to do their work. Even though the OHS innovation and engagement grants, which we've eliminated, have served their purpose well, they were often repeatedly accessed by the same organizations and researchers, in particular in OH and S areas, who are also funded through the Workers' Compensation Board. WCB

funding can continue in those areas, but in effect they were double-dipping. We looked at, you know: how do we, again, have the minimal impact in this area while ensuring that we maintain funding for occupational health and safety?

Those are the changes that we made. So when you're asking about the budget, those are the two biggest areas that we actually impacted, which wasn't directly related in terms of enforcement.

Ms Gray: But you did also mention 10 vacant positions within occupational health and safety. There was a bit of a difference between your plan around full-time equivalents and the intention, which was to improve staffing levels and staff up in OH and S and employment standards. Now, I note that – and I apologize for making you flip – on page 190 the full-time equivalents list shows that Alberta Labour is gaining 42 employees. Would my understanding be correct that that is primarily for the Fair Practices Office?

Mr. Copping: There's an increase of 58 and a decrease of 16 in the budget, so 35 for the Fair Practices Office, 17 in occupational health and safety, and six in employment standards. But we also had vacant positions: six in employment standards and 10 in occupational health and safety. So net it's 35 in the FPO and an increase of seven in occupational health and safety. We did increase in occupational health and safety, and then for the FPO, it is as a result of set-up associated with that office made previously.

10:10

Ms Gray: Okay. Just along this occupational health and safety line of thought, one of the key things in occupational health and safety is, again, targeting where we can have the most impact but making sure that we are out there and doing those inspections, not only reactively when something happens and people are blown around on a window-washing platform, which we saw on social media recently, but also preventatively and proactively where we know there are vulnerable workers. Can you speak to those initiatives and if they are continuing within your ministry to proactively work with industry and to do proactive inspections?

Mr. Copping: You know, our focus is going to be on those areas which have the highest risks. This is where our area of focus is. It's going to be both proactive and reactive. Instead of doing it across the board to all industries and all companies, we want to focus on those areas with the highest risk, and we're measuring that through lost time, injury, and, sadly, accidental death in the workplace.

Proactive inspections will still continue, but our area of focus is not going to be necessarily – you try not to boil the sea. Right? If you have strong performers, people who have certificates of recognition from a safety standpoint, you know, spending your time, energy, and effort – significant time, energy, and effort – is not as warranted as spending the time with the industries and the players where the accidents are. This is not saying that we're cutting out proactive – it's actually a combination of both proactive and reactive – but it's: where do you put your area of focus on?

Ms Gray: Okay. In previous business plans the number of inspections was an important measure. Other potential measures would be the number of officers per employer within the province or the number of orders issued, those types of tracking factors, which are not present in your business plan. How are you measuring effectiveness, and how are you going to be accountable when it comes to occupational health and safety? Right now the only measure you've given us in the business plan is the lost-time claim rate and the disabling-injury rate, both of which are higher this year than last year.

Mr. Copping: Yeah. We recognize that they're higher this year, and this is why we're focusing on the areas that that's being driven by. It's important to keep that – and we've kept that – as a performance metric.

There are a number of metrics – and I'll take a step back – that we are re-evaluating at this point in time. One of the issues and the concerns that we had is when you have an input metric as opposed to an output metric. An input metric measures what you do, but it doesn't measure the impact that it has. One of the concerns we had is in just doing 800. Well, if you're not doing 800 in the right place – what matters is: what impact does this have? So we looked at this as: this is not a good measure of success in terms of outcome. Right? What we're assessing right now for future business plans is: what is a better metric to measure the success? If you had 800 and you hit all the – I went to a company that already had, you know, a core. Well, is that getting value from that? We didn't feel that that reflected the value, so we pulled that, and we're actually looking at developing metrics that can more accurately reflect our focus but also where it's not just an input but an output value.

Ms Gray: Okay. Thank you for that information, Minister.

My next question is related to the OHS code and updates that need to be made to the OHS code. Minister, through the OHS Act you are responsible for publishing each year a three-year plan for the review of the regulation and the OHS code. There was a three-year plan that was published and available on the website prior to the election. I can no longer find that although it is required by legislation to exist. As well, the OHS Council, which was tasked with working to do those required-by-legislation reviews of the OHS code, has not met since the election. This is a nonpartisan group of experts in OHS who are working to improve a piece of regulation, the code, that is incredibly important to many, many different employers across the province and needs these updates. My two questions to you are: why hasn't the council met – because they certainly should have since the election; it's been seven months now – and secondly, what is your three-year plan for the review of the regulations, and why is it not publicly posted?

The Chair: I apologize for the interruption. We have come to the conclusion of the 60-minute block for the Official Opposition.

We now begin a 20-minute speaking block for the government caucus. I will call upon MLA Rowswell to proceed with the minister. Do you wish to combine your time?

Mr. Rowswell: I would, actually. Yeah.

The Chair: Okay. Please proceed.

Mr. Rowswell: I want to focus on the foreign qualification recognition activities that the Alberta advantage immigration strategy is about. I've got a series of questions. On page 108 there's 2 and a half million dollars set aside, and I'm assuming that's new money being spent there. Just fill us in on why you feel that this is important to begin with.

Mr. Copping: Well, thank you very much. You know, the Alberta advantage immigration strategy was a key component of our platform. Really, it's a recognition that in order to grow our economy, recognizing that we have surplus in certain areas – we still have unemployment in certain areas, but in other areas, in other regions, and in particular industries and occupations we also have shortages. If we cannot find the people to fill those shortages – I'll use IT, for example; we have a shortage in IT – then the companies can't grow. And if the companies can't grow, then all the other people that you'd hire around that individual – right? – who are out

of work, they won't get the work. Plus, all the supports, you know, building houses and general growth associated with it, which generate more jobs, don't happen. There's a recognition that in terms of newcomers, immigration can play a vital role in ensuring that we have the skill sets that we need to grow our economy.

A big piece of that is that when we select an individual and we reach through the AINP and ask them to come, or we reach through the federal program and we ask them to come, the reason we're asking them is because we have a shortage in a particular profession. One of the streams of the AINP is that the government can actually select individuals because we have a shortage in an area. But sometimes, given the qualification of that individual with a regulatory body, to be able to get their skill set, it could take months or even years for them to get a job and start working. That's a detriment to them.

Our Premier has said multiple times – he'll talk about doctors driving taxis. That's just a euphemism. It's an example to highlight, but truly the issue is that an individual comes here – we invited them because of their skill set and their education – but they can't get the job, and we need them to work this job to provide the services that Albertans need and to grow our economy. If we can't get that individual working, it's to their detriment: lower income for them, difficulty supporting their families. Then there are all kinds of costs associated with newcomer services, trying to help them connect – right? – and we can't grow our economy or provide the services that we need.

The \$2.5 million, the focus on that is a couple of things. It's the fairness for newcomers office to work with regulatory bodies to streamline the process and make sure it's fast, efficient, and fair. In an ideal world we'd get to a place, when we get our strategy in place and we update our processes, that when we ask someone to come, they apply immediately, jump through the hoops at that point in time so that when they arrive here they're working as quickly as possible to their benefit and to the benefit of the economy. Some of that funding is associated with that.

It's also in terms of looking at IQAS. That agency does an evaluation of education and is one of the very few in the country that has been nominated by the federal government to do the evaluation so that employers can look at the education equivalents and regulatory bodies can look at that when they're doing their assessment. So it's part of the workflow. This, combined with the Fair Registration Practices Act and the office and our Alberta advantage immigration strategy in terms of looking at our overall flow of the policies as we actually work through that, will help us to get people who we need to drive our economy and Alberta, create jobs for Albertans, and make life better for newcomers as well.

10:20

Mr. Rowswell: Okay. You've kind of answered my second question of what the funding will be utilized for, so you've answered that unless there's more to it than what you've stated already.

Mr. Copping: Yeah. The one thing I did want to add and I missed in my answer is that one thing the funding will also be for is a mentorship program for newcomers, the ALIS mentorship, and also to support microlending. Windmill Microlending is an organization that has been incredibly successful so far. When newcomers come here, they often may not have the funds to help them get through the accreditation process in terms of going to school and then writing a series of exams. Windmill has provided loans to these individuals to help them through the process, and then when they get the job, that they get at the end of it, they actually pay it back. I've had an opportunity to meet with the founders of Windmill and

the CEO, and their repayment rate is 98 per cent, if not 99. It's in that ballpark in terms of the numbers, so it's incredibly successful. But it also provides an opportunity for newcomers to get the funding so that they can do the upgrading to get to the accreditation that they need to work in the job that, quite frankly, we need them for.

Mr. Rowswell: Have you had to hire more staff? Like, it's new money, so is there more staff for this?

Mr. Copping: We anticipate hiring approximately five full-time equivalents in the fairness for newcomers office: one fair registration practices officer, which will provide leadership and strategic direction for the overall office and will report to the ADM; three fair registration practices analysts, whose job is to review and monitor professional regulatory bodies' registration practices, assess compliance with the fair registration practices code, and provide guidance to them in their obligations under the act; and one office administrator, who will provide administrative support and contribute to the daily operations.

We redeployed some vacant positions within our department to be able to fund those roles. Also, some of that funding, as indicated earlier, will be used for grants to assist some of the regulatory bodies in making the changes that are required for them.

Mr. Rowswell: I'd like to just expand on it a little bit. I remember watching elections, and it seems that every party has forever been wanting to recognize the qualifications of foreign workers coming in. I'm sure the previous government had that as a goal as well. But federally and provincially, everyone says this, and the fact that we're having to highlight it, to me, says that something is not working. Do you have an opinion on why we continually have to bring this up and deal with it? Why is it failing, and what's standing in the way of making this work?

Mr. Copping: It's not a simple issue. We mandated a number of regulatory bodies, and they initially – and this is provincially – have the obligation to ensure the safety of Albertans and ensure that the professionals, those that they accredit, have the skills necessary and what people expect. That comes into focus, and over time they build layers and layers upon that, which makes it more and more difficult to jump through hoops. The Fair Registration Practices Act that we passed, Bill 11, also sets the mandate to say: yes, that's important, but so is a fair accreditation process. So we're not necessarily changing the rules, but it allows us to ask the tough questions and say that you have to have a process and, quite frankly, within the first six months you need to give an answer.

One of the things we heard, and we did a significant number of round-tables asking people about the Fair Registration Practices Act, was: "I would apply, and I would get an answer. I would do that piece, and then I would get another answer, and I would do that piece, and I'd get another one." It wasn't altogether one answer. What the Fair Registration Practices Act does is that it requires the regulatory bodies to say: "Okay. After you get all the information, you have six months to provide an answer, a path forward, and all of the steps that go through the path forward," so there's at least a clear line.

We also learned that different professional organizations have different approaches to this. Some, you know, will have no problem meeting the standards of the act. As well, because they're on a national basis, the chartered accountants are a great example of a national body. Once you get accredited in one location, you can move across the entire country. In addition to that, they have a pretty straightforward – they can give you an answer within six months, and here's the path forward. Very clear.

Other organizations are more challenged in terms of doing that. Restrictions between provinces are making it harder to actually move. You know, I think part of this is the culture of the organization. That's why I'm so excited about the Fair Registration Practices Act. It allows us to actually have conversations with them about: "How do we fix this? Is this reasonable? Can we make the change?" It also ensures that there are reporting requirements. So for those that aren't doing as good a job, we can point that out as a path forward.

Mr. Rowswell: Can you force the issue, then? I guess my concern is that if a professional organization is standing in the way for vested interests, is there anything that you can do about that?

Mr. Copping: Under the act it allows us to require them to provide information, and if they don't do that, we can increase fines. So there's some leverage under that act. But as the Premier pointed out when we rolled this out, if parties are being reasonable but they still don't want to play ball, it's just to point out to them that they are bodies of the province.

Mr. Rowswell: Okay.

Mr. Copping: We are the individuals who gave them the responsibility and, under a provincial statute, the rules under which they're going to play, so we have ultimate authority to deal with that. But, you know, our approach here is not to be heavy-handed. We want to work with the organizations first to understand, ask the reasonable questions. But if push comes to shove, I guess, on this item, as the Premier said and during our press conference on this, I get to be the good cop, and he's going to be the bad cop. But in reality it's working with the professional organizations because, you know, they have a job to do, but we've provided clarification. The job is both safety for Albertans and the expectations in terms of the skill sets that someone accredited has, and recognizing foreign credentials, and doing this in a safe and consistent manner. I think, quite frankly, that's reasonable. That's doable. In conversations with the PROs, because we had multiple conference calls, we can set up a process to make that happen. Many of them are there already.

Mr. Rowswell: Okay. Very good.

A final question. I'd just like you to refer to page 114 of the business plan and 3(a). It's a measurement there that 85 per cent of AINP nominees surveyed reported that they are still working and residing in Alberta one year after obtaining permanent residency. Like, there's an individual in this building who cleans our offices. I was talking to him at the coffee thing there. He's from Eritrea, and he said: look, I've got a degree in math, and I've got a degree in engineering. And he's cleaning, right? He was happy to be in Canada. He took his shirt off and showed me where he'd been shot six times. You know, he loves to be here, and wants to use his skills. So under this system here, the metric that we're using to measure success – he would show as being employed. He's actually got three jobs, he told me. Do we have any metric that measures if they're employed in what they're trained in?

Mr. Copping: That's a great question. We currently do not have a metric on that at this point in time. This is an evolution.

Mr. Rowswell: Yes.

Mr. Copping: The previous metric and the previous plan was just: how many did we attract? That's an important number. But then we said: well, it's not only about attraction; it's about retention. So how

many do we retain? And you're taking it to the next level: how many do we retain in their field? Now, I can tell you that one thing we are requiring PROs to report on is the number of applications that they get from foreign qualified trainees and the number they approve – right? – and then how long it takes them to do that. So we will have that data. It's not in our business plan.

Mr. Rowswell: We need to see it.

10:30

Mr. Copping: Yeah. But we are measuring that.

Mr. Rowswell: Okay. Good.

Mr. Copping: Part of the challenge is that if you attract people, which is fantastic, then you need to keep them, but I understand your point that you also need to keep them in the job that we wanted them to be in in the first place and how long it takes them to get there.

We have some metrics coming in from the PRO, but it's difficult when you're building a business plan and you want to grab a metric that sort of hits the bulk of what you're trying to do, which is getting people here and keeping them here – right? – because also, you know, people through AINP sometimes move. That said, we have literally hundreds if not thousands of metrics, and all of them can't be in the business plan. But to your point, that is something that we also need to watch as an indicator.

Mr. Rowswell: Yeah. Okay. Well, good. Thank you. I'll be looking forward to that if we can get a report or something.

That's the end of that question, and I'd like to cede to Allard if that's okay.

The Chair: Okay. MLA Allard, please proceed.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Chair, and through you to the minister and staff, thank you very much for the work you've done in preparation of this budget and for being here today to speak with us.

I'd like to stay on page 114 of the ministry business plan. In the first paragraph it states: "The ministry works and advocates for increased labour mobility and qualification recognition across Canada and to reduce barriers to full participation in Alberta's economy." Under key objective 3.2, on that same page, a focus on settlement in smaller communities is referenced. Although I'm from the large city of Grande Prairie – it's still referred to as a small community – I know also there are many small communities around Grande Prairie and in rural Alberta that struggle to maintain services to residents because there are numerous challenges to attracting and retaining professionals, small-business owners, that kind of thing.

For example, right in Grande Prairie, actually, and in the surrounding area there are multiple pharmacies that are struggling to find pharmacists or to keep them or even newly trained pharmacists that are willing to come to the north. In one instance I understand that the pharmacist was retiring and was unable to sell his business, so unfortunately it closed, leaving the residents without access to that service. My question is: can the minister comment on the types of services he hopes to maintain or even add in the smaller communities as a result of the Alberta immigration strategy?

Mr. Copping: Thank you for the question. Actually, I got to spend some time in Grande Prairie. As part of the Alberta advantage immigration strategy we did consultations across the province, which included Grande Prairie and Fort Mac. I know you're calling

them larger cities. In part of those conversations we talked about the importance of focusing on streams for rural Alberta. During those consultations we defined rural Alberta as anything outside Calgary and Edmonton because, quite frankly, for the most part the vast majority, you know, well over 70 per cent, of newcomers to Alberta settle in Calgary and Edmonton.

How do we get more out into the rural areas? As part of our platform and what we consulted on in terms of how best to do this is looking at two rural immigration streams. One is a rural entrepreneur stream. Setting up that stream will deal specifically with the example you had. A pharmacist who wants to sell his business can't find anybody interested to sell it to, you know, in a particular area; however, there may be newcomers who would love to invest, buy that business and so, as opposed to starting from scratch, learn from the current business owner, get established in the community, and move forward. We're looking at all businesses associated with that, not just pharmacies, and looking at not the major metropolitan area of Grande Prairie but smaller communities as well in terms of doing that. That's a stream that we're working on.

As part of the Alberta immigration strategy, our objective is to finalize that by the end of this year and develop new streams for next year that would enable people to come in under the Alberta immigration nomination program and get permanent residency by buying a business and connecting people who want to come with the sellers of the business in all businesses. So it's not just that. It's the hardware store, right? It could be a number of small, family-run businesses where the next generation is not interested in doing that here, perhaps, but there would be newcomers with entrepreneurial spirit who would love to come here and take advantage of that. We're looking at that.

Also, on the rural side, one of the key items we're looking at – and we sort of indicated this in our platform – is the rural renewal immigration stream. That's focusing on occupations where there is a shortage. We'll be releasing a report shortly. I indicated earlier in my remarks about areas of shortage that we have. Some of them include, you know, some of the health care professions, also mechanics, heavy duty mechanics in particular, in Grande Prairie and Fort Mac, where we have areas that don't do that, and we'll focus on bringing them in.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. We have concluded the 20-minute speaking block for the government caucus.

We now move into 10-minute speaking blocks alternating between the Official Opposition and the government caucus. We begin with the Official Opposition. MLA Gray, your time begins now. Please proceed.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much. I have a question that you'll be prepared for. Why has no three-year plan been posted, and why hasn't the OHS Council met since the election? The question we ended on last section.

Mr. Copping: Okay. Let's deal with the occupational health and safety prevention council. It has not yet, but it's scheduled to meet in November, so we'll be meeting shortly.

Ms Gray: Okay. Can you explain why it hasn't met? Like, did it not meet because of political reasons? The work that they're doing is technical, it's nonpartisan, and it's also really, really important to the province and, I would say, behind.

Mr. Copping: My understanding is that we had a shift in membership for personal reasons. We needed to take steps to ensure that we had the full complement of members before we actually had

the meeting. That's taken care of, and the meeting is scheduled for November, later this month.

In regard to the OHS code plan posting, we are currently revisiting the code plan of the previous government to ensure that we are tackling first those sections of the code that support job creators, in particular sectors that want to move forward with innovation and harmonization; as an example, the oil and gas industry and mining. We pulled it back. We're assessing our areas of focus, and then we'll be moving forward on that basis.

Ms Gray: Will the OHS Council be playing a role in setting the three-year plan?

Mr. Copping: We'll be . . .

Ms Gray: Consulting with them?

Mr. Copping: . . . looking for their input, yeah.

Ms Gray: Okay. Thank you. Yes. The harmonization: there are large industries who are anxious to see these changes being made, so I think it will be good to have that continue.

Minister, you referenced the COR program. We know from experience that the COR program hasn't been as effective as it could be. There have been several studies that have shown there is no strong evidence of safety results coming out of COR, so reviewing and revising the COR program to make it a more effective program was work that was beginning before the election. I'm hearing from people within the safety community that the initial changes to COR might look like Alberta Labour delegating responsibility for some things to certifying partners. Can you just talk to me about COR, how we can make sure that it's an effective program, and if Alberta Labour will be taking more or less of a role in making sure that this safety program is effective?

Mr. Copping: As you correctly pointed out, Alberta Labour and Immigration has worked with researchers to assess the effectiveness of COR, right? These studies indicated that although the program can be an effective method to validate, improve, and certify employers' health and safety management systems, it's become complicated both in terms of administration and in terms of how we actually do the recognition. We struck a department-led committee in March 2019 to examine the COR and look at how we can modernize the program going forward. You know, some of the things that we're looking at are an introduction of a new risk-based and scalable model for a business-sized audit process that will better adapt to and protect small employers who are recognizing performance excellence, recognition of other certification processes such as ISO, and harmonization with other jurisdictions to recognize CORs across provincial borders. There is a recognition that we can improve the program, and we're working on it at this point in time.

10:40

Ms Gray: Okay. How can a member of the public find out more about changes to the COR program or have input into that process?

Mr. Copping: We have individuals right now who are involved in the program, so we haven't opened it up to broad members of the public, largely because it's the employers and the safety associations that are being involved.

Ms Gray: Within occupational health and safety and some of the increasing lost-time claim rates and disabling injury rates we've seen, we've also, unfortunately, had some very tragic stories coming from our continuing care sector. We know that the care

worker sector has quite a few issues with violence. In 2017 a violence prevention program was piloted specifically around care workers. Are you able to speak to what work this government is doing to make sure that care workers are being kept safe?

Mr. Copping: You know, I'll comment, and then I'll actually pass it over to one of my officials in terms of the specific work going on. What happened recently in terms of the tragic incident is just that; it's very tragic in terms of that individual, Ms Onwu, who was killed. We have occupational health and safety. Our officials are looking into that. When we get the report back, we'll have a better understanding of whether everything was in place, and then we can move forward after that incident after we get that.

Maybe I'll ask one of my officials to comment on specifically the program that the hon. member was referring to.

Ms Gray: *Hansard* will turn on your mic. You're good.

Ms Young: Thank you. As you may be aware, we have conducted three focused inspections within the social care sector targeted proactively to assess the readiness of these types of organizations with respect to their workplace violence programs. That is ongoing.

We have also provided support in the form of the provision of technical resources to the sector to assist them more broadly as well as provided the linkage to a health and safety association that could also assist them in building their programming.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much.

Would you be able to provide – one of the measures for comparing occupational health and safety to other jurisdictions is the ratio of officers to employers or comparing the ratio of officers to other factors that generally remain stable in other jurisdictions. In your briefing binders would you happen to have that?

Mr. Copping: We do have some data that does a jurisdictional comparison in regard to the number of officers and outcomes.

Ms Gray: Okay.

Mr. Copping: For 2018-19 OHS officers in Alberta is 142. B.C.'s is 279; Manitoba has 50; New Brunswick has 40; Newfoundland has 29; Nova Scotia, 47; Ontario, 445; P.E.I. has six; Quebec, 274; and Saskatchewan has 55.

Ms Gray: Do you have, essentially, that information but contextualized, where it's the number of officers compared to, say, the number of employers or number of employees, so that you get a better sense of context? Comparing Alberta and Ontario just in raw numbers can be misleading.

Mr. Copping: Just to give a frame of reference, we take a look at the likes of: Alberta has 6.2 officers for 100,000 workers, Ontario has 5.9, Quebec has 7.2, B.C. has 12, Manitoba has 7.8, and Saskatchewan has 9.6.

Ms Gray: Sorry. What was Ontario?

Mr. Copping: Ontario has 5.9 officers per 100,000 workers.

Ms Gray: Okay. Thank you very much, Minister.

I believe that we've been talking about this as we talked about occupational health and safety, but on the Alberta Labour website the prevention initiative for Alberta's occupational health and safety system is available. It talks about, really, finding those system priorities like musculoskeletal disorders; slips, trips, and falls; psychosocial hazards like violence, harassment, mental

health, essentially finding those priorities that particularly, based on data, need our attention as well as priority workforces like small businesses and vulnerable workers. I note that it talks about potentially producing a report in the summer, and I was wondering if that work was completed and if that report will be made publicly available.

Mr. Copping: I'm going to ask one of my officials, Jody, to respond.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. We have concluded the 10-minute speaking block for the Official Opposition.

I will now call a five-minute break. We will resume in five minutes. Thank you.

[The committee adjourned from 10:46 a.m. to 10:51 a.m.]

The Chair: Good. Thank you. Our five-minute break has elapsed. We will now reconvene.

We will begin with a 10-minute speaking block for the government caucus. MLA Allard, you may proceed at this time.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Chair. I will just start by talking a little bit about Grande Prairie as we get settled back in here. We left off talking about the Alberta advantage immigration strategy. I wanted to highlight a couple of things with respect to that. I know that as the Grande Prairie regional hospital project comes to a conclusion, there are a number of gap analyses that have been conducted to identify where we're going to need to look for staffing to make sure that the hospital is not only running but fully staffed and running efficiently. That being said, my background is in the service and hospitality sector, very different than health, but I still have personally experienced challenges to staff my restaurants and retain workers. I suspect that this immigration strategy will assist immigrants to settle and feel more at home in these smaller communities and also provide employment, potentially, to other residents, particularly if they're coming in under the entrepreneurial stream.

Another benefit I'm hoping to see will be the acceleration of settlement of immigrant families. This has definitely proven to increase the likelihood of that worker staying in the community where they start and settling there. There certainly have been times in my former career when our business expansion was deferred or even cancelled due to extreme staff shortages, and I think that ours is just an indicator of other industries that may even have further challenges.

Further to my previous question when we stopped our last block of time, I'm wondering if the minister can comment further on the number of jobs that will be maintained and potentially added due to the Alberta advantage immigration strategy.

Mr. Copping: Well, thank you very much for the question. You know, I wholly agree with your assessment of, particularly in rural Alberta, the need to have the right people with the right skills at the right time to support businesses. We firmly believe – and this is why it was such a core component of our platform – that this strategy will increase job opportunities for Albertans, growing our economy, and it will also help newcomers in terms of finding jobs. The entrepreneurship stream alone, bringing entrepreneurs into our province to create jobs, is a direct path to job creation but also having people to provide services – right? – as indicated. You talked about the hospital opening up in Grande Prairie and: do we actually have all the skills that we need to open the hospital? Not only that; in conversation that we had when we did the round-tables in Grande

Prairie, there was one young man, a doctor, who had gone to a small rural location outside – the name I can't remember.

Mrs. Allard: Beaverlodge.

Mr. Copping: Beaverlodge. That's right. I should remember Beaverlodge. But the challenges they had with accreditation and basically being the only medical practitioner or potential medical practitioner in Beaverlodge – people are retiring, and there's no one to replace them.

You know, our strategy is going to be focused on bringing both entrepreneurs into rural Alberta as well as on occupations where there's a shortage, whether it be for the health care professionals or in other areas, to be able to grow the economy and provide the services that we need. Quite frankly, the one thing I remarked on at the round-table discussions that we had was that to be successful, this is going to have to be a whole-government, whole-community approach. What I mean by that is that it's not only the provincial government, but it's working with the municipalities, economic development authorities, newcomer organizations in Grande Prairie, for example, and the federal government to ensure that our program aligns with the federal program to get the right person at the right time as quickly as possible and that they feel welcome.

As indicated before, I view my role as the vice-president of human resources for the province. When you look at this from a hiring lens, if you're asking an external hire to come to our province, it's not only important that when you hire someone to your organization – and you as a private business owner have done this many times – you make sure that they feel welcome, that they have the training that they need, that they know the job that they need to do, that they not only feel welcome but their family feels welcome, right? You bring them all in and welcome them into your business and your community. We need to have the supports to do that. The strategy will outline our approach to that, and I'm really excited to be releasing that in the new year.

Some of the funding and the programs that my department supports in terms of working with programs for doing outreach, particularly building capacity in rural areas, which is one of the focuses for our programs so that – yes, Calgary and Edmonton have a number of newcomer organizations that can provide settlement services, but now we need more in Grande Prairie and then even smaller areas so that we can support that so that when newcomers come, not only do they have a job, but they feel welcome, they can get integrated, and they stay. This goes back to comments made earlier in regard to: what do you measure? Well, you need to measure retention. I get the point of retention in the particular field that we bring them in, but we need to measure retention if we're bringing newcomers to rural Alberta to support growth there and ensure that they're creating jobs either in the entrepreneurship stream or by providing really valuable services that we need because we can't get people from elsewhere and that they actually stay, and part of that is feeling welcome.

Mrs. Allard: Yes. Thank you.

I believe that this is public knowledge as of this morning: I was appointed as chair of the Northern Alberta Development Council. In that new role I know that this strategy – I realize that we're talking about the Alberta advantage immigration strategy, but I think it also pertains to labour mobility within the country. I guess my comment would be that I'm just hoping to work alongside the ministry to ensure that we are able to staff initiatives often in northern Alberta. I know that people lump Grande Prairie and Fort McMurray. We are geographically far apart and actually quite, quite different in how things operate and in some of the challenges

that we face as communities. I would say that one of the challenges for investment is to make sure that we can staff that investment to fully realize the return on it. That would be my last comment.

With that, Chair, I will cede my time over to MLA Horner.

The Chair: MLA Horner, you have about three minutes.

Mr. Horner: Three minutes? Okay. Thank you, Chair. Through you to the minister and the department, thank you for your preparations and availability today. With three minutes, I guess I'd like to go to page 108 of the fiscal plan and ask a little bit about the heroes fund and the PTSD support. I know this was a campaign pledge, and I know it's \$9 million over three years beginning in 2020-21, but I'm wondering if you can elaborate on how this funding will be allocated.

Mr. Copping: Sure. Happy to do so, and thank you so much for the question. I'm very, very excited about these campaign commitments that we've made. Just to break them down, starting in 2020-2021, the Alberta government has committed to \$1.5 million per year for three years for the heroes fund. This will provide a one-time tax-free payment of \$100,000 to eligible families of first responders who die as a result of performing their duties. This is in recognition of the incredible work that our first responders do putting their lives on the line, putting their lives at risk to protect us. This is in recognition of that for their families.

11:00

Now, this is a fund that you hope you never have to pay out, quite frankly, but we do recognize that there are first responders who, unfortunately, die in the line of duty, so to recognize that and help support their families – and this is in addition to the federal program. There already is a program, the federal memorial grant program, for first responders who are eligible. This is in addition to that federal program, for those who receive that. This includes police officers, firefighters, and paramedics. We expect this program to start in the spring of 2020. We made an announcement earlier today on this. The administrative details: we're working that out right now, and we'll be able to provide more details early next year.

In regard to the PTSD support funding program, this will also provide \$1.5 million annually beginning in April 2020, and it will tie closely with the federal program, Supporting Canada's Public Safety Personnel: An Action Plan on Post-Traumatic Stress Injuries. This is a new two-stream grant program, on the PTSD side, using the structure of former grant programs to disburse funds for services for first responders and applied research on best practices to treat and prevent PTSD in first responders.

You know, I was chatting about this with the firefighters last night at a reception. We can talk more about that later.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We now begin a 10-minute speaking block for the Official Opposition. MLA Nielsen, you may proceed.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. Through you to the minister: if we can share our time?

Mr. Copping: That's fine.

Mr. Nielsen: Great. Thank you very much. I guess I'll start off – I'll probably be spending most of the time on page 112 of the business plan. Just in case, for reference, over in the government estimates, page 208, line item 9, around red tape reduction, there's \$1.5 million being allocated for this fiscal year. I may just happen to mention that, just in case. But looking back on page 112, key

objective 1.1 talks about reducing red tape and regulatory burden. I'm just wondering: how much red tape has your ministry been able to reduce so far?

Mr. Copping: Just to provide some context in terms of the red tape reduction, you know, this is a part – and a critical part – of our government's approach to reducing red tape. Red tape is not only about looking at reducing red tape for employers, right? To reduce the costs associated with red tape and enable them to hire more people: that's really the objective of it.

Mr. Nielsen: How much red tape have you been able to reduce?

Mr. Copping: I'll get to that in a second. But it's also looking at our own internal processes. It's not red tape for employers – right? – but also red tape, quite frankly, in our own government processes to do that.

We made a number of red tape reduction items, and I can actually go through a few of them.

Mr. Nielsen: That's probably okay, Minister. Just a ballpark number: round it up or down; it doesn't matter.

Mr. Copping: Yeah. We have it broken down – sorry. I'm counting because I have a list of several pages associated with it.

Mr. Nielsen: Yeah. Like I said, you can just ballpark it if that's the case.

Mr. Copping: Well, it's both . . .

Mr. Nielsen: Maybe you can just get back to me with that number later if that's more convenient.

Mr. Copping: Yeah. I'll get back to you. It's just broken down in a number of both stuff we've . . .

Mr. Nielsen: I'm just looking for a rough number of what's been accomplished here so far. Yeah, if you can get that back to me before we vote on estimates, that would be great.

I guess the next question around that, though, is: is this work being done within the ministry, or is it being done within the ministry of red tape?

Mr. Copping: We work collaboratively with the minister of red tape. The minister of red tape, in terms of – from a process standpoint, as you may be aware, they have gone out to the public looking for a number of suggestions, you know, doing industry round-tables, in terms of: how do we reduce red tape? Some of those items will affect our ministry, so we will receive them. Then we'll analyze them and say, "Okay; does it make sense in terms of reduced red tape? What are the implications associated with that?" and then be able to move forward on it. Some of the items – and it's not just . . .

Mr. Nielsen: Sorry, Minister. I hate to interrupt. It's just that there's a lot of information here and a very short time to try to get through it. How many staff do you figure are being dedicated to this through your ministry, approximately?

Mr. Copping: I'll ask my officials to – this is about culture. This is not about individuals saying: your job is RTR, and that's all you're going to do. This is about looking at our current resources and how we are assessing. You know, we have a policy group, for example.

Mr. Nielsen: Do you have, like, maybe a group of two or three employees that kind of, sort of look towards that?

Mr. Copping: You know, we may have a few people that focus a significant amount of their time on it. Again, we haven't staffed up to deal with RTR. What it is is about looking at the focus on the – for example, we have a policy group, and the policy groups will get ideas from the RTR committee, right? Plus, all . . .

Mr. Nielsen: Sure. I pretty much get the idea, Minister. Sorry. Again I apologize for having to tear through this very, very quickly here.

Maybe I'll just get you to look now again under key objective 1.2, around the minimum wage and, more specifically, the youth wage. I'm just wondering, you know: what kind of information do you think employers need to keep track of in order to comply with this new legislation that was brought in?

Mr. Copping: Well, they will need to know whether or not the – just back up for a second. The youth minimum wage applies, first of all, to students. When they're not working in, like, holiday time, it applies for students working 28 hours or less, right? When you're actually looking at, you know, "What do employers need to know?" well, they need to know (a) if they're students and (b) the number of hours that they worked.

Mr. Nielsen: Okay. Were employers previously required to kind of keep track of this information?

Mr. Copping: The number of hours they worked: most definitely, because they have to pay them, so they have to keep track of that on a regular basis.

Mr. Nielsen: Essentially, like, that's not their birth date and . . .

Mr. Copping: Whether they were a student or not: there was no requirement at that point in time to do that.

Mr. Nielsen: Okay. I guess, since this red tape reduction was created to encourage youth employment, I'm just wondering if you might have a number around how many youth jobs have been created because of these changes. If it's not handy, you can always get that number back to me. That's fine.

Maybe while you're looking: at the same time, have we had any reports about job losses in that area? The reason I ask: I'm certainly not going to point any specific fingers, but I do know of a couple of employers that would take advantage of this situation and potentially lay off an individual because they can get somebody at a lower rate.

Mr. Copping: Like, again, we do have stats in regard to the youth aged 15 to 24, but that doesn't actually get into the category that you're actually looking at in terms of that.

What I can tell you anecdotally is that over the summer I chatted with a number, particularly in the restaurant and the service industry, who indicated that because of that change, they were able to hire hosts – right? – in the restaurant, which they hadn't hired before. Quite frankly, they laid them off before because they couldn't afford them. They were able to hire hosts to guide people to the table to actually get some experience associated with that. Anecdotally, I can tell you that I've had a number of people – and this is not one restaurant owner; this is multiple restaurant owners who came to me and said . . .

Mr. Nielsen: Are you expecting those numbers to come in, then, at some point?

Mr. Copping: We will get the numbers associated with Stats Canada in regard to the unemployment rate and the number of jobs

for that particular age group, those numbers. In terms of the numbers associated with how many employers specifically hired at this number, that isn't currently being tracked.

11:10

Mr. Nielsen: Okay. Maybe a suggestion: it would be a great way to essentially prove if it's working or not.

A little bit further down, then, on that same page, page 112, specifically now performance measure 1(a). I'd just start reading the beginning here:

Government is committed to reducing red tape . . .

Then, of course, in brackets it does say:

. . . (regulatory requirements).

But I did notice that right down at the bottom of that paragraph, again in brackets, it's mentioned here:

(Regulatory requirements are any action that a citizen, business, or government must take to access government services or programs, carry out business or pursue legislated privileges.)

I guess I'm just wondering why, potentially, this legislation wasn't originally added to the Red Tape Reduction Act, that we debated earlier. This, I think, would have been, you know, very helpful. Any idea maybe why that kind of a definition wasn't added in?

Mr. Copping: I wasn't involved in developing that act, so I can't tell you. What I do know – and I think it's useful just to put on the record when we're talking about it, because there's often confusion about: what is red tape? It's not just about legislation or regulation; it's also about process and procedure. Some of the items that we've been identifying: it's the processes that are creating barriers for businesses or barriers even for ourselves, so it may not be a change – when we talk about red tape, it's much larger. Quite frankly, what you want to do is: say, like, if we want to focus on, you know, better processes, quicker processes, faster turnaround time, it's not necessarily about the regulation or the legislation.

Mr. Nielsen: Okay. This definition that you do have, though . . .

The Chair: Thank you.

We now move to a 10-minute speaking block for the government caucus. I call on MLA Horner to please proceed.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Chair. Yes. Minister, we were discussing the heroes fund and the PTSD support before we were cut off last, page 108 of the fiscal plan. I know I had an opportunity to speak to some of the firefighters at the Legislature yesterday, too, and they seemed quite proud of this government's initiative on this. I'd just like to give you an opportunity to finish your thoughts.

Mr. Copping: Well, thank you very much. As I was saying, we were speaking with the firefighters last night, particularly on PTSD, and they were noting that this is an issue – right? – for firefighters and first responders, who are dealing with some very difficult situations. Quite frankly, PTSD could lead to suicide, and that's their biggest concern associated with that. Looking at supports not only when someone is diagnosed – and they're not even calling it a syndrome anymore or a disorder; they're calling it an incident because, from their view, this is something that can be addressed – and looking at funding on the front end, not just the back end, to increase the ability of first responders to deal with this so they don't suffer from the incident at the end of it: you know, the firefighters very much welcomed this as another way to work hand in hand with the federal government to address this issue so that we do not have sometimes the very dire consequences associated with PTSD in terms of suicides in this area.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Minister. I agree; it's extremely important.

I'd like, if we could, to move to page 160 of the estimates, back to the coal workforce transition program. I know it was touched on briefly by the opposition. This is an extremely important program for my riding. A lot of the people this program is trying to help transition are constituents of mine, and there's still a lot of anger and frustration over the accelerated coal phase-out initiated by the previous government anyway. I would just like to speak to how much funding will be allocated to this program over the four years, if you had that.

Mr. Copping: I'll get the exact number in a second, but you're quite right. There are concerns about employees who are working in thermal coal mines that are being phased out. You know, we looked at this program – this isn't their fault – that's associated with it: how do we help transition? So we agreed to continue the funding for this program, and the funding has multiple streams, which I think is very useful. This was developed in consultation with the coal workforce transition program and partners in part of that program, which are both unions and employers and government officials, to say: how do we help these individuals transition? As indicated earlier, we have, you know, the three programs that are bridging to re-employment, to go and find other work either in another industry or the same industry elsewhere. This is assistance with reallocation and, then, also bridging to retirement. The vast majority, again, have been bridging to re-employment. It has been a successful program in actually finding people other jobs so they can maintain their livelihood associated with that.

Also, we've provided, you know, opportunity for vouchers. It's called the coal and electricity transition tuition through the Department of Advanced Education and provides a maximum of \$12,000 to pursue postsecondary education to train for an entirely new career, so we want to transition out of this and go into a new career. I actually had the opportunity to meet with those who do the training on large equipment – forklifts, Cats, and that kind of stuff – and there's an anticipated shortage in that area. It was interesting that they were pitching to people coming out of the mining industry, saying: "Hey, there are jobs elsewhere, not in mining but in road building. You can use similar skills to do that." Very pleased that there's an opportunity to do that, and we continue to fund it.

In terms of the total amounts, what we have slated so far is \$4.65 million for '19-20, \$7.1 million for '20-21, \$11 million for '21-22, and \$7.5 million for '22-23, a total of \$31 million associated with the program. As previously indicated, again, this is our best guess as we continue to work with our partners. A lot of it depends on the timing of when the mines are closing and then when people are looking for jobs, but it's also the mix.

Bridging to retirement tends to be way more expensive than bridging to re-employment, but I think, you know, the vast majority – and you may have a better feel for this than I in terms of those in your community. From what I understand, a lot of the individuals that are working in this are, quite frankly, mid-career, so not ready to retire, want to find another job, and want to continue to work. The bridging to re-employment is a great opportunity for them, and the fact that they're finding work is fantastic, and a number of them will wind up as road builders. We're pleased to be able to continue to support this program and ensure that individuals impacted by the early phase-out of coal can find jobs in other parts of the economy.

Then also in terms of our government's approach, TIER, that program is going to be funding this going forward. That is in the House right now – we're discussing that – and we're very excited about, you know, our government's approach to putting in a major-

emitters tax with a focus on technology to reduce our emissions. We believe this will be successful over the long term and make a real impact without negatively impacting jobs and workers.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you for that, Minister. It sounds like no one will be left behind. I guess one of the real-world outcomes of this that I see on the constituency side is that you do have to remain flexible and kind of reactive. Those people that are caught in the middle: like you said, I hear from them quite a lot. The people that are being retrained: you know, the sad part is that they're being retrained to leave my community. That's the real outcome of this unfortunate policy. I thank you for being flexible in continuing. That's great.

If I could, then, I would move to page 109 of the fiscal plan, the Workers' Compensation Act review. It states that "in accordance with the legislation, a review of the Workers' Compensation Act will be completed." I was just wondering if you could elaborate on why a review is required.

Mr. Copping: There is a legislative requirement that we complete a review within three years, so no later than February 1, 2021. Then it requires that the government establish an independent committee to review the act, associated regulations, and administration of legislation, including the WCB. You know, we expect that we may launch this earlier. Our focus of the review is to ensure that we can maintain the sustainability of the fund while at the same time providing benefits to workers who are hurt or injured on the job.

11:20

Mr. Horner: That's great, Minister. What would be the expected impact on WCB-related agencies?

Mr. Copping: You know, part of it is that it's to be determined. One of the other things is part of looking at it from the red tape reduction lens: look at all the agencies and the flow of a claim and then, if it's not approved, take a look at what the appeals process is and how it works its way through, the amount of time that it works through, and the number of hands that it changes. Can we minimize that time?

One of the issues identified through WCB is that the vast majority of claims are dealt with in a very short period of time and get people back to work. Really, that's what you want to focus on. It's better for the employee, and it's better for employers, quite frankly. The longer time that claims drag on, then you have potential for intervening ailments to come into play. You know, if you look at the overall stats, once you get past a certain point in time, like – and I can't remember the exact number, but we're talking six to nine months – then the risk of that claim going on for years goes significantly higher.

You know, part of looking at it from a red tape reduction standpoint and also the standpoint of improving the outcomes for both workers and employers is: how do we streamline this process? So we're making no decisions yet.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We now begin a 10-minute speaking block with the Official Opposition. MLA Gray, you may proceed.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much. I'm actually going to try and take a page out of my colleague's handbook because I'm looking at how many questions I still have left. I will again apologize for interrupting at any point.

We left the last block just talking about the prevention initiative being ongoing, and I believe your ADM Jody Young was going to respond to that if that can still happen.

Mr. Copping: With that, I'd like to pass it to Jody.

Ms Young: Thank you for the question. We are in fact continuing the great work under the prevention initiative. As you well know, it unites the efforts of our department, the health and safety associations, industry, and labour to focus on the three hazard areas of musculoskeletal disorders – slips, trips, and falls – as well as psychosocial hazards. Those working groups are stood up. They have been meeting regularly, and each of the groups has a strategy for moving forward.

I think you will also note that the original commitment was around ensuring that the department and the funded health and safety associations' performance metrics are tied to it. You will see reflected in our posted proactive inspections programs, that are on our websites right now, that each of our initiatives is threaded through those three key hazard areas, and we'll be holding ourselves to account with respect to each of those elements.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much. I'll ask just for a follow-up offline, just the link to where the proactive inspection programs are listed. I don't think I found it, but there's lots on the website. So if you can follow up.

On the topic of OH and S, I really just want to make a statement. There's such a strong business case for healthy workplaces and investment in prevention initiatives. There have been a number of studies that show that investing in OH and S is an investment in prevention and that dollars spent on OH and S have a measurable benefit in reducing lost-time incidents but also costs on employers' training time, production time, and so on. I don't believe that Alberta was at a point where we were starting to lose our return on investment. So when I see a \$4 million decrease in the OH and S budget, when I see a reduction in the amount of money we are requesting from the WCB to perform work that actually helps employers and helps our overall health and safety system, keeping in mind that we are talking about workers who are injured and sometimes workers who lose their lives, that \$4 million decrease, in my mind, should not be there as part of cost-saving measures. We are talking about health and safety. And if you believe that we've maxed out our return on investment and that more dollars spent on OH and S won't make healthier, safer workplaces, then I would disagree with that.

Violence and harassment stats . . .

Mr. Copping: Can I just do a quick comment on that?

Ms Gray: Please.

Mr. Copping: Just a quick comment on that. Just so you know, in terms of the reduction on this, we did increase the staff by seven. Also, the reduction was in the grant areas in terms of from a research standpoint. We did an increase, but also it's not just about how much you spend. It's about the value that you get from the spend – right? – and where you focus the time, energy, and effort to get the most bang for your buck. That's what our focus is on.

If we just talk about, "It's all about how much you spend; well, you're going to spend here, and that's what's important," it's not just about that. It's about the outcomes that we get associated with that.

Ms Gray: I agree with you, Minister, but unfortunately the outcomes right now as measured in your business report are increasing lost-time injury rates and increasing disabling injury rates.

Mr. Copping: And they have been increasing even previously – right? – like, previous to our government.

Ms Gray: Well, actually, there was a downward trend. The value of those measurements can also be discussed. I think that they're an important indicator. We know that there are other indicators as well, but I certainly appreciate the comments.

I'd be interested – perhaps it could be a response in writing – in the new implementation around violence and harassment policies in occupational health and safety, particularly as it's a target area in the prevention initiatives going on. How many concerns are we seeing through the department? What kinds of supports are being provided to employers?

My next is more of a comment. Again, on OH and S, I just wanted to mention that the OH and S council website goes to the Appeals Commission, the phone number that's posted. That's just something because I've been trying to figure out if the OH and S council had met yet. I tried to call, and it's going to a place that does not make sense at this point.

Under joint worksite health and safety committees how many accredited training providers are there to date? Are we doing any tracking about whether employers, particularly larger ones, have created joint worksite health and safety committees? I couldn't recall if we had a way to kind of measure if those committees were coming forward or not. I don't know if you might know, Minister.

Mr. Copping: I'll ask Jody to comment.

Ms Young: Thank you for that question. With respect to the number of service providers, the exact number that have been certified to date, I'll have to get back to you on the actual number, but we have been certifying organizations over the last several months, and it's continuing.

In terms of tracking the number of individuals, obviously we're tracking the number of individuals who are certified through the program, and of course, as we are conducting workplace inspections, we are routinely verifying that joint health and safety committees are stood up and in place as required by the legislation. Reflective of that would probably be a statistic around the number of orders we've issued for workplace health and safety committees. I don't currently have that stat with me at the table, but I could absolutely provide that.

Ms Gray: A follow-up would be appreciated. Thank you very much.

Also, perhaps just a written follow-up under 2.8, skills and training support. We've had conversation about it, particularly for training for work, aboriginal training to employment, First Nations training to employment. Could I be followed up with just on the amounts allocated last year and then this year further to that conversation we had during that first one-hour block?

Regarding the AINP fees, that are now \$500, I will flag that one of my concerns is that historically in Alberta AINP has often been used as the only path to permanent residency for temporary foreign workers. Although it is a part of the economic immigration stream, temporary foreign workers often do not have high-paying employment within our province, so I'm interested to hear if you have any information about how many temporary foreign workers are currently using the AINP program and if the \$500 fee may be a barrier for this group of workers, who would be considered vulnerable workers.

11:30

Mr. Copping: Let's comment in terms of that while they're looking up the figures on the temporary foreign workers. I know we have a

number of temporary foreign workers using one of the current streams right now. You know, one of our concerns when we looked at that and made the decision to put a fee associated with an application is that, quite frankly, we're getting flooded. Often what we were finding was that individuals were applying – not all of them but a percentage of individuals – under multiple streams in multiple jurisdictions. We only have so many staff associated with that, and we want to make sure that the person who is applying is serious. So we looked at other jurisdictions in terms of what they were doing, and we found that, other than one, all of them require a fee.

We're also conscious that this is an economic stream, so when you're dealing with individuals who are applying under the various streams for the temporary foreign workers, I recognize that it's \$500, but they are working, right? They're actually earning an income on that, and often, you know, it's the employer, in addition, that wants them to become a permanent resident. So we're also conscious of that. A temporary foreign worker wants to apply for permanent residency, but they also have a job, and the employer wants them to apply because it's employer driven. So with one of the streams, it's employer driven. So, no, we're not saying who pays for it, but at the end of the day it's a choice between the individual and the employer on that.

Then we take a look at the other main stream, which is the Alberta opportunities stream. Again, these are people who are for the . . .

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We now begin a 10-minute speaking block with the government caucus. MLA Allard, you may proceed.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Chair. Through you to the minister, I will just pick up, actually, right where you left off with respect to AINP. I will say, first and foremost, that in my former career I did employ temporary foreign workers, and I can appreciate the member opposite's comments with respect to prohibitive fees. At the same time, I definitely have personal experience where foreign workers are, you know, really trying to access PR, and they'll take whatever opportunity they can find to get that, and I completely understand that. But I can appreciate the minister trying to ensure that the spots are actually filled, because what happens is that we can get a glut of applications. I just wanted to inform that I've personally experienced that and tried to help foreign workers manoeuvre that system more efficiently. So I'm hoping the fee will assist with that.

I just wanted you to elaborate on – no. Actually, I don't need you to elaborate. I'm going to move on. We're just so short on time.

The Canada-Alberta job grant: that's what I want to talk about. Referring to page 113 of the business plan, the second initiative identifies that

\$22 million is allocated to Labour Market Programs to support Alberta employers and their employees to gain the skills they need to succeed in the workforce, including funding for the Canada-Alberta Job Grant.

I'm just wondering: first of all, who is eligible to receive the grant, and what are the grants typically used for?

Mr. Copping: Well, thank you very much for the question. The Canada-Alberta job grant is an employer-driven program that helps employers invest in training for current and future staff, and the goal of the program is to ensure that skills are aligned to job opportunities. Alberta job creators and provincial training providers are key stakeholders of the program along with Albertans who require the training.

The grant serves employers across all industries such as oil and gas, construction, manufacturing, and technical services, so any industry can apply, and it's in all regions – right? – whether you're

talking about urban or rural. The grant primarily is used for workforce training and upskilling to meet the needs of organizations and the economy, and training is available for both employed and, as we talked about earlier, unemployed individuals across all industries except for the public sector.

If unemployed, the CAJG provides extra support to employers to hire and train a new employee. This provides incentives to the employers to hire skilled, unemployed Albertans first. The CAJG also helps employers with retention of staff, engagement, succession planning, preventing layoffs, ensuring staff have the necessary technical skills, and assisting underrepresented groups to participate in the workforce. It builds capacity amongst employers to hire and advance women, people with disabilities, indigenous peoples, visible minorities as well as newcomers and low-skilled employees.

Now, the CAJG supports trainees – so this is not only supporting the employers in terms of doing this; it supports the trainees – to develop the skills to enter into and maintain employment, enhances their capacity and resilience to maintain employment, and builds capacity amongst employers to hire visible minorities and lower represented groups.

I actually have a testimony from a recent CAJG trainee. This is a quote:

As of this past summer I have completed training with the assistance of CAJG and my employer. The past five years have been very difficult for many of us in the energy industry, myself losing my job back in 2015 after more than 20 continuous years of energy industry service. After a brief period of unemployment in late 2015, I started working again in 2016 with my current employer, who has a strong commitment to personal development and career growth. I wanted to reach out and say thanks for the opportunity to complete this highly valuable training and further my career development.

In a nutshell, you know, CAJG is a fairly flexible program and can provide not only upskilling for industries, but the area of focus that we are in particular keyed in on is the ability to provide training for those who are unemployed and then get them into the workforce – so those are long-term jobs – as well as training for individuals that otherwise would have been laid off but who, due to retraining or upskilling, can continue to do their employment.

It's a very broad program. Those are the areas of focus where we want to do that. We think it's a good opportunity to leverage although there are some areas where, you know, we have individuals who apply and provide training where otherwise the employer may have done it regardless. So there are some issues with the program. We think that generally it works pretty well, but we want to focus on areas of ensuring that people have the skills and matching the skills to the job and that it leads to long-term employment.

Mrs. Allard: Can I just confirm: it is the Canada-Alberta job grant, so is it funded 50-50 between the federal government and Alberta?

Mr. Copping: Yeah. It's all federal dollars for workforce development.

Mrs. Allard: Oh. It's all. Okay. Perfect.

I'm going to move on, then, to the voted estimates, page 160. The total for program 2, workforce strategies, is \$114.6 million. I just wanted to ask the ministry or the department: how are you going to ensure that the \$114 million allocated in this budget is effective?

Mr. Copping: Well, thank you very much for the question. You know, the department has collected individual program metrics for three years and makes the stats available to program staff and

decision-makers in a monthly report, and interactive program dashboards are also used to present client outcomes.

For example – and we talked about this earlier – training for work is one of the prime examples. One of the key metrics is not only how much they're spending per trainee but job placement at the end of it. Our target is 70 per cent, and we actually write that into the contract, that 70 per cent of people who go through the training program either find a job after or some of them require more upskilling training after that. We have been largely successful.

Like, when we lump it all together, we're hitting our target of over 70 per cent. We have different targets, you know, depending on the program. For our immigrant bridging programming, for example, that's 79 per cent. For our integrated training program, it's 78 per cent in terms of placement. For our self-employment program, it is 90 per cent, which is very successful. We've got a little work to do in our transition to employment services and workplace training, which is just under 70 per cent, but when you look at the overall average, it's there. This is a prime example of a great metric and also linked to the objective of the program, which is reskilling individuals who are unemployed and getting them jobs, long-term career jobs.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you very much, Minister.

In respect of our short time that's left, I'll cede the rest of my time to MLA Rowswell.

The Chair: Okay. MLA Rowswell, you may proceed.

Mr. Rowswell: Going to employment standards, line 3.3 of your estimates shows an increase of \$630,000 for employment standards. I was just wondering: will you continue to maintain the level of service for Albertans, and how will this funding be utilized to support Albertans?

11:40

Mr. Copping: You know, the role of employment standards is to ensure that the employment standards are maintained, and then we address complaints quickly and fairly that Albertans provide to employment standards when there's a belief that the employment standards are not being complied with. We're going to continue to reduce the backlog and have aligned our resources to maintain excellent service for Albertans. We have implemented new tools in terms of IT systems and streamlined our processes to be able to get to those objectives in terms of the metrics.

You know, one of the key metrics indicated as a standard is that employment standards complaints be completed within 180 days, and our objective on 75 per cent of them is to have them done within 180 days. Given the great work of our officials in terms of both process changes and use of technology, we've been able to address 90 per cent of the complaints within 180 days at this point in time, and despite, you know, that we had six positions in employment standards which we didn't fill, we've been able to get better outcomes through leveraging technology and improving our processes.

This area is really important to us. Again, it's not about just what you spend, but it's how you spend it, and we have the right processes in IT. This is one of the examples the hon. member was asking for from an RTR, red tape reduction, standpoint internally. This is one of the examples that we point to in our list that is a way of, you know, reducing cost and improving services. And of note: we didn't lay off anyone associated with this change. These are six blank positions that we didn't fill, but we're still hitting the ball out of the park in terms of addressing these issues.

Mr. Rowswell: That's great success.

That leads to kind of my second question, where ...

The Chair: That question will have to wait.

We now begin a 10-minute speaking block with the Official Opposition. MLA Gray, you may proceed.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much. This is my last block, so I'm going to read off a bunch of questions. I'm very grateful to the department and to everyone for helping to facilitate this process, so thank you very much.

My question to you, Minister, is that one of the metrics in your business plan or one of the things that we record is days lost to strikes. I'm wondering what information you and the department may have about the cost to the economy for each day lost due to labour disputes, particularly when we're talking about, potentially, major industries. With some of the concerns that have been raised around Bill 9, concerns with wage rollbacks, we're hearing a lot of combative language from both labour and government. What could be the impact to the economy if there are larger size strikes happening in our province?

Mr. Copping: So your question really is about: do we have a number associated with the impact on the economy associated with strikes, days lost to strikes? The answer is that we don't have a number associated with that. We haven't tracked that before in terms of that regard.

Ms Gray: Person-days lost to strikes and walkouts: on page 118 it measures just that, only the fact that they're occurring.

Mr. Copping: Yeah.

Ms Gray: I believe that it's tracked because having days lost to strikes and lockouts can have a negative impact on everyone involved and the larger civil society, depending on which facility it's in. It would be interesting to me: if not your ministry, would another ministry be looking at measuring the impacts of what a general strike might cost our economy?

Mr. Copping: Perhaps another ministry may do that, but I'm not entirely certain on that. You know, the performance indicator is measuring the number of lost days due to strikes. As you know, our department has mediation, arbitration services under it, and part of that objective is to try to ensure that the parties facilitate conversations so that they can reach agreement. That is the objective of our department.

You know, like many, I spent a large part of my career in labour relations and in negotiating agreements and talking with the parties, and then I've actually spent some time doing that type of work as well. I think it's an important role that our department plays. That's the reason why we measure it in terms of, you know: how effective are we in the role, in mediation? As you know, in terms of the indicators we are one of the lowest in the country. When you actually measure the number of strikes, often you have one or two a year. The lost days to strikes is quite simply due to how many people are in that bargaining unit, right? We are going to continue to focus our department on ensuring that, you know, we can provide mediation. There are some issues that the parties need to address going forward, and they may need some assistance, and we're going to be ready to provide this assistance should it be required.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Minister. I'm going to interrupt you there because what I'm hearing from you is an understanding of and a commitment to the collective bargaining process and how important that is whereas I've been concerned about the general

tone from this government in how it is dealing with labour relations on many fronts. In your labour relations review, because you talk in your business plan about wanting to look at the labour relations code, are you committed to following a balanced process with representation from both employers' and employees' sides in any reviews that you undertake? I understand there's one that will be announced by 2021. Will trade unions be included in this process?

Mr. Copping: Categorically, yes. You know, we ran on a mandate to provide balance. Now, there may be arguments from different sides of the House of what that balance looks like, but it is balance, right? We need to have input from both sides on how the system is going to work. At the end of the day, you know, what you want is a system that'll enable the parties to deal with difficult issues and talk to each other . . .

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Minister. You've answered my question wonderfully well, and I appreciate that.

Just as a comment, I will suggest that I did not see balance on your minimum wage panel. You did not have representation from labour on that consultation, and I think that was unfortunate. I put forward some suggestions. I appreciate that you considered them. We will leave that there for now.

If you could follow up, or have someone from your department follow up, I wanted to ask a line of questioning around capital investment. I'd like to know a little bit more about how the capital investment in safe, fair, and healthy workplaces is going. As well, I'm interested: labour relations was updating their IT system. Big project. We had planned to do additional spending in this budget year and potentially even next. A status update on that labour relations system would be much appreciated.

Finally, do you have plans to modernize the AINP system and how that is being processed? If you don't mind following up in writing, that would be wonderful.

Regarding the employment standards, you've continued the . . .

Mr. Copping: Can I jump in quickly on some of this stuff?

Ms Gray: Yes. Very quickly.

Mr. Copping: The AINP: yes, we are planning to modernize that.

Ms Gray: Okay.

Mr. Copping: Our capital spending, generally speaking, has gone up, largely because of our investment in IT. It spiked last year. It's coming down a little bit, but it's still higher. Traditionally it's been around \$900,000, just under a million dollars, so we're going to go back to that next year, but we did get the OHS changes.

Ms Gray: Oh, good.

Mr. Copping: The employment standard changes, we did get those changes.

The labour relations one is finished. It is finished.

Ms Gray: Fantastic. Okay. That's all very positive. Thank you very much, Minister.

Mr. Copping: But there were complications, as you're well aware. I heard multiple stories for the last few years on that.

Ms Gray: Okay. On employment standards, you've set 75 per cent complaints resolved within 180 days, which is an ambitious target, but we've done so much to set us up for success there.

Mr. Copping: We're at 90 per cent right now.

Ms Gray: It's fantastic. A lot of work went in to try and do that.

If you wouldn't mind following up in writing, I'm just wondering how many complaints are being resolved through the new voluntary resolution process. I know that six employment standards vacancies are being kept, so not hiring there. I hope that won't impede any of the progress. If you could follow up in writing on what restrictions or cost-saving measures are being placed on field staff, travel, that type of thing, I'd be interested to know what's happening there. As well . . .

Mr. Copping: On that one there are no restrictions.

Ms Gray: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Copping: In terms of that, in regard to travel and staff, we can get you the detailed information on, you know, the number of complaints that we're receiving.

Ms Gray: Thank you.

Similarly, would you be able to inform me on how many farm workers have had injuries covered by WCB in the 2018 and 2019 years? That was information I always had at my disposal in previous estimates, and I'd be interested in that going forward. An update as well would be requested, please, on the Westray partnerships between OH & S and law enforcement and if work is continuing to build those bridges between those two.

11:50

Finally, I really want to touch on the employer liaison services pilot because this is a really important program that is essentially asking employers to hire Albertans first. It's currently set to end in April 2020. Given our continued high unemployment, will the government actively pursue continuing those programs that emphasize hiring Albertans first? It's a program that's driven by labour market information in partnership with the federal government. Obviously, they need to agree to it, but I hope that we will see that program continue going forward.

Mr. Copping: I'll ask one of my officials to answer that in a second. Just because I have it here, in terms of between April 1, 2018, and April 1, 2019, there was one fatality on farms and ranches and 659 injury claims to WCB.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much.

Mr. Copping: In regard to the specific question on the liaison pilot, Maryann, if you would respond, that'd be great. Thanks.

Ms Everett: Yes, we are continuing the employer liaison service. We have staff that are assigned to that. They operate through a telephone call line, and we have a series of workforce consultants throughout the province that follow up on that. We haven't seen a very large number of inquiries lately, but it doesn't mean that the program is not useful. Really, as you would remember, the program is intended to help those employers that are struggling to find workers and where the occupations that they're trying to recruit to are in an oversupply situation in the province. We continue to see it as a useful tool.

Ms Gray: Will we be requesting that the pilot continue past April 2020?

Ms Everett: We still need to discuss that with the federal government because, as you referenced, it's a joint project, but certainly it's an important tool.

Ms Gray: Fantastic. Thank you very much.

Minister, I'd be interested in finding out more. I understood through I think it was media reports that the Premier has asked you to review some of the issues around the trucking industry, around temporary foreign workers. I didn't get a chance to ask during this process, but I would be interested in knowing what you are doing. I would suggest that it would be incredibly helpful if the federal government told us where temporary foreign workers are working in order for us to better protect that vulnerable population.

The Chair: Thank you.

We now move to our final speaking block for the government caucus. There are just over seven minutes left. MLA Rowswell, I recognize you. You may proceed.

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you very much. That complaint standard has been great. I mean, that was my question, and it's been handled quite nicely. Congratulations on doing a great job. Given that, once you hit 100 per cent, will the goal be to reduce the number of days from 180? What's going to be your next metric?

Mr. Copping: I think that'll be a nice problem to have, and we'll cross that bridge when we get there. You know, part of it may be reducing the time, and then part of it also may be focusing on: how do we actually reduce the complaints, period. In an ideal world you don't have any complaints because people are complying. I think that would sort of be the next step, but we'll have to take a look at that when we get there and see how long we maintain the 90 per cent. We've had great success initially. You know, our target is 75, and we may have to up that over time, but we'd like to see a little bit of runway. Then, as I indicated before, we're looking at a lot of our metrics in the plan. I expect over the coming years, as we modify our plan going forward, that we'll be moving in and out of metrics because we're trying to match them as closely as possible to things that we can manage but also make a difference and make them outcome-based not necessarily input-based.

Mr. Rowswell: Okay. Well, congratulations, anyway. Well done.

Next, page 115 of the 2019-23 business plan includes initiatives that support key objectives. The second bullet states: "Employment Standards helps maintain fair and equitable workplaces by setting . . . standards for wages and working conditions in most workplaces in Alberta." There's been \$16.1 million allocated in the 2019-20 time frame. Can you expand on how the \$16.1 million will be used to support outcome 4, "Alberta has safe, fair and healthy workplaces"?

Mr. Copping: Well, thank you so much for the question. Having safe and healthy workplaces is critically important and a big part of what our department does. We have in employment standards 144 full-time employees that are allocated to align with the demands of Albertans requiring resolution of their complaints, balanced by a need of permitting education and outreach, collection, and appeal. So they run the whole gamut. Having the right balance of resources allocated to complaints ensures timely service delivery, so this is getting to the 90 per cent and then above, but it's also about education – right? – ensuring that employers know what the standards are and that they can comply with them. We're going to continue to achieve our objectives by, you know, getting that mix right, deploying our resources where we're going to get the best bang for our buck associated with that.

We're also going to maintain specialized services. For example, one area of focus for our government – and we noted this in our platform – is: how do we address human trafficking? This is a

crossdepartment approach sort of led by the Solicitor General. You know, the part that we can play to ensure that we can reduce human trafficking and identify the issues associated with that: when we identify that, we can get these people connected to the appropriate supports and address that problem.

Employment standards has implemented new applications through the employment standards portal initiative to deal with appeals and apply for permits and variances, resulting in less resource administration burden for job creators and Albertans. Quite frankly, our investment in IT and the process improvement – I know that you congratulated me, but this is not me; this is the people surrounding me, who have done phenomenal work. It gets back to, you know – and this goes to the red tape reduction initiative and culture – how do we provide a better service at a lower cost for Albertans so that there's less burden on the taxpayer, so that we don't have to spend as much money, but we're hitting better numbers and providing better service? I think this is a prime example of a red tape reduction initiative that has gone very, very well and hits on both – right? – in terms of making that happen.

Mr. Rowswell: Okay. I'll cede the balance of my time to Mr. Horner here.

The Chair: Please proceed, MLA Horner. You have just under three minutes left.

Mr. Horner: Okay. Thank you, Chair. Minister, if I could, I'd go to page 160 in the estimates and back to the summer temporary employment program, the STEP program, that was touched on by the opposition. I know that you were quite clear that, you know, 2019-20 includes \$8 million for STEP, and then the program will end after the current year. You outlined it clearly, that less than 1 per cent of the segment was able to access the program, that there is \$32 million in savings, I believe you said, and that there were other supports and training available. So that's where my question lies. I'm wondering if you can identify what supports are available to employers and youth to help support employment and training.

Mr. Copping: There is a large number of other programs that youth could do both within our department, outside our department, and within levels of government. There already exists a federal program that is actually very similar to STEP, which is in essence competing with STEP. It's interesting that we have people apply to both at the same time, and then they'll go with which one actually gets back to them first or which has higher, you know, better funding in terms of that. So there's that.

Also, within government we have a series of programs for youth or that youth can take advantage of. One we talked about already is the Canada-Alberta job grant. We spent a lot of time talking about that. That can be available in particular for students that graduate and haven't found work yet. It's giving them additional skills-based training to actually find a job. You know, training for work programs can also be used for students and youth as well as training to employment for First Nations. ATEP and First Nations, both on- and off-reserve, are programs that can be available and actually are used by youth and students.

Outside of our department: we talked before about Advanced Ed, Careers: the Next Generation, and the Alberta learning information service. Those are programs that are targeted towards youth and/or that youth can do. Under Community and Social Services, you know, career and employment information services: that's broader, but youth can depend on that as well. Then, as has been indicated earlier, there is a list of federal programs.

This is one of the reasons why we actually made the decision to say, you know: look, if there was unlimited money, maybe this is something you would do, but there's not, right? We got elected on a mandate to balance the budget, so we have to make choices.

The Chair: I apologize for the interruption, but I must advise the committee that the time allotted for this item of business has concluded. I will reiterate that any written material provided in response to questions raised during the main estimates should be tabled by the minister in the Assembly for the benefit of all

members, preferably prior to the vote on estimates, which will occur in Committee of Supply on November 19, 2019.

I would also like to remind committee members that we are scheduled to meet next this afternoon, Wednesday, November 6, 2019, at 3:30 to consider the estimates of the Ministry of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism.

Thank you, everyone. This meeting is now adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 12 p.m.]

