



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Standing Committee
on
Alberta's Economic Future

Ministry of Labour and Immigration
Consideration of Main Estimates

Thursday, March 10, 2022
9 a.m.

Transcript No. 30-3-6

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The 30th Legislature
Third Session**

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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Ministry of Labour and Immigration

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Hon. Muhammad Yaseen, Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism

Shawn McLeod, Deputy Minister

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

Andre Rivest, Executive Director, Financial Services

9 a.m.

Thursday, March 10, 2022

[Mr. Neudorf in the chair]

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

The Chair: Good morning. I would like to call the meeting to order and welcome everyone in attendance. The committee has under consideration the estimates of the Ministry of Labour and Immigration for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2023.

I'd ask that we go around the table and have members introduce themselves for the record. Minister, please introduce the officials who are joining you at the table when we get to you. My name is Nathan Neudorf. I'm the MLA for Lethbridge-East and the chair of this committee. We will begin, starting to my right.

Mr. van Dijken: Good morning. Glenn van Dijken, MLA for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

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

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Good morning. Jackie Armstrong-Homeniuk, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mr. Walker: Good morning. Jordan Walker, Sherwood Park.

The Chair: The minister.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Chair. My name is Kaycee Madu, Minister of Labour and Immigration. In the gallery is the Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism, Muhammad Yaseen. To my right is my deputy minister, Shawn McLeod. To the deputy's right is Assistant Deputy Minister Michele Evans. To my left is Myles Morris, assistant deputy minister. Next to him is Andre Rivest, executive director of financial services.

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

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

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

The Chair: Thank you very much. At this time there is no one joining us online.

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

Speaking rotation and time limits. Hon. members, the standing orders set out the process for consideration of the main estimates. A total of three hours have been scheduled for consideration of the estimates for the Ministry of Labour and Immigration. Standing

Order 59.01(6) establishes the speaking rotation and speaking times. In brief, the minister or a member of Executive Council acting on the minister's behalf will have 10 minutes to address the committee. At the conclusion of the minister's comments a 60-minute speaking block for the Official Opposition begins, followed by a 20-minute speaking block for independent members, if any, and then a 20-minute speaking block for the government caucus. Individuals may only speak for up to 10 minutes at a time, but time may be combined between the member and the minister.

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

With the concurrence of the committee I will call a five-minute break near the midpoint of the meeting; however, the three-hour clock will continue to run. As this requires unanimous consent, I will only ask one question: does anyone oppose having a break? Hearing none, we will have a break at the midpoint.

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

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

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

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

The vote on the estimates and any amendments will occur in Committee of Supply on March 21, 2022. Amendments must be in writing and approved by Parliamentary Counsel prior to the meeting at which they are to be moved. The original amendment is to be deposited with the committee clerk with 20 hard copies. An electronic version of the signed original should be provided to the committee clerk for distribution to committee members.

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

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Chair, once again. I am looking forward to discussing Labour and Immigration's 2022-2023 budget estimates and the 2022-2025 business plan and how they are critical parts of Alberta's recovery plan.

Under Budget 2022 Labour and Immigration is taking a unique approach. We are focusing on four main themes to guide us. The first theme is maintaining core operations with modest cost reductions. Labour and Immigration's 2022-23 estimates reflect that government is maintaining investment in its core programs and services with some modest reductions. The cost reductions reflect government's

continued plans for fiscal restraint with a focus on delivering programs and services in the most effective and efficient way possible. Front-line service levels will be maintained so that the ministry staff can continue to provide high-quality support to Alberta workers and employers in a timely manner.

The second theme is increasing investments in employment and training programs and services. Government is increasing investment in Labour and Immigration's employment and training programs and services through the Alberta at work initiative as well as additional funding to support core skills development and training programs.

The third theme is multiculturalism and antiracism support. Alberta's government is committed to addressing racism and promoting multiculturalism in all of our communities so that people from all backgrounds can live freely and safely. As part of the establishment of the office of the Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism \$620,000 was transferred to Labour and Immigration to support multiculturalism and antiracism efforts.

The fourth theme is COVID-19 and recovery plan initiatives. Labour and Immigration is moving forward with its COVID-19 and recovery plan initiatives, with the ministry having completed the emergency isolation program and Workers' Compensation Board premium support program in the 2020-2021 fiscal year. Finally, Labour and Immigration will continue to deliver the Alberta jobs now program to support Alberta's economic recovery and complement other investments in the Alberta at work initiative and other employment and training programming.

Budget 2022 is moving Alberta forward by strengthening our health care system, getting more Albertans to work, and bringing Alberta's balance sheet back into the black. Alberta is entering a time of great employment opportunities for those looking for work. Alberta is leading Canada's economic recovery. Through our support for retraining and our focus on removing discriminatory policies, we are creating a brighter future for more Albertans. Our government's early and decisive action to support our citizens and businesses with Alberta's recovery plan was key in guiding the province through the worst of the pandemic upheaval.

While we can expect some impact from this upheaval to persist, most indicators show that Alberta's labour market has recovered. Yet many Albertans are experiencing challenges finding work, including youth, women, and Indigenous people. Also, too many Albertans are experiencing long-term unemployment. Our workforce is changing. Older workers are retiring, and the future of work is evolving. Many industries are looking for more skilled workers, so we have made careful investments in retraining to help Albertans launch new careers, and as Alberta recovers, Labour and Immigration continues to focus on supporting Alberta workers and employers.

Budget 2022 includes increases for Labour and Immigration's employment and training programs. We are doing our part to ensure that all Albertans benefit from this investment to get them back to work. Budget 2022 invests an additional \$45 million over the next three years into three programs designed to help Albertans find their dream job: training for work, the Canada-Alberta job grant, labour market partnerships. These are only a few of the programs helping Albertans return to work.

Our ministry is very proud of the Alberta at work initiative. We will be leading this initiative with Advanced Education and Community and Social Services. This initiative will help ensure that all Albertans can take advantage of our economic growth and prosperity and find opportunities to build their skills, pursue their passions, and support themselves and their families.

We are working hard to ensure that no Albertan is left behind. Labour and Immigration is investing \$79 million over the next three years to support workers with skills development, training, and

wage programs as well as enhanced labour market information. Over the next three years more than 35,000 Albertans will benefit from these skills development programs, and we will not stop there. Our government will continue looking for better ways to support our workers and will adjust these programs and their funding as needed.

9:10

The 2022-23 budget also includes almost \$98 million for the Alberta jobs now program. This program helps reduce the cost of hiring and training unemployed Albertans for jobs while encouraging employers to create jobs as the economy recovers. We are continuing this investment to help employers' efforts to support Alberta's economic recovery.

Budget 2022 continues the coal workforce transition program. As our energy needs and options change, we will be there to support workers with programs and support. We are investing \$9 million to support affected workers as they seek new employment, retrain, relocate for a job, or retire. Employers forecast fewer coal industry workers needing to change careers as Alberta transitions to other energy options.

Newcomers are essential to maintaining Alberta's recovery plan, and we are speeding up the permanent residency process for them to enjoy the success they deserve. The Alberta advantage immigration strategy will assist entrepreneurs or people looking to have their overseas education recognized sooner. We aim to be Canada's number one destination for skilled international workers, whether they are starting a new business or want to make their home in one of Alberta's rural communities. Newcomers are a critical part of Alberta's future. Budget 2022 continues to support our successful immigration pathway options.

I take great pride in our government's efforts to reduce racism and discrimination in Alberta. In Labour and Immigration Associate Minister Yaseen and I will continue to focus on supporting our province's diverse population. We will promote multiculturalism, combat racism, and support the fair treatment of all Albertans. Together we will build a more welcoming and diverse and prosperous province.

Labour and Immigration will also continue to promote safe, fair, and healthy workplaces to ensure that Albertans' rights, health, and safety are protected while on the job. Although this year's budget reflects a modest reduction in dollar amount, we have maintained front-line services throughout the pandemic. The team has been able to manage increased demands through greater efficiencies. Promoting safe, fair, and healthy workplaces isn't just critical to our government's efforts to recruit skilled talent and get Albertans back to work; it is something we are proud to support. With the programs and safeguards we have in place, Albertans can rest easy knowing their rights and health are protected.

I am proud of Budget 2022. We are focusing on workers' rights and safety. We are growing and diversifying our economy. Most importantly, we are doing all of this while investing in Albertans through every step of their career. Together we will build an engaged and productive workforce with the skills and adaptability to respond to job creators' needs now and into the future. The investments in Budget 2022 continue to position Alberta as a destination of choice for a globally engaged workforce and enable more people's participation in Alberta's growing economy.

Thank you for your time. I welcome your questions and comments.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

For the hour that follows, the members of the Official Opposition and the minister may speak. Hon. members, you'll be able to see

the timer for the speaking block both in the committee room and on Microsoft Teams.

Members, would you like to combine your time with the minister's? Minister, would you like to combine your time with the members'? Do you want to combine time, or do you want block time?

Mr. Madu: Block time, please.

The Chair: All right.

Ms Gray, you have the call for the next 10 minutes.

Ms Gray: Okay. Thank you very much. Welcome to the new minister to Labour and Immigration, an incredibly important department within the government of Alberta. I'm very pleased to be joining you here for estimates.

Let me begin by saying thank you to the department staff who are here to support and to all of the staff inside of the Labour and Immigration ministry. The work that is done in this ministry is foundational for worker safety, for addressing the issues we have with unemployment here in the province, and supporting Albertans in a myriad of ways. I have a great deal of respect for the work that goes on in the department.

I understand that the minister has chosen to use block time. If the minister would like to change his mind at any point, please just let me know. I would love to be able to ask questions and have a bit more of a dialogue. We've been able to do that very productively in these estimates in the past. I think that would be incredibly helpful because I don't want to overwhelm with lists of questions. I do tend to come with quite a few, looking for more information. That being said, we'll start this first section in block time, and perhaps we can revisit as we proceed.

One of the premier initiatives under Budget 2022 is the Alberta at work initiative. I'm pleased to see that Labour is leading this initiative in partnership with Advanced Ed, CSS, certainly through the LMD delivery. These ministries have been working together to address the challenges with our labour market and employment for many, many years. Of the \$600 million I noted that only \$79 million was being delivered through Labour. I feel strongly that the programs being delivered in the Department of Labour – training for work, CAJG – are incredibly valuable, so I wanted to talk a little bit more about the investments in Alberta at work and how that's being spent in the ministry.

There are \$15 million for improved labour market information/data analytics. I would love to understand if this is going to be additional FTEs, the \$5 million per year to do this work within the Department of Labour. Is data analytics perhaps acquiring technology or using consultants to acquire access to data others are gathering? There are many different ways this could be used to support the decisions being made by the government of Alberta, and I hope to understand more what those \$5 million are for. We'll call that question 1.

Within Alberta at work, the other piece, the enhancements to proven skills development and training programs, certainly training for work is incredibly proven. The Canada-Alberta job grant, I would suggest, is considered an employer-focused jobs training program. It's considered to be very flexible, but something that has been discussed at these estimates before is that the Canada-Alberta job grant is primarily used to additionally train currently employed employees.

Now, the program was modified to allow for a hundred per cent of training costs to be used when someone was hired from unemployment, but the uptake on that was incredibly low. I would like to ask: within the existing CAJG have we seen any improvement in uptake? Are more of the funds for CAJG being used to hire

people from unemployment? The money that's being put forward as part of Alberta at work, the additional \$18 million this year, \$23 million next year, and \$23 million the year after that, which is Labour's most significant contribution to Alberta at work: will that focus on that 100 per cent training for those who are coming from unemployment, or will those dollars be used to train already employed employees? How is the ministry emphasizing to employers that the dollars can be used in this way to make sure that it's to maximum benefit?

While I certainly know that employers appreciate being able to train their existing employees to improve their skill sets, it does provide them advantages in their own career path. In Alberta we have a very serious unemployment challenge that I think the ministry of labour needs to play a leadership role in addressing. When it comes to the dollars in CAJG, I'm very curious what boundaries might be placed on that and how that will be managed.

The breakdown of that \$18 million for this budget year between training for work and CAJG: I believe I heard the minister say that they'll be deciding flexibly how to use these dollars, which is, I think, important and will be very good. A similar question in a similar vein: training for work is included in one of the performance measures in the business plan, performance measure 1(b). I had a question here that I hadn't thought about before because this training measure has been used for many years, but it reads: what percentage of clients are either employed or in further training? Reading through the details of the budget documents, I understand that the workers are surveyed and asked whether they are self-employed, in further training. Like, they have a bunch of options.

9:20

My question for the minister is: do you have this disaggregated to distinguish between workers who have done training for work and have gone on to employment versus workers who've continued on in training? I think, ultimately, the goal is to have workers move on to full employment. That disaggregated number – the performance measure I think is good, but I'd be very interested to know the difference between workers who go on to further employment versus workers who continue on with more training.

We've talked a little bit about the Alberta at work initiative. I certainly would have liked to have seen Labour have more than only that \$79 million out of \$600 million. I think a number of the line items in Alberta at work that other ministries are developing are going to be less short term when it comes to getting people jobs. The work that Labour does and labour training does often reaches people who are close to attaching to the job market but need a little bit of help. When I see some of the investments in some of the much longer turning items – the work that's being done by the jobs ministry, for example, just about attracting investments, the work that's being done when it comes to school programs, a little bit more and longer term – I think Labour has a real opportunity to help get people back to work quickly through the programs that they are delivering.

I feel like I've already started to overwhelm you with many different things. We've talked about Alberta at work, the Canada-Alberta jobs grant, training for work. At the same time, I will ask you about the Alberta jobs now program. Specifically, you've now been through the first two intakes. What have you learned so far? I was curious if you had any advance signals to know how many workers from the first intake will have been employed for that full 52 weeks. I understand we haven't reached that yet, so you might not have that data, but I'm certainly going to be very interested in seeing how effective the Alberta jobs now program is in practice. It certainly was very popular with employers, had very high uptake. That change in employment status will be really important, and I'm

curious how high the percentage of workers making it the full year will be.

I was going to ask about the third intake, if you might be able to signal, even vaguely, when that might be happening for Albertans to be able to apply to.

Finally, let me transition a little bit away from Alberta at work to talk about the department of labour itself. FTEs within the department of labour: last year it was 851, and this year it is 837, a change of only 14. I imagine that this touches on what the minister was saying about modest cost decreases. But within that change of 14 FTEs I also note that your Alberta jobs now team is 60 people. The program delivery has shifted significantly within the ministry.

I'm very curious to learn more about how those employees have shifted. Is it because there are significantly fewer within the strategy and policy division? I noticed that there were a number of manager, director positions vacant when I was reviewing the contact directory, specifically the increase in staffing within the workforce strategy. When it comes to FTEs, the change is only 14 people. It appears that there has been a lot of movement within the ministry, and I'd like to better understand where we maybe have reduced some of the work that's been happening with the ministry in order to staff Alberta jobs now.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Minister, you have up to 10 minutes to respond.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Member Gray, for your questions. You've touched upon several topics that are relevant to my department. You began with the Alberta work initiative and training for skills employment, the Canada-Alberta job grant – you have a few questions there – and you touched upon the Alberta jobs now program and the Alberta-Canada jobs program as well. You ended your comments with the FTEs within the department of labour and how that impacts the Alberta jobs now team.

Let me begin with the Alberta at work program. Although Alberta's labour market has largely recovered from the pandemic, we recognize that there remain challenges such as labour shortages in key sectors, youth unemployment, barriers to entry for underrepresented groups, and significantly increased long-term unemployment. A slow-growing and aging population will also constrain Alberta's workforce and lead to a greater reliance on interprovincial and international migration to fulfill our labour market needs.

To support the development of Alberta's workforce, Alberta's government is investing more than \$600 million over three years in new strategic investments to assist Albertans, no matter where they are on their career path, in participating in the labour market with jobs that support their aspirations and improve their lives. Now, building on existing strengths, Alberta at work will help individuals develop new skills, attract talent to the province, and encourage all Albertans to participate in the labour market.

Budget 2022 announced an additional \$605 million to support labour market development, attraction, and retention initiatives. These initiatives will focus on building foundations for learning, developing skills, attracting investments and labour tie-ins to Alberta, supporting employment seekers, and providing support to advance careers.

Labour and Immigration has also worked closely with Jobs, Economy and Innovation, Advanced Education, Community and Social Services, and Treasury Board and Finance to develop a path forward for labour market attraction and retention. Alberta is currently faced with a paradoxical problem of persistently high unemployment rates coupled with labour shortages in some sectors.

Alberta at work will support both reskilling and job placement support for the chronically unemployed while addressing skills challenges for businesses lacking qualified workers.

Now, in terms of some of the impact of this important initiative, as you rightly noted, \$79 million in investment over three years will support workers with skills development, training, and wage programs. Now, a bit of a background on this particular program. Alberta's labour force is undergoing a significant transition due to the combined impacts of the shift in oil and gas prices and the COVID-19 pandemic. This impact resulted in elevated long-term unemployment and many employers struggling with finding workers with the skills that they need.

Now, a bit of an overview here. Alberta at work has five key pathways to support Albertans. First, building foundations. Alberta's approach must recognize and adapt to emerging trends. Increased automation and digitization, globalization and remote work, green technology, an aging population, continued urbanization, and migration all have the potential to significantly transform Alberta's economy in the future.

Second, developing skills. Developing skills is critical to addressing existing gaps in our labour market.

Third, seeking employment. Assisting those seeking employment is essential to addressing Alberta's existing unemployment pressures and will also help address emerging labour supply challenges.

Fourth, advancing your career. Shifts in the nature and structure of work are driving the need for diverse and adaptable skills, so enabling employers and employees to fulfill emergent needs by supporting them in tough times is critical.

Lastly, workforce and investment attraction. Attracting investment to our province will be critical to create jobs for Albertans.

Now, in terms of the funding breakdown, as I noted before, Budget 2022 includes \$79 million over the next three years. Improving skills, development, and training programs would have \$64 million over the next three years. The 2022-23 budget has \$8 million in training for work and \$10 million in the Canada-Alberta job grant, and 2023-2024 would have \$15 million in training for work and \$8 million in the Canada-Alberta job grant. Then, finally, 2024-2025 would have \$18 million in training for work and \$5 million in the Canada-Alberta job grant.

9:30

Now, I also want to talk about – you referenced this – the data analytics that have been devoted, \$15 million. Here are the breakdowns, beginning with the fiscal year 2022-2023: \$5 million in program review and labour market information related initiatives; for fiscal year 2023-2024, \$5 million in program review and labour market information related activities; and then, finally, 2024-2025, \$5 million in program review and labour market information related activities.

You also talked a little bit about the Canada-Alberta job grant. Now, the Canada-Alberta job grant helps more Albertans get the training they need to reskill or upskill now and into the future. In 2021 by temporarily expanding the program routes, more Alberta workers had the opportunity to gain the skills needed for businesses to grow and diversify. Alberta businesses can apply online to receive financial assistance to help workers access mandatory training and training for family members and people who are sole proprietors. This program supports Alberta's recovery plan by helping ensure Alberta's workforce has the skills needed now and in the future.

Now, in mid-February 2021 Alberta expanded the eligibility under the program. Eligible trainees can now include employed family members of eligible employers, business owners, incorporated or unincorporated, or sole proprietors and partnerships with four or

fewer employees are now eligible to train themselves. More flexibility was also created for eligible training.

In the 2022-2023 budget there is approximately \$31.4 million which will help meet growing projected program demand and assist with preparing Alberta's workers to best contribute to economic recovery. Now, in 2020-2021 the same program allocated \$17 million in funding, including oversubscription for more than 5,000 applications, resulting in over 13,200 training courses for almost 6,900 Albertans, unique trainees, and around 2,000 unique employers as well. Now, this program can also be used to train both employed and unemployed, and we are still making a decision with respect to employers.

Let me, from there, talk about your question around employment and skills training. As our economy recovers, we must ensure that Albertans can adapt to changing times and gain the skills that they need. More recently our government, as I said before, invested \$600 million in funding over the next three years, and I am confident that with all of these combined programs we are going to be able to set our province on a path to ensure that we have the skilled workforce that we need.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Back to Ms Gray for 10 minutes.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much. Respectfully, Minister, I only gleaned a few pieces of information new to me or that were in response to questions from your response. Absolutely respectfully, I've been in your seat. My first estimates was only weeks after I had been appointed minister of labour as well, and you've only had a short amount of time to get up to speed. That being said, I know that the officials supporting you at the table have a lot of these more detailed answers, so respectfully I would ask that if we could try to go back and forth, we might be able to speak about a single issue at a time. Would you be willing to try that?

Mr. Madu: No. I would prefer the block time.

Ms Gray: Okay. Then I will just have to proceed and put as many questions as I can on record with the request that if the department would endeavour to – for the more specific numbers-based questions that the minister is unable to respond to at the time, perhaps there could be follow-up. That would be fantastic.

The response that I heard that directly answered one of my questions was the breakdown of the Alberta at work funding when it came to enhancements to proven skills, training for work starting at \$8 million, ramping up to \$15 million and then \$18 million. I imagine that's because, of course, training for work isn't something you can just turn on. We need to make sure that there are program delivery operators, and we need to partner with people to make sure that that's set up. I'm very pleased to see that it is weighting higher towards those training for work programs in the outer years. I think that's fantastic.

For the Canada-Alberta job grant you did reference the 6,000 Albertans, unique trainees, in the past year. I want to emphasize that a key question I have is: how many of those were unemployed Albertans? Is the Canada-Alberta job grant doing the job? Is it an effective tool to help unemployed Albertans attach to the job market, or is it continuing, as it always has been, to help employers train existing employees, which, while there are absolute merits to be debated for that, does not help Alberta solve the problem that the Alberta at work initiative is claiming to solve?

When it comes to the development of the \$10 million, then \$8 million, then \$5 million in the Canada-Alberta job grant going forward, can there be mechanisms that require that 100 per cent

training cost because someone is hiring someone unemployed? That is going to make a real difference if we think we can get the uptake. If the Canada-Alberta job grant isn't the tool, then continuing to emphasize training for work, I think, will be important, and it would be good to see even more emphasis placed on that programming.

Minister, when it comes to the department and the structure of the department and where people are working, I'll just repeat the question that I had. Year over year we're seeing a 14-person decrease, which, again, does not seem significant. However, within the department there have been massive changes to where people are working within the different branches. As an example, the Alberta jobs now has a 60-person team. Those are employees within Labour or FTEs within Labour that would have been allocated somewhere else, so that has shifted. Speaking of the people who work within the department of labour, I'm curious to know how you are measuring current workloads and whether the decrease in FTEs is through attrition, how that is being managed.

Certainly, as you continue to develop your Alberta at work initiatives and you work to solve the challenge we have in this province, which is very high unemployment right now, you have a wealth of knowledge within your department. If you haven't had the opportunity to meet some of the fantastic people within your teams – your industry workforce specialists, your workforce consultants, people who are boots on the ground talking to employers in different regions of the province – I certainly encourage you to do so. I know that the labour portion of the Alberta at work training is in good hands if the policy decisions can be made in the right place.

Now, overall budget for Labour: I see roughly an overall 2 per cent decrease. That being said, whenever I see decreases in the Labour budget, I'm reminded that Labour is driven by a lot of dedicated revenue. There's a lot of flow-through funding, whether it is the WCB money that funds OHS, whether it's the LMD money that funds training that cannot be cut, so when I see an overall decrease of 2 per cent, I know that that impacts Labour in a fairly strong way. If you're able to tell me – I couldn't find it easily reviewing the documents – what is either the percentage or the amount of dedicated revenue when it comes to the labour ministry in the 2022 business year?

As well, we see that 2 per cent decrease, but my understanding is that the Alberta at work funding should have been incremental, should have been new funding, so although we see a 2 per cent decrease, in theory that \$18 million should have been shown as a bit of an increase. As well, Multiculturalism, when it was under Culture, had value, and I think you talked about some monies being transferred, so that's an increase as well. When I'm looking at the budget, it looks like there may be more than modest cost decreases because the additional funding coming in is essentially masking deeper cuts to the department and to the work that the ministry does. That's certainly a concern that I have.

9:40

I believe we've now talked through and I've asked my questions on the Alberta at work. Training for work: if the disaggregated data for the performance measure 1(b) can be provided, I think that would be fantastic. And I repeated my question about the Canada-Alberta job grant.

Let's move on to a few other topics. Labour Relations Board funding has been held flat for a number of years, but the Labour Relations Board has been asked to take on more and more activity: OHS appeals, employment standards appeals. One of the performance measures, 3(b), is timeliness of the Alberta Labour Relations Board. My concern is that I'm starting to hear from people

that there are delays in hearings when it comes to certification and decertification applications, and as we move out of COVID, I believe we're going to start to see more and more applications to the Labour Relations Board. My understanding is that the number of applications and hearings conducted in 2020, for example, was decreased. COVID was happening. So with the budget being maintained as flat, I'm wondering if the Labour Relations Board has any concerns about being able to meet timeliness. I will remind you that the Restoring Balance in Alberta's Workplaces Act amended the labour relations rules and took away some of the timeline requirements that were there, which were intended to address fairness and making sure that Albertans had access to timely resolution as well as, particularly, certification and decertification.

Let's talk about – we've got about two minutes. I'm going to throw some occupational health and safety questions at you, Minister. Specifically, one of the things we've been able to talk about at these estimates in the past is the ratio of officers to employers within the province of Alberta. It's an important metric that can be used to measure front-line staffing for occupational health and safety to other jurisdictions. I suspect, Minister, you may have at your disposal a table that would talk about the current ratio in Alberta as well as in some of the other provinces, and I would love to know that. If you don't have that, I would certainly be interested in knowing the number of OHS-related officers that are currently in the employ.

As well, in the business plan you have included the number of inspection field activities. I'm always interested to know how the department is – and certainly we see an increase in field activities in 2020. It had to have been a crazy year for the teams that you've got in OH and S. I'm curious about the proactive inspections side of the work that's being done. How was that impacted by COVID? If you have the number of proactive inspections.

I was also going to ask about the prevention initiatives. The last annual report was put out December of 2020. When it comes to proactive inspections and when it comes to the prevention initiative, I wondered if during COVID that initiative has been able to continue.

On occupational health and safety I also was interested in the three-year code review plan and understanding where we stand with that.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Minister, you have up to 10 minutes to respond.

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Chair and Member for your questions. Again you went back to some of the topics that were addressed in the first 10-minute block and then delved into a few other areas – for example, occupational health and safety, multiculturalism, performance measures – and you talked about the comparisons in terms of the OH and S officers we have right now compared to other provinces.

I'm going to begin my response with the occupational health and safety questions. For viewers out there, the work of this particular division of my ministry is critical to keeping Alberta workers safe and ensuring that at the end of their work they return safely to their families. Safe, fair, and healthy workplaces help Alberta to be a more attractive and competitive place to work and to do business. Occupational health and safety laws set up minimum health and safety standards for workers to help ensure that workers return home safely at the end of their shift and prevent costly lost production and downtime due to incidents. Consistent enforcement of occupational health and safety laws helps prevent workplace illnesses, injuries, and fatalities. The ministry collaborates with job creators, workers, health and safety associations, industry associations, and labour

groups to promote an informed and knowledgeable workforce regarding both rights and responsibilities.

The foundation of occupational health and safety legislation is what is known as the internal responsibility system, where primary responsibility for health and safety rests with employers, their workers, and other work-site parties. Within this system the role of Labour and Immigration is to maintain the policy and legislative framework, to create awareness of rights and obligations along with best practices in preventing workplace incidents, and to exercise regulatory oversight by monitoring for compliance with legislated requirements.

In the ministry's budget estimates I'm going to talk a little about the budget for this division. As noted, there's a very minimal, modest reduction for occupational health and safety within my ministry. This reduction has no impact whatsoever on front-line staff or resources. Now, in terms of enforcement activities they conduct inspections both in response to complaints and on a proactive basis. You touched upon the need for proactive enforcement. They issue orders and other enforcement measures based on observed noncompliance. They also investigate serious incidents such as workplace fatalities and injuries resulting in hospitalization.

[Ms Goehring in the chair]

Now, you were also interested in some of the statistics related to occupational health and safety activities. Over the last 10 years there has been a moderate downward trend in injury rates. However, from 2019 to 2020 the lost-time claim rate increased from 1.54 claims per 100 person-years to 1.66.

You were also interested in the impact of COVID. The impacts of COVID-19 may have influenced the lost-time claim rate as Workers' Compensation Board data indicate that just over 15 per cent of claims were related to COVID-19. With respect to workplace fatalities the numbers have remained reasonably consistent over time. In 2020 130 workers died due to work-related injuries and illness compared to 129 in 2019.

Now, the question then is: what does our ministry do with respect to making sure that we prevent some of these sad occurrences? Labour and Immigration uses an evidence-based approach along with collaborations with stakeholders as part of its injury and illness prevention efforts. The occupational health and safety prevention initiative brings together safety associations, organized labour, the Workers' Compensation Board, and the department to align efforts within the system to have greater effect on injury and illness prevention. The current prevention initiative focuses on three priority areas and two priority workplace types. The three priority areas are musculoskeletal disorders such as injuries resulting from repetitive use, overexertion, lifting; slips, trips, and falls; and psychological hazards.

9:50

Now, you also were looking for the data. I'm going to have one of my staff here, Andre Rivest, talk about the detailed breakdown that you referenced. Andre.

Mr. Rivest: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Member, through the chair. I believe there was a question related to the OHS field activities, which is the performance indicator that we have in the business plan. Within the business plan it indicated that the '20-21 figure for that was 35,306. Just to provide a little bit of additional information on that item, that measure reports both the reactive and proactive OHS field activities.

[Mr. Neudorf in the chair]

From an inspection point of view: an assessment of a work site or associated documentation for compliance with the OHS Act, regulation, and code. In terms of reinspection, there's a follow-up assessment of a work site for compliance with the OHS Act, regulation, and code as well. In terms of talking just about the analysis of that result and the latest actual that we have for the '20-21 fiscal year, there was an increase in field activities that can be attributed to education and outreach activities by the occupational health and safety division, primarily related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

There are also various external factors that could affect the number of OHS inspections such as economic activity, workplace trends that could result in targeted inspection programs. Factors that are within the control of the ministry, again, include focusing on providing educational materials to employers to help both employers and workers understand their responsibilities. Also, the department conducting proactive inspections, which the minister had referred to, is key to trying to limit workplace injuries. Finally, you know, as part of that proactive inspection piece, a key piece there is working with employers who do have high rates of injury and disease. Then those are the ones that are targeted in order, again, to provide as much education and awareness as possible and to help limit any workplace incidents.

Hopefully, that covers that line item in terms of the business plan and OHS field activities.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Andre.

Member Gray, you also wanted some data on the Canada-Alberta jobs grant. Historically the Canada-Alberta job grant trains about 98 per cent of workers that are employed and 2 per cent unemployed, and this trend is continuing. This is a proven program that we will continue to review and make sure that the program is supporting the Albertans for whom this program was established in the first place. They can be assured that the department is ever ready to ensure that we provide them the support that they need.

Now, you also talked about FTEs within the department.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Back to Ms Gray.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much. Thank you to the minister and the department for a couple of small items, but, Minister, it is not helpful to me or to the public to hear overviews and to be described the internal responsibility systems. I assure you that I understand what OH and S is doing and their guidelines. The estimates process for the budget: in order to serve my constituents, to do my job as the Labour critic, I prepare in good faith a number of very specific questions to try to better understand what's happening. I'm finding the block time incredibly frustrating because most of it is being used up in fluff, things that I can read on your website.

I understand the lost-time claims rate is increasing and is now at 1.66. I had thought that COVID-19 might be a confounding factor there, and you confirmed that with your answers. My question is: what is the department doing to disaggregate that to monitor in the face of COVID-19 and the need to support Albertans with WCB coverage and supports as they recover? Particularly, we know that long COVID is impacting workers, and many workers were put at risk as they continue to perform their jobs in essential businesses during the pandemic. At the same time, being able to focus on our prevention initiatives and to understand what's happening with health and safety with employers in our province, if you disaggregate out the COVID-19, do we still see a rising trend when it comes to OH and S? How is the department going to manage that challenge to be able to keep a view on the long-term goals while also responding to COVID-19?

The question I asked about officers per 100,000 workers was not answered and is a straightforward measure in order to compare occupational health and safety systems to other jurisdictions. The number of proactive inspections would be helpful, understanding that the field activities include reactive and proactive.

You confirmed my understanding of the Canada-Alberta job grant, which is that it is used primarily, 98 per cent, to train people who already have jobs. For it to be one of the primary planks of the Alberta at work program within the labour ministry, understanding that training for work needs time to ramp up – but you're literally saying that of the \$10 million that had been allocated in Budget 2020 for the Canada-Alberta job grant, 2 per cent of that will actually help an unemployed Albertan find work. That, to me, is a serious concern.

I would suggest that through policy changes you and your ministry could encourage more employer adoption or perhaps limit employer use of this to unemployed individuals. Surely, there must be levers you can pull, because continuing to train Albertans who have a job while you tell Albertans that you are working to solve the unemployment problem – there is a fairly large disconnect.

Looking through my notes, the things we've been able to touch on and not, I'm just going to continue to put on the record the questions that I prepared today. They may be a little whiplashy back and forth, because I might as well just get them all on the record at this point.

Let's talk about the Labour Relations Code and changes that were made under Bill 32. Regulations for Bill 32 were published in December, and stakeholders impacted by these regulations were given, essentially, a five-month deadline for implementation. My understanding is that the minister and the department at the time promised guidance for the implementation. We're now two months in, and that guidance has not been provided. My question to you is: will the deadlines be potentially reconsidered given that you are requiring major changes for stakeholders impacted by the Bill 32 regulations yet have not provided the guidance that you said you would?

Under employment standards, very similar to occupational health and safety, I'm certainly interested in knowing the number of front-line staff that you're seeing in employment standards, what the trends are. I was very proud to be part of the early resolution process that we put in. Very curious to know if that's continuing to help with processing times, because there were previously performance metrics to help measure processing times, with employment standards complaints being completed within 180 days.

I would imagine the department is still measuring these things. I had hoped that you might be able to tell us more about how that's going or if it's been negatively impacted by COVID and increasing volumes, which I would not be surprised to hear, how the department is continuing to find efficiencies while providing that critical support. Certainly, we saw some improvements in the processing times for some time, but since then the department has undergone modest decreases a few years in a row, and I'm curious how that's impacting the resolution process.

10:00

You referenced in your opening comments, Minister, the unemployment rate, that is quite high, for youth, for women, for Indigenous peoples. Certainly, unemployment is a challenge for all. I wanted to talk about this government's policy of, fairly early on in your term, implementing a youth minimum wage. Looking at what's happened with youth unemployment in this province, immediately after the youth minimum wage was put in place, we saw a significant increase in youth unemployment, one that was not seen across Canada, particularly if we look at our neighbours in

B.C. and Saskatchewan. That indicates to me that leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic, youth in Alberta were already at risk with high unemployment. Their wage had just been decreased by the UCP government, and it didn't have the impact that the UCP government said that it would with getting more youth back to work. Rather, it simply took money out of the pockets of 17-year-olds.

Your ministry business plan uses the word "fair" quite significantly. I would be interested to know why you think it is fair for a 17-year-old to be paid less than a 19-year-old for doing the exact same work and, certainly, if your government will be re-evaluating paying youth less for doing the same work given that it has not helped them to weather the economic downturn of COVID. It has not helped get them back to work, and in fact I would say that Alberta youth are at a significant disadvantage to youth in our neighbouring provinces.

Ontario has recently announced new programs and supports for gig workers. What work is your ministry doing or considering to support vulnerable workers of different sectors?

We talked about OH and S, the ratio, the number of inspections. One thing that the department – something that has not been reviewed in quite a while. When we talk about workers' compensation coverage in Alberta, only about 82 per cent of the workforce is covered. The list of occupations not covered by workers' compensation has not been reviewed in decades. This government did undertake a workers' compensation review. I asked in 2019 the minister then if the occupations not covered by WCB would be in scope for that review, and he took that under advisement. It appears that it still has not. Especially being decades out of scope, there are a number of workers who do not automatically get workers' compensation coverage, which means that a workplace injury can have even more devastating impacts than just the injury. They would not be able to get the compensation and support. Employers are able to opt in, but many don't, and I think that this is something where Alberta lags other jurisdictions in not having a higher percentage of workforce covered.

I'm curious about the COR program when it comes to health and safety. There had been in the past few years some COR program reviews. What is the current state? Has the COR program been changed or improved to increase health and safety in this province?

We talked about the lost-time claim rate, and I asked a few follow-up questions.

The OHS prevention initiative: I would have expected to see an annual report published, and I have not seen that.

With the last 40 seconds I will simply ask the minister if he can please explain: in recent legislation the UCP government has changed the rules around joint work-site health and safety committees, removing minimum hour requirements, removing training standards, allowing anyone to develop and deliver the training rather than having groups like the Alberta Construction Safety Association develop a very solid course and then ensure that members of joint work-site health and safety committees are getting consistent, strong training. Now employers can train their own members with some very, very three-bullets, high-level details. My question to the minister is very straightforward: how does gutting that training improve worker safety?

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Minister, you have just under 10 minutes to respond to fulfill this block of time.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Chair. Again, there are a lot of comments here as well as a few questions in this from Member Gray that touch upon some of the issues that we've addressed before. Let me be

clear. I am proud of the work that this government is doing to ensure that all Albertans who are looking for employment find good-paying, decent jobs. That really has been the focus of Budget 2022-2023.

That has also been the focus of this government from day one. I recall that in 2019, when this government came into office, we inherited a mass of hundreds of thousands of Albertans that were unemployed, including youth. Today Alberta has nearly recovered all of the jobs that were lost during the pandemic; 150,000 jobs were created last year. Last month alone Alberta led the entire nation in creating jobs. We created an additional 7,000 jobs when the rest of the country were reporting job losses.

I think, Member Gray, that if there is any provable program out there, a government approach that would go a long way in ensuring that those individuals, our fellow citizens who are underemployed, get the opportunity of good-paying, decent employment – it is a focus on job creation. It is a focus on our economy. It is providing the support that our employers need, creating an enabling environment for businesses and employers and job creators to do what they know best to do. That is why we focused on the job-creation tax cut. That is why we have been laser focused on red tape reduction. That is why Alberta is being praised around the country for its leadership in that particular effort.

We have reduced costs on employers, and as employers and job creators – again, those savings: what we are seeing is that there are jobs available for every single Albertan, those who are willing and ready to work. We are seeing that in the number of jobs that we have created. You know, my hope is that all of us in elective office would understand that the best way we can help our fellow citizens to be gainfully employed is to be focused on the things that would actually get them to employment.

That also includes debt and deficit. I am proud of this government being able to balance the budget in this fiscal year, something that no one thought was going to be possible from where we were in 2019, when this government took office. The last time there was a real attempt to balance Alberta's budget was in 2008, and despite multibillions of dollars in debt and deficit that this government inherited in 2019 and despite a brutal two years of pandemic, we are at a place where now this province is providing much more efficient, cost-effective programs and services of high quality. We now have enough fiscal room to fund the programs and services that Albertans want and rely on. We are making a historic investment in health care; we are making a historic investment in jobs and training programs: \$600 million has been added to the Health budget; an additional \$630 million has been added for job-training purposes. My hope is that we can all work together to ensure that all of us – youth, women, and Indigenous people – achieve their dream of employment in our province.

But let me again come back to your question on: what are we doing, you know, to ensure we deal with the lost-time claim rate? There are many factors that influence the lost-time claim rate. These include workers' compensation system processes, efforts by employers to implement safety programs, and attitudes of employers and workers. Labour and Immigration strives to bring the LTC way down by working closely with all stakeholders, including employers, workers, industry associations, and, yes, WCB.

10:10

This ministry has many programs that promote safe and healthy practices in the workplace and influence these results, including raising awareness to promote health and safety, educational materials on how to work safely and stay healthy on the job via the certificate of recognition program, which is awarded to employers

that establish standardized health and safety management systems. The ministry continues to update metrics to identify employers with a high rate of injury and disease and works with them to improve their workplace health and safety practices and management systems. Programming is continuously adjusted to address emerging concerns to prevent work-related injuries, illnesses, and death.

You also wanted an update on the certificate of recognition, otherwise known as the COR program. Again, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic the government suspended the use of on-site audit data-gathering activities while public health orders are in effect. COR audits are restricted to documentation review and employee interviews that are conducted remotely by auditors. The use of audit observations is optional in 2022.

Work is under way with the certifying partners to develop a complexity-based, scalable audit tool that would be appropriate for all employer sizes, levels of risk, and sophistication. The smaller employer COR would be replaced by a new, simpler program based on the audit tool. The former employer review process has been redesigned to create a better system that will use a data-driven, evidence-based model to select employers. The department is currently developing the occupational health and safety abstract. Once complete, certifying partners rather than the department staff will assist COR holders to address deficiencies in their health and safety management systems.

Now, you also talked about occupational health and safety prevention initiatives. Healthy and safe workplaces ensure workers can return home safely at the end of their shift, so improving workplace health and safety starts with making sure that workers and employers have the right information to identify and mitigate risks and hazards. New occupational health and safety resources will help employers easily identify and prevent common workplace incidents and injuries before they happen. Reducing workplace injuries and illnesses is the responsibility of all work-site parties. Occupational health and safety works with employers, as I said before, workers' health and safety associations.

Here are some key facts that I want to put on the record. The prevention initiative was developed by Alberta Labour and Immigration. The program aims to provide an evidence-informed approach to illness and injury reduction and align occupational health and safety system partners' resources. Now, OH and S system partners are organizations that influence health and safety in Alberta workplaces and help maximize the effort made by all parts of the system.

Now, you also talked about, you know, the full-time equivalent count, and I want to provide some key data here.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

This concludes the first portion of questions for the Official Opposition.

I would like to take this opportunity to have Member Rosin introduce herself for the record.

Ms Rosin: Thank you, Chair. MLA Miranda Rosin for Banff-Kananaskis.

The Chair: As we have no independent members present at this time, we will now move to the government caucus for 20 minutes of questions from the members. Would you like to combine your time with the minister?

Mr. Rowswell: Well, block, right?

Mr. Madu: Yeah, block time, please.

Mr. Rowswell: Yeah. You bet.

The Chair: You may commence with up to 10 minutes of questions.

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you. Well, welcome to your new ministry, and I appreciate the detail that you've presented in your past ministries. I look forward to that happening here as things progress. The last few years have been a difficult time for a lot of Albertans, many of whom found themselves out of work and seeking employment due to the economic impacts of a global pandemic. This continues to be one of the most pressing issues facing our province as we embark on a road to economic recovery. Line 2.9 on page 166 of the estimates documents indicates \$97.8 million being invested in the Alberta jobs now program. Now, that one is designed for people who have been unemployed. It's not relative from a training perspective. It's a way to learn on the job, so it kind of fits into what Member Gray was talking about, training new people, right? One question is: can the minister please advise how many Alberta employers this program has supported and the number of new jobs it has helped to create?

Now, to expand on that a little bit, I am a member of the Premier's council on the status of people with disabilities, and I know there is an elevated level of support for people with disabilities to get jobs. As I understand it, in the first wave of it I think there were around 500 or so that got jobs, and then there was a second tranche that happened in September. I know from the Premier's council, like, they did a big strategic plan, spent a lot of time on it, and employment was a big part of what they wanted to work on for disabled people. There were actually members on that committee that, you know, are unemployed and they're really smart, but for some reason they don't have jobs. If you have the data, I wouldn't mind seeing the extent to which disabled people have gotten jobs. And then what sort of an impact will these programs have for Canadians who have recently arrived in the province or who have immigrated from another country? You know, that might be their biggest problem when they come into a new country, getting some work.

Can the minister please outline how this program will stimulate Alberta's economic recovery? I guess that if we've got people that are unemployed normally that are employed, they'll spend money as well.

Next I'd like to just talk a little bit about: page 166 of the government estimates indicates under line 2.5 that a total of \$9.2 million is being put forward to labour qualifications and the mobility act. I know that the Labour Mobility Act just passed last December, so it's good to see that the mobile labour force is a priority for your ministry as we move forward. I know that in Lloydminster the biggest challenge we've got out there right now is having enough people to work in, well, specifically the oil industry. People are having trouble finding people to fill the job positions. If we get the growth that we expect going forward, that's going to be an ongoing problem. I like the fact that we recognize qualifications interprovincially, you know, in order to attract people and get them here as fast as we can. Can the minister please outline some of the initiatives that this money is being put towards – you know, making people aware of it, I guess, or whatever – and can you tell me some of the initiatives that that's going towards? How will this money help make Alberta an attractive destination for workers? What is your ministry doing to ensure that this money is being used efficiently?

The other question, because I know that at the time that bill was passed, there was some concern about, "Look, we're cracking it open for everybody else; what about Albertans and them getting jobs?": are we displacing them?

I'm wondering if you're working on any reciprocal arrangements with any other provinces and, if you are, how that's progressing.

With that, I'll pass it on to MLA Rosin to take the rest of my time.

Ms Rosin: Yeah. Thank you, Minister, so much for being here today. As I'm sure you're well aware, our government has a very large priority and focus on reinvigorating Alberta's economy and creating new jobs for the people of our province. That would be meaningful employment in fields of their dreams and any field that they would wish to practise in in Alberta. But what I appreciate most about our labour strategy, your labour strategy, is that there's not just a focus on new job creation. There is a focus as well on trying to fill people who are currently employed into more meaningful employment as well as fixing structural labour shortages that have existed for a long time in our economy.

10:20

A lot of the time I find that when we talk about the labour shortages, especially the structural ones, in Alberta, we tend to focus on the more highly skilled jobs and the trades and talk about training people up to move and progress within the field that they're already in. A place that oftentimes gets forgotten about in the conversation around structural labour shortages is the hospitality industry. They're not oftentimes high-skill jobs. They are more low-skilled, wage-earning jobs but that still play an extremely important role in Alberta's economy and especially in the tourism economies and the tourism communities that I represent.

To cite the place out of your budget, workforce strategy 2.4 is where we have focused on targeted labour attraction and retention to ensure that our economy has the labour force necessary to recover. If we look in Banff and Canmore – and I'm sure that if the MLA for West Yellowhead was here as well, he could stress the need and the gap that exists right now in Jasper in the tourism and hospitality sectors. Interestingly, looking back, even when Alberta prepandemic had been facing an economic recession, where we had very high unemployment rates, it was actually the inverse in Canmore, Banff, Jasper, where we actually had a labour shortage. Even in the worst of times, when there weren't enough jobs to go around other places, we had too many jobs to go around in the tourism sector and not enough people to fill them. I would just like to ask: what work is your ministry doing, then, to ensure that these lower skilled labour gaps are filled, specifically in the hospitality and tourism industries, those more front-facing, wage-earning roles?

I'm also wondering: what work, if any, is being done to retain those who fill the labour gaps when their temporary work permits are finished? Oftentimes you see in the tourism communities that individuals will come here from another country or another province on a permit. They will work for a year or two, and once their permit has expired, as much as they would like to stay in Alberta, they have no choice but to go back home to where they initially came from. So I'm curious if any work is being done to streamline or retain those hospitality workers in Alberta and create an avenue for them to make Alberta their forever home.

I also look at chart 4 of the overview of the government's fiscal plan overall, and that highlights that employment amongst Alberta's youth has been declining for over a decade. I believe that this could also be a driving force behind the structural labour shortages, specifically in the hospitality industries. Typically we don't see people who are at the end of their career or highly educated with university or college degrees in these roles. We tend to see younger individuals, younger Albertan families, working in these hospitality roles. My first job was at Dairy Queen. I eventually went on to work at Chili's. I believe that a lot of times those are the individuals that fill these hospitality roles. If our youth employment has been declining for over a decade, I'm wondering if you would consider that to be one of the contributing factors to the structural labour shortage within the hospitality industry and, if so, if your

department is doing anything to reverse the downward trend of youth employment in Alberta.

I've got, oh, lots of time. Okay. I will ask one more question, then, as well. Looking around the skills and training supports, as much as I represent a large hospitality industry, where we do have those more front-facing server or retail-type roles, our government has put a large emphasis on moving Albertans through their career path as well and helping them to realize their full potential in the career world. Workforce strategy 2.7 is what focuses on the skills and training supports, specifically to create career pathways to success and maximize Albertans' potential. As we know, many Albertans are currently underemployed, or they're in a field where they perhaps could be in a better role or go through additional professional and personal development.

One thing I appreciate the most about your and our government's overall economic recovery plan is that it kind of targets every single individual or every single segment of the career life cycle in Alberta, whether you are new to the workforce, a veteran in the workforce, exiting the workforce, whether you are new or old to Alberta, whether you are an entrepreneurship... [Ms Rosin's speaking time expired] Oh, I had less time than I thought.

The Chair: Thank you.

Minister, you have about 10 minutes to respond.

Mr. Madu: Thank you. Thank you, Chair, and thank you, MLAs Rowswell and Rosin, for your very thoughtful questions. Both of your questions touch upon the government's efforts to ensure that there is employment and job support for Albertans needing employment, especially our young people. You know, we want them to stay right here in our province, in the best province in all of this country, to be able to live a full life and raise our families, build our businesses, so that in return they can contribute to the development and the social enhancement of their various communities.

MLA Rowswell, your first question talked about line 2.9 of page 166 of the estimates document, which indicates \$97.8 million being invested in the Alberta jobs now program. The question was: how do we ensure that Alberta employers who benefit from this program have got the support that they need? Let me begin by saying this. The Alberta jobs now program, which is what you were trying to get to, continues to be a key component of Alberta's recovery plan to create jobs and diversify our economy. Through the first and second intakes last year we have already helped more than 10,000 Albertans to get back to work in good-paying jobs by providing employers with funding to off-set the cost of hiring and training Albertans in new or vacant positions. These new jobs were created by over 4,000 different employers across all sectors of our economy and throughout the province.

Now, I want to touch upon the second part of your question, which deals with: what sort of impact would these programs have for Canadians who have recently arrived in the province or who have migrated from another country? As you know, this is an issue that is very close to my heart. I have lived experience in this particular area, and that is why I am so grateful for the opportunity to now help design the programs and services that will ensure that when new Canadians come to our province, they have the opportunity and that great Alberta advantage, you know, the Alberta dream. The exceptional nature of our province is one that I am particular about. As you know, when I came to this country, if those opportunities were not there, I don't think, MLA Rowswell, I would be here answering this question. It is an important issue that all of us who desire to continue to see a prosperous economy focus on, making sure for everyone, regardless of where you come from, regardless of when you come here – a hundred years ago, last year,

10 years ago – that in this province you can achieve your full potential.

That really is part of the focus of the Alberta jobs now program, that is open to any Albertan legally entitled to work in Canada. That means those with permanent residency status or those with a work permit. By enabling employers to lower the cost of wages or training for newcomers in Alberta, the Alberta jobs now program is one part of the suite of programs that we have to help new Canadians get to work. Programs like Alberta jobs now support the attachment or reattachment to the labour market by providing employers an opportunity to expand their workforce with new and foreign skilled labour.

The third part of that particular question, that I shall outline how the program will stimulate Alberta's economic recovery, is critical as we get out of the pandemic and reposition our province and people for greater success, and that is essentially the pillar of Budget 2022: the goal that this government hopes to achieve is to ensure that all of the employment support that we are providing to Albertans, including newcomers, skills and training programs, have a focus on economic recovery for everyone and every region of our province.

Let me again begin by noting that strong demand for Alberta's largest jobs-training program is signalling confidence in the province's economic recovery and future jobs growth. Alberta jobs now helps employers lower their costs of a significant expenditure in their businesses, their workforce costs. This lowers the risk for businesses who may still face some uncertainty as we continue to return to normal following this pandemic. Many businesses over the past several years have faced many restrictions on their business operations and, as a result, have had to make tough choices related to their employees. The Alberta jobs now program enables these same businesses to hire employees and grow their businesses.

10:30

More jobs stimulate Alberta's economic recovery. By assisting our businesses in this way, we help Albertans get good-paying jobs, which then help them support their families and further contribute to our economy and add to our treasury. Budget 2022 continues that investment, and I am pleased that we have approximately \$98 million allocated to this program in the 2022-23 fiscal year. We are continuing to process applications from the prior intakes, and we will announce details of the launch of the third intake to the Alberta jobs now program in the coming months.

Now, you know, I am pleased about the interest in Alberta jobs now as well, Member Rowswell. We are tracking information on persons with disabilities. That is the footpath of that particular question. While we continue to process claims, I will be sure to report on those numbers as part of our look-back at Public Accounts. We are seeing good uptake by employers hiring those with disabilities, and we will continue to keep working on that. This is who we are. We have to make sure that every Albertan, regardless of socioeconomic, physical, or health status, has a shot at the Alberta dream. For us, I've always said that we are a compassionate province. We are a compassionate people. We have to ensure that all of us – you know, we have always said, if you carefully listen to some of my sermons in the Legislature, I've always said that we govern for all of us. That includes most of our vulnerable citizens, who desire work and a meaningful life. This government will be there to support them every step of the way.

Now, the next question that you talked about deals with the Labour Mobility Act. I wanted to touch upon that briefly. Alberta's government continues to work with other Canadian jurisdictions to reduce barriers and streamline processes to get Canadians back to work. We are committed to attracting highly skilled workers from

around the world and across Canada to Alberta to support economic growth and recovery. You know, this province is going to lead the nation in real economic growth, and I want to make sure that we have the skilled manpower to be able to meet all of those challenges.

My department supports a number of initiatives like the international qualifications assessment service, otherwise known as IQAS, which is a service that issues certificates that compare foreign education credentials to education standards in Canada, helping internationally trained workers get verified recognition for the education and training that they receive abroad. Now, I must say at this point in time that I, too, went through this particular program because I was trained overseas. I was called to the bar overseas. For the federation of legislators of Canada to be able to evaluate your credentials, you know, this program comes in very handy. This is an important program for newcomers in our province who are professionally trained overseas.

Additionally, MLA Rowswell, we operate the fairness for newcomers office, which is working with trade and professional licensing bodies to streamline, simplify, and accelerate foreign credential recognition with the goal of giving Albertans for licensure a clear answer within six months. You will recall that one of the first acts of this government was to pass the Fair Registration Practices Act early in 2019, and that set the centre stage for the establishment of this particular office.

Your other question is on reducing red tape. Increasing the recognition of licensed professionals and tradespeople makes it easier for skilled workers from across the country to be able to do so.

The Chair: Sorry to interrupt. That concludes the government members' first block of questions.

We will now move to five minutes of questions from the Official Opposition, followed by five minutes of response from the minister. As mentioned, members are asked to advise the chair at the beginning of the rotation if they wish to combine their time with the minister's time. Please remember that discussion should flow through the chair at all times regardless of whether or not speaking time is combined.

Ms Gray.

There's a question about the break. After this 10-minute block we will have a break, just so we're not aligned with the other room.

Mr. Deol: Sure. I can go ahead.

The Chair: Member Deol, please proceed.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you for the time. Most of my comments will be made to the Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism, so I would ask once again to the minister if he wanted to share the time or if he prefers to keep the block.

Mr. Madu: Block time is good for me.

Mr. Deol: Block time.

Mr. Madu: Yes.

Mr. Deol: Thank you once again for the opportunity. It was initially encouraging to see the appointment of an Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism, a move that we would have expected would provide an expanded focus and mandate, but that is not the case. Previously multiculturalism was responsible for developing strategies and policies to preserve and celebrate the

unique cultures, heritages, and traditions of Albertans and ensure equal access and full participation in the social, political, and economic spheres. Now, with the move to Labour and Immigration, we see the scope is reduced. Previously multiculturalism was allocated \$1.845 million in the last budget, and now this has been reduced merely to \$350,000. In that budget is also the total for the ministry. This reduction comes after the previous ministry failed to achieve goals or show progress on implementations for recommendations of the Anti-Racism Advisory Council of Alberta report or properly fund organizations to combat racism.

My question to the associate minister is: how do you plan to achieve your goal to develop strategies and policies to preserve and celebrate the unique cultures, heritages, and traditions of Albertans and ensure equal access and full participation in social, political, and economic spheres with this very, very limited budget?

As the associate minister knows, our community organizations play a vital role in promoting diversity and inclusion. The UCP government cut the human rights education fund and antiracism community group support program in the last budget. Multiculturalism has been removed from the community initiative grants. As such, how does the associate minister plan to support community organizations which promote diversity, inclusion, and help combat racism in Alberta? Where are the multiculturalism grants located now?

The last question, question 3, to the minister. This is the first time a budget fails to allocate any funding to multiculturalism. Minister, what were you doing when this whole budget was being developed? Why even is the ministry moved under the ministry of labour? Do you think it is accurate to portray multiculturalism and racism-based issues as being able to be addressed through the lens of Labour and Immigration? I'm hearing from racialized communities that they feel this move indicates that your government views racialized communities' culture and values as less important and not deserving of the same respect and treatment as others. What would your response to these communities I'm hearing from be?

I'm also hearing from the community members, even sending me messages this morning, the business owners in rural communities, that Alberta's immigration program is not really helping. I see the number of programs has been listed on the website under the immigration program. The rural renewal stream and the rural entrepreneurship stream have not really helped the shortage of labour in rural communities. A lot of business owners actually called me and asked me. This is their time to actually retire or, you know, sell the business, and there's a huge challenge they're facing in the rural communities, that they don't even find buyers for their businesses.

10:40

The Chair: Thank you, Member. I hate to interrupt.

Minister, you have up to five minutes to respond, and then we will take a five-minute break.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Member Deol, for your questions and interest on this particular file. Let me begin by saying that this is one file that I am absolutely proud of the record of this government on. You know, when it comes to how we support new Canadians, how we make sure that they get to achieve their full potential in this particular province, we don't just talk about them; we actually do the work. As I travel across the entire province in my various roles – first as Minister of Municipal Affairs, as the Justice minister, and now as Labour and Immigration minister – I am proud of what I hear, the conversations across our province.

You know, one of the first acts of this government in 2020 was the ban on carding. I had the honour of shepherding that important

piece of legislation to the Legislature, a ban on a discriminatory practice that habitually stopped people of colour, multicultural, you know, folks across our province. That was absolutely well received by members of the multicultural community. I am also proud to say that as part of Bill 38, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, that I also brought forward in the fall of 2020, we get to include First Nation police services in the Police Act for the first time in our province's history.

You know, as Justice minister I established the Alberta security infrastructure program, that will ensure that multicultural organizations are able to protect their buildings, their organizations, their people and provide them an unencumbered \$100,000 in grants. I also established the Alberta hate crimes co-ordination unit within the Justice department. We also appointed a community liaison officer on hate crimes. We deployed the men and women of law enforcement to ensure that we deal with the senseless attacks on Muslim women wearing hijab.

I am proud of the record of accomplishment. I am so proud that I was able to get an eminently qualified member of the community to the bench. That's something that we haven't seen in our province in a long, long time. Across our province folks from different cultural communities are seeing the real impact of this government policy.

You talked about funding. I have to, you know, note that the work on the multiculturalism file is one that impacts different ministries, and I am proud of the work that Associate Minister Yaseen and I now have to build upon, the progress that we have made in the last two years. We have my ministry for sure involved in that particular work, the Ministry of Culture also involved in that particular work, Justice and Sol Gen involved in that particular work as well as Indigenous Relations. Together there is funding in different ministry portfolios to deal adequately with this particular issue. But coming to my own ministry, we have \$620,000 for multiculturalism initiatives, \$500,000 in grants, and an additional \$120,000 to support the Alberta antiracism advisory committee.

Recently the Premier also announced, in Brooks-Medicine Hat, the establishment of the John Ware support fund for new Canadians. As many of you know, John Ware is a great Albertan that I take great pride in. When he came to this country as a slave from the southern part of the United States in the late 1800s, John would go on to establish the ranching industry in this province. When John passed away in the early 1900s, it was recorded in history that no funeral procession had seen that number of people all across our province from north to south, east and west.

I am proud of the work that Associate Minister Yaseen and I are going to continue to do with this particular file, because fundamentally I believe that it doesn't matter where you come from, but in this province you have the shot to live your full life and achieve your full potential. My hope is that all of us can work together, because this is a critical piece of the focus of Budget 2022, which is to create opportunities for everyone. New Canadians came here for jobs, and we'll ensure that that job is there for them.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now have a five-minute break, coming back with independent member time and an introduction. Thank you very much.

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

The Chair: Welcome back, members. We are obligated to begin again. We do have an independent member joining us, so I'd ask him to take his time to introduce himself.

Mr. Loewen: Okay. Thank you. I'll do that very slowly. Todd Loewen, MLA, Central Peace-Notley.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Member. We appreciate that.

We will now introduce back into the rotation. Again, the Official Opposition just had their time. We go to an independent member, and then we'll go to the government, and we'll repeat that cycle. I have taken all the notes that I can, and now we will begin with our independent member, with up to five minutes of questions for the minister. [interjection] I understand. I can't do anything but have the member begin and have those questions written down.

You may commence now.

Mr. Loewen: Yeah. Thank you very much, and thank you very much, Minister and to the minister's staff also, for being here today and answering questions. I appreciate the work that you all do. I'm just going to run through the questions. I presume you want to do block time, that that's what you've been doing so far. What I'll do is that I have some questions; they're pretty straightforward. I'll kind of read them through slowly, because I'm not going to have a lot of preamble or anything like that, and I just want to make sure you have time to write them down so that you can answer them when it becomes your time.

We'll start on the business plan, page 85. What is included in other revenue, the line item other revenue? Also on page 85, what is included in the premiums, fees, and licensing? We see these line items in almost every ministry, but it's interesting to find out what is included with your ministry on these line items. Also on page 85, what is included in other federal transfers? I see that the estimate is zero, so if you could explain that, too.

On page 85, what is workforce strategies, and why did it more than double in expense, and why is it also included in capital investment? Also on page 85, why are the line items emergency isolation support, Workers' Compensation Board premium support, and critical worker benefit missing from the budget expenses for this ministry? I presume that maybe there were some changes there in how the line items are listed.

Also on page 85, what is emergency isolation support? I'm presuming that maybe this is COVID related because, again, in the estimates it's zero for this coming budget. Also on page 85, why are we not anticipating federal transfers in the budget? Again, in this budget it's estimated at zero.

The last question: how much are you spending on COVID-related labour disputes with the UNA and groups like that? Has there been any planning or a discussion on how much that's going to cost, and do we have any figure about what's happening as far as cost on COVID-related labour disputes?

Mr. Madu: COVID-related . . .

Mr. Loewen: Labour disputes.

Mr. Madu: Okay.

Mr. Loewen: Yeah. That's the last question, so I'll turn the time over to you, Minister.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Minister, you have up to five minutes to respond.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Member Loewen. I was able to make a note of your questions. Most of your questions come from page 85. Let me begin with other transfers. Those refer to other transfers from the government of Canada. They deal with labour market development, other transfers from the government of Canada, premiums, fees, licences. These are recoveries from the government of Canada for federal government contributions to provincial services provided to internationally educated professionals. The

best way to explain this is that the 2022-23 estimate is \$186,000 lower than that of the 2021-2022 forecast and is a result of the end of the three-year foreign credential recognition agreement with the federal government.

You talked about premiums, fees, and licences. These consist of fees for services such as fees collected for the provision of international educational assessment services for immigrants seeking employment and/or education in Alberta and also fees collected from the Alberta immigrant nominee program, the AINP, also fees collected through the land agents licensing, which are also reported under this section.

Now, your other question deals with other revenues. These are contributions from the Workers' Compensation Board for funds expended on occupational health and safety and the Appeals Commission for Alberta workers' compensation.

Now, you also talked about: what is emergency isolation support? If you recall, at the beginning of COVID the government established support for those Albertans who were dealing with the sudden impact of COVID. You know, this was a pandemic, one that we had not seen in a generation. Governments across the globe and certainly across this particular country were trying to understand what this would mean to our citizens, their employment, their incomes, and the means by which they take care of their families. That was one-time emergency support that we provided to working adult Albertans who needed to self-isolate or take care of their self-isolating dependant at the onset of the pandemic and had no income. You will also note that Labour and Immigration is moving forward with its COVID-19 recovery plan initiative, with the ministry having completed the emergency isolation program in the 2020-21 fiscal year. So that program has ended.

Now, you also asked me to explain the critical worker benefit. Again, this provides a one-time payment to critical workers through a grant to their employers to recognize the risks they continue to take to support Alberta during the COVID-19 pandemic, and this cut across different ministries. There was my ministry, there was Health, there was Community and Social Services, and I think there was also Children's Services.

You also talked about the workers' compensation premium support. Again, as you know, this was part of the government helping Albertans and businesses at the height of COVID-19.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now move to the government caucus. Ms Rosin, you have up to five minutes.

Ms Rosin: Okay. Thank you. I will be quick. I'm just going to finish the question I was about to ask last time, when I realized I had two minutes, not 12. I just want to again highlight the one thing I appreciate the most about our overall recovery plan, that we don't just focus on new job creation for those who are entering the workforce but that we also have such a strong focus on those who are currently in the workforce and on raising them up to meet their full potential.

Workforce strategy 2.7 highlights that it focuses on skills and training supports to create pathways to success and maximize Albertans' full potential. I see that that received a 40 per cent increase this year, or \$15 million. I'm just wondering if you can tell me how many individuals we forecast to support through this program – what broader impacts do we project to realize in Alberta's economy as a result of this program? – and if you have any projections for how much the average income of an average Albertan might increase as a result of this program and receiving the supports they need to move up in their current career path.

I will pass the rest off to Mr. van Dijken.

11:00

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you. Thank you, Minister, for spending time with us here this morning and going through some of the plans that our government has been working on and is putting forward to help develop skills in individuals as they transition into new work or as they progress in their career of choice. I am going to go to page 83 of your business plan and, in there, outcome 1. Your ministry business plan affirms a commitment to ensuring that Alberta's labour force contributes to economic growth and diversification. I see that your performance metric 1(a) relies on the province's employment rate for assessing your ministry's success in achieving this outcome. It's an interesting choice of a metric, relying on employment rate rather than necessarily the unemployment rate. Why will the province's employment rate represent a better metric for measuring your ministry's performance than the unemployment rate? Are there any specific sectors within the labour market where you expect to see significant increased employment rates as we move forward?

I also want to ask a few questions with regard to the Alberta at work initiative, a very important initiative moving forward. Page 141 of the fiscal plan indicates that Labour and Immigration is heading the Alberta at work initiative, clearly a very large and important initiative geared toward one of the most important things that our government can be doing, and that's creating jobs, getting people back to work, focusing on developing skills as our economy diversifies and as our economy continues to grow. Minister, can you please provide an overview of this initiative, the Alberta at work initiative, and advise how it will help get unemployed Albertans back to work? How will it help Albertans at work develop skills and move up in the workforce as they move towards careers of their choice?

Page 141 of the fiscal plan also mentions that Labour and Immigration's budget will have \$79 million over the next three years for Alberta at work. I believe it's a \$600 million project over three years if I'm correct. Can the minister provide more details on how the department will invest the \$79 million that they are charged with, over and above the fact that they are leading the overall initiative?

Finally, the fiscal plan has an entire chapter devoted to Alberta at work, pages 21 to 39. It's a large focus of Budget 2022. If you could speak to how many Albertans will be supported by the Alberta at work initiative going forward.

That's all the questions I have.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will go to the minister, with up to five minutes for you to respond.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Chair. Let me begin with MLA Rosin's question on workforce strategy 2.7. I do want to thank her for that question. Labour and Immigration's skills and training supports include the training for work programs, Canada-Alberta job grant funding, and new support related to the Alberta at work initiative. All of these programs focus on helping people, including youth, women, and Indigenous peoples alongside all the unemployed and underemployed groups, to gain the skills they need most to find suitable employment. My department is forecasting that approximately 4,000 Albertans will be served in training for work programs in 2022-2023.

The funding will also better align the Canada-Alberta job grant program resources with employers' demands for skills training. It is estimated that the Canada-Alberta job grant will serve 3,700 employers and 11,000 Albertans in 2022-2023. With respect to the broader impact we can say this: Alberta's Budget 2022 plans investments across multiple departments for the Alberta at work

initiative that will align to support Alberta's economic needs. This would include attracting workforce and investment to Alberta to create jobs for Albertans and fill skills demand from employers. Alberta will establish itself as a destination of choice for businesses, employees, and their families to prosper in the future. Alberta's strong education and health institutions, relatively low cost of living, vibrant arts and cultural diversity, natural recreation and sport experiences serve as important advantages. Alberta can make the world a better place.

Your last question deals with any projections. Let me say this. Any time we invest in our people, we have an opportunity to see increases in income. I would remind the members that overall Alberta enjoys an average weekly earnings level that is higher than the rest of the country.

Let me now transition to MLA van Dijken's, you know, questions. The first deals with page 83 of the business plan and focuses on the employment rate. The employment rate is the number of employed persons expressed as a percentage of the total population 15 years of age and over. The unemployment rate, on the other hand, is the number of unemployed persons expressed as a percentage of the labour force. The labour force is the number of persons 15 years of age and over who are employed, i.e. have a job, or unemployed, i.e. without work, are available for work and are actively seeking work. The labour force is a subset of the total population 15 years and over. While both the unemployment rate and employment rate give a sense of labour market activity, the employment rate gives a broader sense of labour market activity, hence the reason why that particular formula is being used.

The second part of your question deals with specific sectors of the labour market where you expect to see an increased employment rate. We are already seeing strong economic recovery in many of these sectors in the province, and that is a sign that this government's broad economic recovery plan is working.

Now, you also touched upon page 141 of the fiscal plan, and the question deals with an overview of this initiative and to advise on how it will help get unemployed Albertans back to work. Alberta's labour market has largely recovered from the pandemic, and as I said before, 130,000 jobs were recovered, 7,000 jobs created just last month. Yet those challenges remain. We are seeing emerging labour shortages in some sectors while underrepresented groups and increased long-term unemployment rates still persist.

Budget 2022-23 invests more than \$600 million over the next three years, and I am confident that the work that my department is going to be doing with the Alberta at work program, the Alberta jobs now program, the Canada-Alberta job grant program, all of those put together, including a focus on our vulnerable population to ensure that they get the jobs that will help them live a decent life, is going to be the focus of this government in this particular fiscal year and as we move forward towards ensuring that we bring the unemployment rate to the lowest in the country.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

Now we will go to the Official Opposition. MLA Deol, you may have up to five minutes for your questions.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll repeat, actually, or recap a few of my questions I already asked to the associate minister. Minister, I'm sure you know that our community organizations play a vital role in promoting diversity and inclusion. I do have a hard time looking for where the multiculturalism grants go now. None of the budget documents can assure me that any of the multiculturalism grants exist.

11:10

So my question again: how do you plan to achieve your goal to address racism, promote multiculturalism and diversity, and, as you say, attract and welcome newcomers into this province with substantial cuts from \$1.845 million – that was not even enough last time; that failed to address the issues – to a \$350,000 total ministry budget and without having performance metrics to measure outcomes, measure success? What is the plan? Where can we refer the community organizations, community members calling my office? What is the help available for them? I would be happy to see if that program has been changed to a different ministry and different programs. All I need is direction right now. It's quite disappointing to see that we don't see in any government budget documents where we can refer our constituents and the community organizations approaching my office.

One more question I wanted to add is about the Alberta Anti-Racism Advisory Council. Looking on your website, I see no meetings scheduled for the Anti-Racism Advisory Council for the year 2022. Are there meetings scheduled for this year? Did the 2021 meetings occur, and if there were meetings in 2021, do we have minutes for those meetings? I will be happy to get any answers around that. I have had numerous calls and investigations in the last few days. I have the community organizations anxiously waiting to see as the situation is changing. They're planning for their upcoming summer events. That will be helpful for me to get back to them, to give some information.

With that, I believe I have a minute and 40 seconds left. I can share this time with my colleague Christina Gray.

Ms Gray: Thank you. Just to emphasize the questions my colleague is asking, he's looking for some very specific information from the budget documents. In the minister's previous response the minister chose to share a great deal of his accomplishments as Minister of Justice. I simply want to comment that your accomplishments as Minister of Justice do not answer the questions about the ministry of labour's business plan and budget here in Budget 2022.

Again just to emphasize, because the Official Opposition is trying very hard to get information, multiculturalism had a budget of \$1.8 million when it was under Culture. We see here that the associate minister's office has \$350,000. I believe you referenced in your opening remarks about funds being transferred, yet in response to my colleague's last question you simply moved back to previous actions and rhetoric. The estimates process to serve the people of Alberta is intended to elicit more information.

I note that the associate minister is in the room, and perhaps the associate minister may have more answers when it comes to multiculturalism and how this now new area within the labour ministry will support Albertans in reducing racism. What budget is specifically allocated to support these, especially given that multiculturalism has been removed from the community initiatives grant, something that, as my colleague has mentioned, has been very noted?

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Minister, you have up to five minutes to respond.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Chair. Before I invite Associate Minister Yaseen to speak briefly on this particular issue, perhaps let me restate what I said before in case the members opposite didn't quite get that response. I did clearly say that the work on the multiculturalism file – while its domain is in Labour and Immigration, different ministries do important work to advance the cause of justice for folks from the multicultural community.

In Budget 2022-2023 alone, I know that there is more than \$2 million devoted to the Alberta security infrastructure grant, double

that previously announced. I also know that, you know, there is \$620,000 in multiculturalism initiatives, and I also know that recently the Premier, in Brooks-Medicine Hat, announced a grant in honour of John Ware to help new Canadians across this particular country live their full life.

But with respect to the support for the antiracism advisory committee and some of the initiatives on that, Associate Minister Yaseen, please, would you want to speak on this particular issue?

The Chair: Associate Minister, please say your name and your title for the record.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you. My name is Muhammad Yaseen, Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism. I'm happy to be here to respond to your questions. Thank you both, Member Deol and Member Gray, for your comments and questions.

Let me say this to you. I'm so proud and happy to be part of a government that has done so much for newcomers in the last two or three years, including credential recognition, opening up a new office for fairness for newcomers and a number of other initiatives, including combating racism with respect to the Alberta infrastructure program, establishing a hate crime unit and liaison, as well as funding; mentorship funding for newcomers and language training funding for newcomers over and above the outreach that we had in the last six months, reaching out to newcomers and finding out what they're doing, what their achievements are, where the gaps are, and how we as a government can fill them. I've been very happy with that work as well.

Coming to the funding, the budget questions with respect to grants, we have some grants transferred over into our ministry, and that is about the MIIG grant, that is in our ministry now. In addition to \$350,000, we have a total of \$620,000, including that grant and some related funding in that. But the main work in multiculturalism has been, for me, ever since I have taken over – and we just had a summit on fairness for newcomers, and we outlined the work that we have done and the work that we will be doing in the future as well.

There will be an ongoing summit every year for newcomers to make this province a magnet for newcomers, because of the work that has been done in the past two and a half, three years, including four new streams for newcomers: entrepreneurial, international students and foreign students, as well as Alberta renewal programs, all focused primarily outside Calgary and Edmonton so that when our newcomers come here, they are in the rural communities, and they are actually adding value in terms of creating jobs, in terms of doing things that they are supposed to be doing, and getting in their own fields of studies and training that they have had from the past.

And the Fair Registration Practices Act, that streamlines the process for newcomers, goes a long way, and we've had very positive feedback on that, and it's working really good. Nobody has to wait now for five years, six years to get their credentials recognized because that process allows and provides six months.

The Chair: Thank you, Associate Minister.

We will now move to the independent member MLA Loewen for his five minutes of questions.

Mr. Loewen: Okay. Thank you very much, and thanks again, Minister. I just wanted to cover some of the questions we just didn't get quite answered last time. We didn't have enough time. I'll go back to page 85 again, workforce strategies. What is that, and why did it more than double as an expense? And why is it also included in capital investment? Then what is emergency isolation support?

Is this COVID-related? In fact, I think you actually covered that in one of the previous questions, so I'll leave that one out. We'll go to page 85 again: why are we not anticipating federal transfers in the budget? I'm guessing that maybe that line item got changed to another line item. That would be my guess, but if you could clarify that for me, please. Then, again, the question on how much money is being spent on COVID-related labour disputes with the UNA and other groups.

If you could answer those questions, I'll pass the time over to you. Thanks.

11:20

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Minister, you have up to five minutes to respond.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Chair. I am going to defer those questions to Andre Rivest, within my department. He does have a number of questions on transfers from the federal government.

Andre.

Mr. Rivest: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Member, through the chair. I will start with the question regarding workforce strategies that was mentioned on page 85 of Labour and Immigration's business plan. Within the statement of operations, if you go down, it shows the workforce strategies line item, and the '22-23 estimate is \$236,677,000. The reason for the decrease, I believe, being referenced is that in the forecast for the '21-22 fiscal year that figure is just under \$398 million. The primary reason for that change is in relation to the Alberta jobs now program. The Alberta jobs now program in the '21-22 forecast is approximately \$270 million. The minister had referenced before that once we move into the '22-23 fiscal year, based on the approved funding profile for that program, it moves down to just about \$98 million. That really makes up the primary change and the difference within workforce strategies going from the '21-22 fiscal into the '22-23 estimate.

Also for workforce strategies, on the capital investment side, what I can say is that as we kind of go across here within our statement of operations, capital investment for workforce strategies was about \$150,000 budgeted for '21-22. Then the forecast went up slightly to \$200,000, and then we can see it goes back down to \$150,000 for the '22-23 fiscal year. What that capital investment is in relation to is the development and enhancement of IT systems to support the delivery of the Alberta jobs now program. In the '21-22 fiscal year it also supported, in addition to the Alberta jobs now program, there was also an IT system developed to help deliver the critical worker benefit program, another key COVID-19 recovery plan program for the ministry.

Then we could also see and – actually, sorry. That was below there. The critical worker benefit does have its own line item under capital investment. So just to reiterate, that was related to an IT system to help manage and deliver that program. Under the workforce strategies line item that was all capital investment funding for the Alberta jobs now program.

There was also a question about our federal transfers. Again referring to page 85, our statement of operations in the business plan, going to the top there under the revenue section, the very first line item titled Labour Market Development, that's actually all transfers coming from the federal government. The '22-23 estimate is \$73.9 million, and that funding is entirely related to two labour market transfer agreements that the province has with the federal government, the first being the workforce development agreement, the second being the labour market development agreement.

The workforce development agreement primarily provides funding for employment and training programming within Alberta.

A lot of it is dedicated towards individuals with barriers to enter and join the workforce. It also supports persons with disabilities as well. Within that agreement there is also funding dedicated to what we refer to as sort of employer-sponsored programs. One of those for Labour and Immigration is the Canada-Alberta job grant, that we've mentioned a few times. Most of the expenses related to that program are off-set by federal revenue coming through that.

The labour market development agreement, on the other hand, is primarily dedicated to supporting individuals who are on employment insurance. That's completely funded by the employment insurance system within Canada, and each province and territory receives their allocation.

One of the reasons for the changes that we're seeing within the labour market development line item in our statement of operations is that the federal government provided one-time COVID-19 funding to Alberta within the '21-22 fiscal year – and that's reflected in there – which is showing a fairly large increase in '21-22. Given that that was one-time funding, as we look forward to '22-23 . . .

The Chair: I apologize for the interruption.

We will now go to the government caucus. MLA Armstrong-Homeniuk for five minutes.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you. Good morning, Chair, through you, to the minister. First of all, Minister, I want to congratulate you on your new role. You will do amazing. You have a great team behind you. They are hard-working and they always do a really good job. I just wanted to add that.

On page 12 of the fiscal plan it states that \$23 million has been invested to Advanced Education through the Alberta at work initiative. This money will be put towards grants and bursaries for low-income students and microcredential base course offerings aimed at providing opportunities for reskilling or upskilling. How do you see a reskilled or upskilled labour force helping to balance labour market recovery?

Also, taking a look on page 166 in the estimates documents, I see on line 2.8 that your ministry has a projected expenditure of \$9 million dedicated to the coal workforce transition program. Can the minister please advise why this program's budget is decreasing, with the 2022-23 estimate being \$9 million compared to the 2021-22 budget and forecast of \$18.550 million? Can the minister please outline some of the initiatives that this program aims to take to ensure that Alberta's coal workforce is efficiently transitioned into other sectors of the labour force? What approaches are you taking to ensure that individual Albertans affected by this transition receive the individual support that they need?

Chair, at this time I'd like to cede my time over to my colleague and my neighbour MLA Walker.

Mr. Walker: Thank you so much, colleagues, and MLA Armstrong-Homeniuk for so kindly and generously ceding the remainder of the time to myself, through the chair. Minister, welcome. It's great to see you. As MLA Armstrong-Homeniuk said, congratulations on your new role. I very much support it. I know your background in this ministry. Both you and I had been former civil servants in Labour and Immigration, and I myself had worked at AINP and IQAS. A special shout-out to Myles, a former supervisor, boss of mine.

I know the important work this great ministry does. You eloquently have pointed that out in the great back and forth we've had here with our colleagues at this committee. And also to Associate Minister Yaseen, I was very touched by his remarks, too, on the important work we're doing on the multicultural file within immigration.

I think, Minister, I will begin – the main theme I'll be covering here in the time remaining in this block is workplace safety and OHS. I'll begin on page 83 of the business plan. Key objective 2.2 indicates that the department will

support a coordinated provincial occupational health and safety approach through education and outreach-based prevention initiatives; regulatory compliance through proactive, evidence-based inspections; and reactive inspection and investigation programs, including COVID-19 response initiatives.

Through the chair, could the minister please expand on its OH and S prevention initiatives and how this will help keep Alberta workers safe and support employers? As well, can the minister also speak to OH and S programs, COVID-19 response initiatives, and how that will continue moving into the next fiscal year?

I know that in my riding, Minister – and I'm sure it's the same in Edmonton-South West – during the challenges that COVID-19 and the pandemic placed on employers in ensuring OH and S compliance, you know, they faced tremendous challenges, but our government was there to support them, including Labour and Immigration.

11:30

I know that when I would be getting inquiries with OH and S compliance officers coming out to businesses in Sherwood Park, the files were handled with great sensitivity and competence, with the employer working back and forth with the OH and S officials. I'm really curious to hear your responses to my questions on this matter as we really hope we're moving to the endemic stage, fingers crossed, of course. I just want to once again salute your great staff, with all the great supports you provided, working through the pandemic up till this point.

With that, Chair, I'll cede the remaining time here. I mean, I could count down the clock literally, like I did yesterday – and apparently *Hansard* writes that down – but back to you, Chair. Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will allow the minister up to five minutes to respond. Thank you.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, MLAs Armstrong-Homeniuk and Walker. I will begin with MLA Armstrong-Homeniuk's question, which deals with page 12 of the fiscal plan. Albertans value hard work and are generally ready and able to meet the needs of prospective employers. Albertans are also among the most productive workers in our country and benefit from world-class education systems. The future of work is evolving; no question about that. We have more remote work options, increased automation and digitization in our workplaces, and the demand for new, specialized skills is changing the nature of work as well. That creates both opportunities and challenges for our province. Continuing to reskill and upskill our workforce to meet these demands will remain an important aspect in our labour market.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk also touched upon page 166 of the estimates document. Now, the program activity on this line item is driven by the operational decisions of eligible coal companies responding to market conditions. With program uptake aligning closely with company decisions to terminate eligible staff, program staff liaise with the eligible coal companies to keep informed of termination plans and adjust forecasting as needed. Coal companies are making operational decisions to accelerate the transition from coal-fired electrical generation, resulting in coal workers being laid off sooner than anticipated when the program was launched in 2018. This adjustment ensures coal workers can continue to be supported by the program to transition to other work or retirement.

I will add this. With what we see going on in the global community today, I will leave it to the folks out there in the public to make their judgment as to whether or not that was the right decision for our province in 2018. Certainly, for me, I would not have made that particular call given what we do know now.

The second part of MLA Armstrong-Homeniuk's question deals with what initiatives this program has. Workers whose jobs may be affected by the transition from coal-fired electrical generation to less carbon intensive energy sources continue to have access to support through the coal workforce transition program. This program includes bridge to retirement grants, provides financial assistance at 75 per cent of employment income for up to 72 weeks for those close to retirement. Bridge to re-employment grants combined with employment insurance provides financial support at 75 per cent of employment income for up to 45 weeks. Then relocation assistance of up to \$5,000 is available for those moving for a new job. Finally, Advanced Education also supports affected coal workers through tuition vouchers.

Now, MLA Walker talked about page 83 of the business plan and 2.2 of the key objectives. The prevention initiative was developed by Alberta Labour and Immigration. The program aims to provide an evidence-informed approach to illness and injury reduction and align OH and S system partner resources. Now, these partner resources, which include health and safety associations, the WCB, and labour organizations, influence health and safety in Alberta workplaces and help maximize the effort made by all parts of the system.

You also talked about occupational health and safety programs, COVID-19 response initiatives, and things like that. Now, this program will continue to respond to COVID-19 in the workplace, and inspections assess work-site parties' response to COVID-19. During inspections officers focus on key aspects of the internal responsibility system, including hazard assessment and control and engagement with health and safety committees or health and safety representatives, and they promote education and awareness of COVID-related hazards and control measures such as physical distancing, personal protective equipment, sanitation, and cleaning practices.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

We will now go back to the Official Opposition, with Ms Gray. Five minutes to ask questions.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much. I believe this may be my final five minutes. I do just want to say again that it's been very disappointing, the lack of substantive answers that we've had at these estimates, but I will put forward some final questions and ask the minister to please respond the best he's able to.

On OH and S, I wanted to ask around Westray and if there continues to be ongoing training and focus on partnerships between OH and S and law enforcement where criminal liability may be at play, so the Westray implementation for OH and S.

On the coal workforce transition program, a bridge to retirement, I see that the amount in the budget estimates is decreasing, and I know that it's commensurate with those who need it. My one question was a policy one regarding the program. It appears that the program had a change made to it such that if an applicant is receiving any employer pension or employer retirement fund of any kind, they are ineligible for the bridge to retirement program. I have personally met with a worker who worked for the coal mine for 30 years and is being disallowed from using bridge to retirement because he currently gets \$40 a month from a job that he did when he was a young man in his 20s. I think that that's a big gap in the programming, that any money whatsoever from others is being

discounted, and I would request that the minister consider reviewing that.

I wanted to ask the minister: when it comes to professional regulatory organizations, as a new minister to this file he may not be aware that during debate on previous legislation that impacted PROs, there were concerns about lack of consultation. I'm actually hearing from PROs now that there's anticipated legislation that will foundationally change how they're governed, and there are big concerns that there's been inadequate consultation on that as well. No response necessary at this point other than that I think there may be some concern there, and we'll certainly have an opportunity to debate that in the Legislature if legislation is introduced.

I wanted to ask the minister: when it comes to appointments to agencies, boards, and commissions – appointing to the Labour Relations Board, the Workers' Compensation Board; there are many ABCs within the labour ministry – how is the minister ensuring that there are diverse, well-represented voices and that those appointments are fair and balanced within the labour relations context of employers and workers?

Talking about immigration, the minister had said that they've been doing the work to support newcomers, and I understand there's been a summit for newcomers. I will submit that I would love to be invited to the next one. I'd be happy to be there as a member of the Official Opposition to learn more, because when it comes to the fairness for newcomers office, there's very little information that's been shared. At estimates last year I had a really great discussion with the minister about what they were doing. That year it was a lot of information gathering. At this point, a year later, my expectation was that, having received that information, there was now going to be starting to put in new timelines, baselines, changing behaviours to increase the fairness for newcomers when it comes to the timelines.

That being said, we've seen no performance metrics, no reporting on this, and I continue to hear from constituents who called the fairness for newcomers office and then been told that that office can't specifically help them. There may be a tightening of timelines that's happening within the department, but I haven't seen any public reporting of that. I think that's a shame, because if this government is actually walking the walk – they've been talking the talk – where is the reporting? Where are the metrics? Where do we see that any measurable difference has been made when it comes to newcomers and their experience in credential recognition? Watching very closely, there doesn't appear to have been any measurable change, just a lot of monitoring, just a lot of reporting.

11:40

Refusal to process labour market impact assessment applications. There's a note on the website that says that the employer liaison service will operate until April 2022. Is this program going away, one that helps local Alberta employers find local applicants and unemployed Albertans? The pilot, that was started with the federal government to ensure that unemployed Albertans are prioritized in certain job categories, I think is incredibly important, especially as Alberta continues to have high unemployment. My question and concern is that this may be stopping. I understand that as part of the recovery plan additional occupations were added to the list, so the government obviously sees the value. I'm curious: what's happening with the employer liaison service?

Finally, the Alberta advantage immigration program. I'm curious about processing times. I'm curious about: how many expressions of interest have you seen in the four new streams? I realize they've only been out for a few weeks. How much revenue are you expecting from those applications?

The Chair: Thank you, Member. I appreciate all those questions.

Minister, you have up to five minutes to answer the Official Opposition.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Chair. With respect to MLA Gray's first question, on criminal liability for workplace injuries, I'm going to pass on that question to be addressed by one of my ADMs, Myles Morris.

Myles, please.

Mr. Morris: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Member, through the chair. The question related to what's known as the Westray law or the Westray bill, which was an amendment to the Criminal Code of Canada regarding criminal liability of corporations and individuals with respect to workplace deaths and injuries. I believe the question related to, you know, how that is being operationalized, so to speak, or to the types of training that are occurring on the application of that provision of the Criminal Code of Canada.

I guess the starting point: all of our officers receive training with respect to the criminal liability piece. We understand that training is available to all police agencies in Canada through I believe it's called the Canada Police Knowledge Network and similar training for prosecutors.

In addition, Alberta occupational health and safety has memoranda of understanding in place with every police agency in Alberta, works closely with those agencies on fatal and/or serious workplace incidents, and where OHS discovers that there may be anything associated with those incidents that is potentially criminal in nature, pursuant to the memoranda of understanding occupational health and safety refers those issues to the appropriate law enforcement agency.

Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Myles. I appreciate that.

The second part of the question deals with professional regulatory organizations and the modernization that is currently going on. Alberta's government continues to take bold actions to reduce red tape, attract investment, and address labour market needs so that our economy can recover and grow. It is important that we streamline professional legislation and regulatory requirements, which will free this organization from unnecessary red tape and allow them to continue to focus on protecting public interest and safety. The focus, we must all remember, has to be on protecting the public interest and safety and not making it difficult for them to carry out their day-to-day work. Over the next year additional steps will be taken to streamline legislation and create more efficient and consistent professional regulations so that Alberta can move towards recovery and growth.

Now, the next question that you asked deals with the baseline report for fairness for newcomers. That report was published on the government open-data site in December. We will continue to hold regulators accountable for adhering to the legislation that we passed in 2019, the Fair Registration Practices Act. As I had noted before, this work is important. It is important that professional newcomers who come to this country, who come to our province know exactly what is expected of them within a reasonable time frame so that they can make the transition to their chosen professional life and are able to take care of themselves, their families, and contribute to the growth of our province. That is an important work, I mean, that would continue.

With respect to the employer liaison services, this is part of a pilot program to help employers understand the alternative Alberta sources of workers. We continue through our workforce consultations, located throughout the province, to provide direct

supports to employers, effectively achieving the same result in a different way.

I think those were the questions that Member Gray asked, but let me also end by saying this. At the end of the day, our focus has to be making sure that we keep our workplaces safe and that we ensure that professional organizations are able to deliver not just to Albertans but to their stakeholders. And, you know, the Premier has been clear.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

Now we'll go to MLA Loewen for his five-minute set of questions.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, and thanks, Minister, again for the questions on the last round there. I just have one question left, and that's: is your department or the government as a whole in any legal or labour disputes regarding COVID-related issues? If so, how much money has been spent on that? If you want to undertake that, if that's something you're not quite sure of, that's fine, too.

The Chair: Minister, you have up to five minutes to respond.

Mr. Madu: Thank you. I am going to pass on that question to my deputy minister, and the deputy can direct that question to any of our senior staff.

Mr. McLeod: There has been some litigation started with respect to that involving human rights complaints. It involves several different departments. Our department has a complaint specifically with respect to that issue, and we will be responding in the normal course.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you.

Mr. Madu: If I may add to that question. MLA Loewen, as you know, we are dealing with a pandemic, one that we have not seen in a long time. This is still an evolving situation, and I think it is premature at this point in time, you know, to anticipate or to have details on labour disputes. My sense is that if there are, they are still working their way through the system. Unless they work their way through the system, we wouldn't be able to know exactly where things are right now, whether or not government has devoted any resources. As you know, this would have implications not just for my ministry but across the board. So that information is not yet available right now.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now go back to the government members. MLA Rowswell, for up to five minutes of questions.

Mr. Rowswell: Okay. Thank you very much. Alberta has long been a great place to work. I've worked here most of my life. I see in line 2.4 on page 166 of the estimate documents that your ministry expects to spend \$4 million on labour attraction and retention. Can the minister speak to some of the strategies or programs being implemented to make Alberta an attractive place to find work for out-of-province Canadians and immigrants? You know, \$4 million is – like, what would you be spending that money on? Can the minister speak to what supports or programs are being put in place to ensure that Albertans who have recently joined the province's labour force are incentivized to stay? I'm not sure how big of a problem that is, like, people coming and then working a little bit and taking off, if it's a big deal. If you could kind of explain that to me and see if – what type of incentives would you do to get people to try to stay?

11:50

The other one is relative to the professional regulatory organizations, which MLA Gray had spoken about to some degree. I've had some issues. I brought this up – it's interesting. It was the first time I did estimates, and the previous minister was working on this. I expressed a story of an individual that works in this building who had a math degree and an engineering degree from another country, and he was cleaning here because that's the job he could find, right? I think it was a barrier of the professional regulatory organization that was stopping him from progressing. He is still in that position today, so it's a bit of a concern that I have. You know, you guys might be more on top of what the barriers are or what interests there are that are conflicting with that goal. Can you speak to the work the department has undertaken that will be on track to help reduce the barriers to participating in occupations in Alberta? Those are usually professional ones, I guess. Like, the trades one is kind of our mobility act, I think, for the most part. I might be wrong, but this is the professional organizations.

How will the ministry work with professional regulatory organizations to ensure that the provisions of the mobility act are being implemented and that the decisions related to registration, for example, are being made in a timely manner? Again, I'm not sure, because professional regulatory organizations are kind of arm's length – like, as I understand it, we can't tell them what to do – but, you know, what power do we have to try to accelerate their recognition of qualifications from people outside the country, mainly? I think within the country it's easier, but outside the country is a big problem. If you've got a chance to answer that.

I'll pass some of my balance on to MLA van Dijken.

Mr. van Dijken: Good. Thank you.

Minister, I've just got a couple of questions with regard to outcome 2 in the business plan. Of the objectives, 2.1 is to review the occupational health and safety code to improve health and safety outcomes while enabling innovation, competitiveness, and streamlining regulatory requirements. I guess I'd just like some clarity on an overview of the review of the OH and S code and how changes will benefit Alberta employers while maintaining safe and healthy workplaces for Alberta employees.

Then I also have a question on line item 3.3 on page 166 of the government estimates. It shows a fair amount of expenditure being put toward employment standards. Now, I know that this is an important line item and that maintaining employment standards is a key component in creating safe, fair, and healthy workplaces. Minister, can you please speak to some of the employment standards that Labour and Immigration oversees and what Albertans may be seeing their tax dollars being put toward with this line item? What sort of regulations does your ministry do to ensure that these standards are maintained right across the province?

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Minister, you have up to five minutes to respond.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Chair. There are a lot of questions packed in there. But important questions. Let me begin with MLA Rowswell on page 166, estimates document, that commits up to \$4 million on labour attraction and retention. As we continue our recovery, we know that access to talent to drive industries will be critically important. Some of this talent would need to come from abroad and elsewhere in Canada. The funding noted in this budget line is primarily for the operations of the Alberta advantage immigration program. This is an economic immigration program Alberta has to select immigrants for permanent residency so they can join our permanent workforce and help meet our long-term

labour market needs. We are hearing from employers right now, despite this pandemic, that one of their challenges is finding the workers that they need to meet the current demand. So that is going to be a focus of my ministry as we move forward. The program has targeted streams to attract newcomers that our province would need to continue our economic growth, and we will increase focus on selecting skilled newcomers with the highest human capital to come to our province.

Now, you also asked a question on what supports or programs are in place for those Albertans in the form of incentives. Again, MLA Rowswell, this is absolutely crucial. We can't just bring newcomers here; we need to keep them here and support them to contribute to their maximum potential over the long term. That is how we will drive our economy forward. We can't have people who are skilled and qualified with this complex range of skill sets not be able to get to work to help themselves and their families and our communities. This work is critically important. A key element of this plan is the Fair Registration Practices Act and the fairness for newcomers office, which is working with Alberta regulators to reduce barriers for internationally trained workers to get their credentials recognized to the fullest extent possible. I think that also touched upon your other question, which is on our efforts to streamline regulatory professionals.

Let me speak to that, because this is a key part of our commitment, and the Premier has often talked about this. The summit that we held in Calgary was actually directed, apart from bringing newcomers together to show them what is possible in our province, to professional regulatory bodies, to say to them: we can't have all of these professionals here and see them languish without a clear path as quick as possible to get to their profession. That message has been sent, and we have made a commitment that this will continue to be a yearly summit.

Let me now talk a little bit about MLA van Dijken's question on page 83 of the business plan. The question was: can the minister please provide an overview of the review of the occupational health and safety code and how the change will benefit Alberta employers. The changes to the Occupational Health and Safety Act took effect on December 1, 2021. Further changes to the code related to year 1 of the published occupational safety code review plan are expected in 2022. Now, the act requires the minister to publish a plan for the review of the OHS code every three years. Going forward, there will be an ongoing cyclical review of the code. Now, in December 2019 the government committed to reviewing all OHS legislation and associated regulations by the end of 2020-23.

Your last question deals with line item 3.3, respecting employment standards. As you know, this is where I worked when I was in the public service, and that work is important to me. It deals with making sure that we have the floor-level minimum wage, payment of earnings for hours of work and overtime, vacations and general holiday, paid job-protected leaves, youth employment, termination of employment. This is important work, you know, to ensure that everyone in our province has the required standard of employment in our province.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We will now proceed for the last little bit of time to the Official Opposition. MLA Gray.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much. Let me just start by saying thank you to officials. Thank you to the department staff for the work you do in the ministry of labour. I greatly respect the work that happens.

I have found these estimates to be frustrating. Minister, you were just talking about the fairness for newcomers office. That fairness for newcomers office, which your government implemented two years ago, is not doing anything at this point. The report that you mentioned being published is really just measuring baselines, and to be fair, you did not even gather the quantitative data on timelines. How long are things taking today? That's not gathered in the report, and this was my concern that I was raising to you. So far all you've done is measure and talk about things. The interim decision six months: not real action. People see this; again, lip service. Your government has reduced safety for workers through the changes that have been made to occupational health and safety, has reduced rights for workers through occupational health and safety changes as well as employment standards.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I apologize for the interruption, but I must advise the committee that the time allotted for consideration of the ministry's estimates has concluded.

I would like to remind committee members that we are scheduled to meet Tuesday, March 15, 2022, at 3.30 p.m. to consider the estimates of the Ministry of Culture and Status of Women.

Thank you, everyone. This meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 12 p.m.]

