



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Fourth Session

Standing Committee
on
Alberta's Economic Future

Ministry of Trade, Immigration and Multiculturalism
Consideration of Main Estimates

Tuesday, March 14, 2023
7 p.m.

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The 30th Legislature
Fourth Session**

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Participants

Ministry of Trade, Immigration and Multiculturalism

Hon. Rajan Sawhney, Minister of Trade, Immigration and Multiculturalism

Invest Alberta

Rick Christiaanse, Chief Executive Officer

Jasmine Nuthall, Chief Financial Officer

7 p.m.

Tuesday, March 14, 2023

[Ms Goehring in the chair]

**Ministry of Trade, Immigration and Multiculturalism
Consideration of Main Estimates**

The Deputy Chair: 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 Trade, Immigration and Multiculturalism for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2024.

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

Mr. Rowsell: Garth Rowsell, MLA for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

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

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

Mr. Walker: Good evening. Jordan Walker, MLA, Sherwood Park.

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

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

Mrs. Sawhney: Good evening, everyone. I'm Rajan Sawhney, MLA for Calgary-North East and the Minister of Trade, Immigration and Multiculturalism. To my right I have my deputy minister, Ako Ufodike, and to his right is Jennifer Jabs, who's the assistant deputy minister. To my left I have Sonya Johnston, assistant deputy minister of financial services, and then to her left is Gosia Cichy-Weclaw, assistant deputy minister.

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

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

Mr. Deol: Hello. This is Jasvir Deol, MLA for Edmonton-Meadows. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: I'd like to note the following substitution for the record: Ms Rosin for hon. Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk.

A few housekeeping items to address before we turn to the business at hand. Please note that the microphones are operated by the *Hansard* staff. Committee proceedings are live streamed on the Internet and broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV. The audio- and videostream and transcripts of meetings can be accessed via the Legislative Assembly website.

Members participating remotely are encouraged to turn on your camera while speaking and mute your microphone when not speaking. Remote participants who wish to be placed on a speakers list are asked to e-mail or message the committee clerk, and members in the room should signal to the chair. Please set your cellphones and other devices to silent for the duration of the meeting.

Hon. members, the standing orders set out the process for consideration of the main estimates. A total of three hours has been scheduled for consideration of the estimates for the Ministry of Trade, Immigration and Multiculturalism. Standing Order 59.01(6) establishes the speaking rotation and speaking times. In brief, the minister or member of Executive Council acting on the minister's

behalf will have 10 minutes to address the committee. At the conclusion of the minister's comments a 60-minute speaking block for the Official Opposition begins, followed by a 20-minute speaking block for independent members, if any, and then a 20-minute speaking block for the government caucus. Individuals may only speak for up to 10 minutes at a time, but speaking time may be combined between the member and the minister.

After this, speaking times will follow the same rotation of the Official Opposition, independent members, and the government caucus. The member and the minister may each speak 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 send an e-mail or message the committee clerk about the process.

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

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

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

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

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

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

I would now like to invite the Minister of Trade, Immigration and Multiculturalism to begin with your opening remarks. You have 10 minutes.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Madam Chair, and good evening, everyone. I'm pleased to be here today with members of my team to discuss the 2023 budget for Trade, Immigration and Multiculturalism, or TIM. Before I begin – I know I've made some introductions already, but I'll make a few more – I would like to introduce some members of my team who are here with me: Sarah Amiry, my chief of staff; and Garrett Koehler, press secretary. Also joining me today from TIM, as I'd mentioned earlier, are Ako Ufodike, my deputy minister; Sonya Johnston, assistant deputy minister, financial services and senior financial officer; Gosia Cichy-Weclaw, assistant deputy minister for immigration and multiculturalism; Jennifer Jabs, assistant deputy minister for international trade and investment; Thierry Karikurubu, executive

director of financial services; Mara Simmonds, the director of communications; and from our partner agency Invest Alberta, Rick Christiaanse, chief executive officer, and Jasmine Nuthall, chief financial officer.

I will now move into the details of TIM's budget. TIM's consolidated 2023-24 operating expense estimate is \$85.9 million compared to the 2022-23 forecast of \$72.5 million. The year-over-year change is primarily due to new funding for multiculturalism programs, more funding for the Alberta advantage immigration program to increase the number of people nominated for permanent residence, and additional funding to expand Alberta's international presence by further promoting trade growth and investment attraction.

With this new budget TIM is helping to secure Alberta's future by strengthening, diversifying, and growing Alberta's economy, positioning Alberta as a top destination for private-sector, job-creating investment and pursuing opportunities in the global market. At the same time we are attracting skilled workers from all over the world to address key labour gaps, and we are providing newcomer language and settlement supports and building welcoming, diverse, and inclusive communities.

One of TIM's key priorities is attracting high-value, job-creating investments to Alberta from around the globe. Budget 2023 commits \$45 million over three years to attract job-creating companies and investment to Alberta via the investment and growth fund, also known as the IGF. IGF is one of the first deal-closing investment attraction programs in Canada. Since its launch in the fall of 2021, IGF grants have helped create over 700 permanent jobs and 2,000 temporary ones and over \$1 billion in capital spending. Moreover, to date for every \$1 million in IGF funding awarded, over \$60 million is spent in the province.

IGF success stories to date include Ontario-based GoodLeaf Farms building a vertical indoor farm in Calgary, resulting in 70 permanent and 50 construction jobs. CGC Inc. is building a wallboard manufacturing plant in Wheatland county, resulting in over 100 permanent jobs and approximately 200 construction jobs, with a \$210 million cap ex, or company spend, into Alberta's economy. Southland Trailers will expand operations and double its production capacity with a new plant in Lethbridge county, creating 253 new permanent and 25 temporary construction jobs. Siwin Foods will build a new food production facility – and I was thrilled to be able to announce that – creating 50 new permanent jobs and 50 construction jobs, with a \$53.9 million capital expenditure benefiting Alberta's economy. The IGF kept Siwin Foods in Alberta when they were being courted by other jurisdictions. Appexus Technologies is Alberta's latest IGF success story. The global technology services firm will establish its Canadian headquarters in Calgary, creating 125 new permanent jobs.

IGF is modelled on other successful investment attraction programs but tailored to meet Alberta's unique needs. IGF is administered by the province but delivered by five designated program partners, one of which is Invest Alberta Corporation, or IAC, which was established as a government agency in 2020. Budget 2023 allocates \$17.3 million in 2023-24 to support IAC's operations and strategic mandate. This funding will enable IAC to pursue high-quality investment opportunities for Alberta and promote it as the best place to invest, work, and live. After only two years the IAC is seeing strong results, including helping investors outside of Alberta commit to injecting over \$20 billion into Alberta's economy.

7:10

Another important program for TIM is its Alberta export expansion program, otherwise known as EEP. Budget 2023 will invest \$3 million over three years into this program, a program that provides

export-ready Alberta companies and nonprofit organizations with funding to explore new international markets, meet buyers, or bring buyers to Alberta to help get their products to new markets.

Now let's move on to the immigration portfolio. While attracting job-creating investment to Alberta is critical to our long-term economic success, so is the ability to fill key labour shortages. This is particularly important as our economy continues to grow. While we added a total of 61,600 new jobs in December of 2022 and January of this year, there are still around 100,000 vacancies and a forecasted shortage of over 33,000 workers by 2025 across many occupations, skill levels, and sectors. In short, Alberta must attract more skilled workers.

One of the ways we are doing this is through economic immigration programs such as the Alberta advantage immigration program, or AAIP. The AAIP provides pathways for employers to retain workers with the skills they need in key sectors such as health care, construction, technology, agriculture, tourism, hospitality, and more. Budget 2023 includes \$21 million over three years to expand AAIP's ability to accept an increase in eligible applicants. This is great news for the province of Alberta. In 2023 the federal government granted Alberta a 50 per cent increase from its 2022 allocation – so now we are at 9,750 in terms of allocations – another increase in 2024 of 10,140, and a further increase for 2025 just shy of 11,000 allocations.

While attraction is an important part of our labour strategy, so is helping newcomers after they've arrived. To help newcomers successfully settle and integrate, TIM funds organizations that deliver settlement and language programs. Budget 2023 will commit \$50.3 million over three years for settlement and integration initiatives, international qualification recognition support, and responses to emerging issues and newcomer needs. As we continue to draw people from across the world, it is critical that we promote the benefit and value of multiculturalism and diversity. Alberta's diversity is a key strength, which is why Budget 2023 allocates \$8 million over three years to support more effective engagement with ethnocultural communities. This funding will help organizations promote crosscultural knowledge and understanding, celebrate and support cultural diversity, address racism and intolerance and discrimination, and help build even more inclusive communities.

Leading efforts to combat racism is the Alberta Anti-Racism Advisory Council, whose recommendations guided the Alberta antiracism action plan. One of the plan's actions was to establish a new grant program, the multiculturalism and antiracism grant, or MARG, as it's known, to help address racism and discrimination and promote the value of cultural differences and heritage. Budget 2023 will provide \$500,000 per year over three years to support MARG. This program allows community groups to apply for funding up to \$30,000 for cultural events, festivals, training, workshops, or other projects. This helps organizations to develop their own solutions for addressing racism.

A key TIM mandate item is also establishing a Premier's council on multiculturalism. Budget 2023 will allocate \$100,000 per year over the next three years to support the council. Through this council and other initiatives TIM's goal is to create an even more welcoming and inclusive environment for people of all cultures.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.

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

Mr. Bilous: Yes, please.

The Deputy Chair: Minister?

Mrs. Sawhney: Yes.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you. Go ahead.

Mr. Bilous: Great. Thank you, and thank you to the minister for being here and to your staff. I used to brag about EDT having the best staff in the GOA. Now they're spread out between five ministries, so you have a fifth of those incredible staff. That's not to say that the others aren't incredible also. I really appreciate you sharing time, and I'll commend you for that because I think we can have a much more fulsome discussion on the line items. As I say at the start of all estimates, this is not question period. I'm not looking for a zinger or to get you, Minister. This is the opposition asking questions on behalf of Albertans on how you plan to spend your budget, so the further we can drill down, the better.

With that, I'm going to start with the Alberta export expansion program. Again, I will thank you, Minister, for taking a different approach than some of your colleagues and some of the actions of the government when you first formed government in 2019, where programs were cancelled simply because they came in under the former government. What I like to see is that good policy, good programs will continue regardless of who introduced them. I'm sure that you've heard this from the private sector, as have I, that entrepreneurs don't care who's in government. They just want good programs, and they want a government that's going to support them.

The export expansion program: we were very proud to introduce that. It did serve Alberta companies incredibly well. If you can just talk a little bit about it – and I'm happy to hear. I understand this isn't Public Accounts, but I'm happy for you to share some success stories. If you can break down the funding as far as the companies. I know you have your performance metric. Your target is 200 companies this year. Can you talk a little bit about the program itself? How much can companies receive? Is it still for travel, hotel, food, et cetera, to make it more accessible for companies to access new markets, or have the parameters around the program or the use of the dollars changed? How is the program working today?

Mrs. Sawhney: All right. Well, first of all, let me begin by saying thank you for your compliments for my very capable staff. It's been a short time, but it's been a good time. I can definitely say that, and thank you to all of you who are joining me today.

I do appreciate your comments about programs being kept and being, I guess, promoted as well. If it's a good program, it shouldn't matter what government is in place. I come from the private sector, and you're absolutely right; I will agree that the private sector doesn't care. They are looking for good public policy, and they are looking for a competitive jurisdiction.

I will also acknowledge the fact that this program was initiated in 2016. You were the minister, I believe, at that time. We have actually found that we've had good success. Now, sometimes these programs do take time before they take off, and I think the budget allocation at that time was a little bit higher than what the uptake was. Right now I am pleased to announce that we are allocating a million dollars per year for the next three years for this program, and we have seen significant uptake in recent years.

Just to answer your question in terms of what this program is all about, it's about supporting small and medium-sized enterprises – so SMEs – municipalities, industry associations, Indigenous communities, and economic development organizations to promote Alberta exports through outbound international business travel and incoming buying expeditions. Essentially, the program is similar to what it was in 2016. It's providing funding to help cover eligible

travel, exhibition and trade show costs for Alberta businesses and nonprofits targeting foreign markets or bringing potential buyers to Alberta.

In terms of success stories let me just, you know, read a testimonial from some EEP participants, and this should make you happy, Member Bilous: EEP is a fantastic and essential tool for small businesses like ours; with the help of the government of Alberta, our company was able to enter central east Asia, Middle East, and European markets; as a direct result of the assistance provided to us through this grant, our company is expecting to generate over \$200,000 in new international profits by the end of 2023. That was by CardGio Inc. I've got a couple of other success stories here as well – happy to share them – but I think I've covered this program.

7:20

Mr. Bilous: That's wonderful.

If I can, Minister, you talked about also expeditions or trade missions that are coming into Alberta. What is the process for a company to apply and then successfully get a grant for an incoming trade mission? Is there a maximum or a cap on that?

The last question I'll put in this little block. We initially had a collar on the program, which only allowed companies to go into a market once, and realized very quickly that a market like the U.S., for example, is so large that the same company could go in multiple times, and we had incredible successes. Koleya Karringten is the CEO of Absolute Combustion, and they are doing phenomenally well globally but attribute a lot of that success back to the program. Can a single company receive supports on multiple outbound missions?

Mrs. Sawhney: Okay. Those are very good questions. I may not have all of those answers for you at this point. I know that when trade missions do come to the province, we have significant resources available at our disposal, including that Invest Alberta will certainly intervene to provide that concierge service and talk about the programs that are available.

In terms of whether applicants can apply more than once, team? Yes, they can? Okay. Yes, they can, and that makes sense – right? – because when you're going to, like you said, markets like the United States or other international markets, sometimes one visit doesn't suffice. And that's the purpose of this program, to ensure that individuals who have organizations here can actually establish themselves in a particular marketplace.

Mr. Bilous: Wonderful. Is the program still based on receipts getting reimbursed for their outbound missions?

Mrs. Sawhney: Yes, that is correct. So it's the same as it was before. A successful for-profit applicant will be reimbursed for up to 50 per cent of the eligible costs, but for nonprofit applicants they will get up to 75 per cent.

Mr. Bilous: Yeah. Wonderful. That's great to hear.

Minister, you talked about a million-dollar commitment in this budget in the next three years. Can you help break down the other \$3.8 million under trade and export development, so line 2.3?

Mrs. Sawhney: Sure. Okay. Line 2.3 is trade and export development, as you had mentioned. The majority of that is actually for salaries, wages, and benefits. The EEP program is under investment attraction. That would be under 2.2. Line 2.3 is \$3 million for staffing costs to lead trade and export development in five key regions; \$1.8 million is funding for trade missions, so for

market intelligence, path finding, and client relationship management.

Just to give you some more background information, the department did identify over 30 potential in-person outbound international trade promotion missions for 2023-24, so that's pretty exciting. There's a lot happening in this upcoming fiscal. Just to give you some examples of the missions, they include the Abu Dhabi International Petroleum Exhibition, Arab Health, Australia Oil and Gas Energy, Mobile World Congress 2024, and Outreach Europe. The total for this element is \$4.8 million, and just to reiterate, most of that is for salaries, wages, and benefits.

Mr. Bilous: Right. Excellent. I'm a big fan of trade missions and recognize that we are an export province, so if we are not in the market competing, then, you know, we're at a disadvantage compared to the rest of the world.

Mrs. Sawhney: Right. I agree.

Mr. Bilous: Now, that does, you know, make me ask the question – and I appreciate, Minister, that this was probably the Premier's decision. I see the fact that the trade offices all report to Executive Council as an unfortunate decision. The reason I say that is that export is just as important as inbound investment. I appreciate that you likely work with the trade offices, but because they are hived off under Executive Council, it doesn't make sense to me. If you could just talk a little bit about: how do you ensure that your ministry is leveraging Alberta's trade offices? If you could use an example. I know that yourself and Minister Jean just returned from Korea. Can you tell us how the trade offices, because Alberta has a trade office in Korea, were leveraged and used when you were planning your mission to Korea?

Mrs. Sawhney: Yes. I would be very happy to answer that series of questions. I'm not necessarily in agreement with your characterization of, you know, the offices moving to Executive Council as being detrimental to the work that we're doing. We do work very closely with the Alberta international offices, and the rationale for moving them was actually quite sound, because those offices do more than just attract investment into Alberta. They also undertake policy advocacy, trade promotion, attracting international talent and labour – everybody has heard of our Alberta Is Calling campaign – so the international offices do a little bit more than just that investment attraction piece.

I'd be very pleased to provide an example of how the international offices were helpful to us when we went to South Korea. Minister Jean and I had met with the local representative there, and she was very helpful in terms of talking about some of the cultural nuances as we had our engagement with several organizations and provided some excellent background on some of the enterprises that we were meeting with in terms of where they were listed and what other areas and sectors they were involved in. At the same time we were also working with Invest Alberta to get more information from their offices that was required during that trip. So that is a real, live example that I can give you in terms of how we work with all of the different entities within government to make sure that we're pursuing the same goals, which is to bring investment back into the province.

Mr. Bilous: We'll just agree to disagree on where the trade offices should be.

Mrs. Sawhney: And that is fair. It's happened before.

Mr. Bilous: Going back to line 2.2, investment attraction, I'm guessing that's where the investment and growth fund is in your budget.

Mrs. Sawhney: Yes. That's correct. It's \$15 million for the IGF and \$1 million for the EEP.

Mr. Bilous: I remember having a debate with Doug Schweitzer, when he was the minister, on the fact that this is essentially a fund that's used to give money to companies to try to incent them to come. Again, we can characterize it any way we want. You know, I said to him the irony – and I wished all of the government caucus was here listening to this – that often we hear about how the government shouldn't be picking winners and losers and shouldn't be giving companies welfare, yet this is a direct subsidy to a company using taxpayer dollars.

Now, having said that, I'm not criticizing the need for that program, but I'm pretty confident, Minister, that if we were in government right now and created this fund, the UCP opposition would be all over us for, you know, cutting checks to corporations. But I recognize that many other jurisdictions do have entities and funds that will help incent or entice companies to either relocate headquarters or to make investment decisions, so for those reasons, Minister, I'm not criticizing the fund.

I know that on page 135 there's \$45 million in funding over three fiscal years for this fund. Again, it's in your document, Minister, that it's to elevate Alberta's competitiveness. You had mentioned earlier in your comments that there are five entities that helped deliver this fund, and Invest Alberta was one of them. Could you identify the other four?

7:30

Mrs. Sawhney: Yes. I'd be happy to do that.

You know, I understand what you're saying about the IGF and your comments about corporate welfare. I just want to say for the record that I completely disagree. We have to make sure that Alberta is a competitive jurisdiction. Now, we know that the Gulf coast has become somewhat more competitive with the Inflation Reduction Act, so that's why the IGF is an even more important tool. It's a tool that we have at our disposal to attract investment, and it's a deal-closing mechanism. It's a unique program in Canada, and we've had tremendous success. I just want to make sure that I articulate that. I've had the pleasure of announcing about two IGF-funded organizations that have come to the province and have had significant conversations with them like: what drew you here? The whole concierge aspect and this fund to help with the relocation was instrumental.

Now, the other organizations that help are – here we go. We've got Agriculture and Irrigation within the government, and we have Travel Alberta, Edmonton Global, Calgary Economic Development, and JEND as well.

Mr. Bilous: Do they – sorry. For the process are they able to make a decision and allocate dollars independently of you, or do they make recommendations that come back to you for final decision? Can you talk about the process of: how is a company evaluated? And then how do you get to the decision of if they are going to be supported and how much that is? Is there a formula?

Mrs. Sawhney: It's the latter of the two options you mentioned. These organizations can't make the decisions themselves. They provide a recommendation to government, and then we have our own rubric in terms of how we evaluate the organizations. I mean, one of the items is that it has to be a high-impact, high-value investment. There have to be – I believe there is a – we're just getting the metrics. There have to be a certain number of jobs that

have to be created through this investment, and that goes through my department. It goes through Jennifer's department, actually. They do a very thorough evaluation, and then if things are looking good and we know it's a high-value, high-impact investment that's creating a certain amount of jobs and capital investment in the province, then that agreement is signed with the organization.

Mr. Bilous: I won't ask you about specific companies. I appreciate that you mentioned them. I'm obviously not going to ask what they received. I'm sure that there are NDAs that were signed. Can you just comment on: is there an average that a company would receive? Again, understanding the fact that it depends on the size of the investment, amongst other criteria. I'm just curious how far that funding will go within a year.

Mrs. Sawhney: Well, I can tell you, actually. I have the numbers right here. Just eyeballing it, I would say an average would be about 2 and a half million dollars per organization. We have seven – yeah – organizations that we have funded and would be happy to share the information with you if you want more in terms of the metrics.

Mr. Bilous: I would love that, if you could, Minister. Absolutely. If you're able to share those metrics. I appreciate that. Again, in other estimates I quoted Peter Drucker, saying that you can't manage things you don't measure. Of course, if we don't have those very clear metrics, then it's very difficult to assess whether a program is being successful and delivering the outcomes that you want it to. Again, I appreciate, Minister, that – and maybe it's your private-sector background – you're driven by those metrics and that there's a rubric, so there's really a clear playing field with rules on how companies are going to be evaluated, and it's not, you know, left up to your gut or some other form of measurement.

I'm having an internal struggle on wanting to make a comment yet not wanting to go political, just on the fact that . . .

Mrs. Sawhney: I'm enjoying your internal struggle, actually.

Mr. Bilous: Well, and I will do this respectfully, of course. I appreciate, you know, again, the purpose of the fund and that there are other jurisdictions that have funds like this. I know from being in your position, Minister, that companies want not only the concierge service, which, again, was the reason that we created Invest Alberta, that was within the department and then your government spun it out, which – and I've said this on the record, that I wholeheartedly agree that Invest Alberta should have been spun out of government and be an arm's-length organization, so I appreciate that. But this little nagging voice tells me that when the corporate tax rate was dropped from 12 per cent to 8 per cent, over and over and over again it was touted as . . .

Mrs. Sawhney: It was a great decision.

Mr. Bilous: No. Minister, here's the issue. It was touted as: this is what is needed for Alberta to be competitive, this will attract companies, this will draw companies from Ontario to headquarter in Calgary. I appreciate that Jason Kenney is no longer the Premier, but he talked over and over about that. If the corporate tax rate is working and that was the reason that it was reduced, then this fund shouldn't be needed according to that logic.

Mrs. Sawhney: Well, I will respond that. I'll say that, you know, to be competitive with other jurisdictions that are very similar to Alberta – like, let's look at some places south of the border. Their corporate tax rates are much lower, and in order to compete with them for that business, we needed to make that particular decision.

Those jurisdictions also have these kinds of programs that are analogous to the IGF. Again, if we're going to draw investment and we're going to compete on a level playing field, we have to make sure that we're at least providing some analogous program. I think Alberta's situation is most definitely unique because we are competing with jurisdictions like Texas and others south of the border. These kinds of measures were necessary to be competitive.

You know, just to draw back a little bit on my private-sector experience, I know that – this is an oft-told story, but I was in those rooms with the AER and CAPP and other large organizations from the oil and gas industry when the climate policy was announced by the previous government and the carbon tax was implemented. In front of my eyes, I can tell you, there were companies who were saying: "You know what? We are going to shut our doors because we can make more money just across the border." That's the reality. When people are making capital decisions, investment decisions, they're going to look at rate of return, and rate of return encompasses all elements of the fiscal regime. So I will stand by the fact that reducing the corporate tax rate was an incredibly – well, it was the right thing to do, definitely, to attract investment, and this particular fund has demonstrated a lot of success as well.

Right. I'm just going to read a few items here. As of February 15 of this year, just so this information is out there as well, we had seven IGF grants that have been fully executed, with project build-out ranging from three to five years – that in itself is exceptional – \$5.5 million of IGF funding supported, and I mentioned this in my opening comments, about \$52 million in cumulative value of capital investment in the province that would not have otherwise come here. There were other jurisdictions that were courting these companies.

Mr. Bilous: Okay. I'm going to move on to Invest Alberta. We'll just agree to disagree. Again, you know, the rationale behind lowering the corporate taxes was so that that type of grant wasn't needed.

Moving on, I see that the CEO of Invest Alberta is here, so I think that's wonderful to be able to hear directly. Obviously, that's your decision, Minister. In this current budget the FTEs were more than doubled, from 20 staff last year, I believe, up to 50 this year, and the budget continues with that 50. I'm curious to know, you know, with the increase in staffing, what projects the increase has accomplished. If we can get a breakdown, an overview, of the jobs, like how many FTEs are in Invest Alberta. If you or the CEO can also talk about – sorry; I've got my notes on multiple pages. Again, if we can get a breakdown.

I'm curious to know as well of some of the salaries of the staff in Invest Alberta. I've been told by numerous people who formerly worked for Invest Alberta that many department staff were moved from the department over to Invest Alberta to continue with a similar job, yet their salaries doubled, so jumped significantly. I'm curious to know, you know, the 50 staff: if we can get a bit of an org chart along with their compensation. Again, because this is a Crown corporation and it's paid by taxpayer dollars, I think that question is a fair question.

7:40

Mrs. Sawhney: Yeah. I think there are many fair questions that can be posed when we're talking about Crown corporations, but I would caution against using stories, hearsay, things that you've heard, you've heard from a friend, you've heard from somebody because, you know, everybody has a perspective and an opinion, so unless there's something that's fully substantiated – you have something in writing, you have a legitimate claim that you want to bring forward – it's really difficult to answer some of these questions that

you mentioned regarding anecdotes. But happy to talk about the staffing, and I will invite Rick to come up and say a few words as well.

There are 44 and a half FTEs with Invest Alberta right now, and I'll just break it down for you. There are about 28 and a half FTEs in the Calgary office. In Edmonton there are 19. In B.C. and Ontario we have one FTE respectively.

Salaries, I do believe, are in their financial statements, at least for the CEO and the C-suite individuals, so you can definitely see some information there. The total salary component for the 50 staff members is \$5.8 million, which is an average of about less than \$120,000 per FTE.

I think I've answered your question, and you know, I will invite Rick to come up and say a few words, if you could as well, just to substantiate some of these numbers and the information.

Mr. Christiaanse: Thank you, Minister. Rick Christiaanse. I want to make sure that there's a good understanding around how we think about how we add FTEs because that's an important criteria. We want to make sure that as we add members, we have both increased capacity to the organization in terms of expanded Invest Alberta ability to operate in markets possessing favourable investment clients. We look at making sure that we hire talented people both from within current government and from outside. We started three years ago, so we have evolved from the numbers that were quoted earlier to a point where we are at our FTE count. Our strategy involves being nimble and agile so we can rapidly adapt to the market and move forward. We have made sure that in our seven key sectors we have sector experts so that as inquiries come in and as we reach out to companies around North America and the world, we can move forward. Have to recognize that FDI is a fiercely competitive space, and our people are critical to telling the Alberta story. At the end of the day, it's relationships that will advance people to move forward.

To give you some comparisons, Quebec has 300 people doing the same job. B.C. and Saskatchewan are at higher numbers than we are. The budget for Quebec is \$159 million. The budget for some of the provinces that are close to us are also significantly higher than what we're working with, so . . .

Mr. Bilous: If I could interrupt – sorry. I have a whole suite of questions all around Invest Alberta, if I could, so I apologize for interrupting you, Rick. What proportion of your budget – when I look, you know, at the \$17 million this year, almost \$6 million is for salaries. What's the proportion of the budget for administration in general? Do you have that number?

Mr. Christiaanse: How would you define administration? Just so we're talking the same numbers.

Mr. Bilous: Let's flip this around. I mean, how much of the budget is spent on, again, you know, investment attraction, be it materials that are separate from admin staff? How much is spent on programming? I mean, honestly, if you could break down the \$17 million beyond the \$5.8 million salaries, that would be wonderful.

Mr. Christiaanse: Absolutely. Program delivery costs are about 5 and a half million dollars, and then the staffing costs would make up the rest. That would be a high-level breakdown of those numbers.

Mr. Bilous: Okay. Thank you.

Last year we noticed that there were some concerns regarding a significantly high turnover over at Invest Alberta. Now, I've noticed that about 20 per cent of positions are still vacant or are

unfilled. Can you talk just briefly about your hiring and retention strategies?

Mr. Christiaanse: I would make a couple of points in general. Number one, we are building a high-performance team that reaches out and works in a very competitive space. Attracting those people is challenging in the current environment, so we will see vacancies at times as we move forward on some of these roles. As an overall objective we are working very hard at making sure that we retain the people that we hire. We are spending resources on making sure they are trained and they are supported, and we will continue to work on taking the head count down. But the reality is that this is still an organization that is in its early years, formation, and there will be a bit of turnover as we get absolutely to the point where we move forward.

Mr. Bilous: Okay. Great. Thanks for that.

I just want to talk a little bit about expenses. Expenses for yourself as CEO were about \$74,000 in the period between October and December of 2022. I appreciate that that's backward looking. The question is: what can we expect your travel expenses to look like in '23-24?

Mr. Christiaanse: It's a question that gets raised. Let me take a step back for a moment and just chat mandate.

Mr. Bilous: Sure.

Mr. Christiaanse: Our role is to attract investment from around the world, and the reality is that when we're meeting with the CEOs or C-suite level executives, we have to go out and go into the markets and actually chat with them in their locations. We are very proud of the work that we've done attracting investment from places like Ireland and India, that traditionally Alberta has not been a strong player in. We look at both data – like, what's the flow of outgoing FDI, what's the market size? – or the presence of clusters, pre-existing relationships that determine where the markets are that we want to focus on and we want to free-deliver on. For any travel that happens, we want to make sure that there are outcomes set in advance and that we make sure that we deliver on that.

I'm going to ask Jasmine, our CFO, to just come up and walk you through the process in a little bit greater detail.

Mr. Bilous: Sure. Please don't go too far. I've got lots more questions.

Ms Nuthall: That's perfect. My name is Jasmine Nuthall with Invest Alberta. To answer your question – I believe it was about the CEO travel, correct?

Mr. Bilous: Correct.

Ms Nuthall: His travel allocated for the 2024 fiscal is actually \$150,000, but within that portion, when we look at the trips that we're taking – so we have a pretty robust preapproval process where anyone who travels, including the CEO, has to clearly document where they're going, what the objectives are, how many meetings, who they're going to be meeting with, and what the outcomes achieved from that particular travel are. When they get back, there's a postreport that now has to be completed as well, capturing the deliverables that were met. We review it, and then within our system we capture it, allocate it to our CRM. Then we're going to be using that in the upcoming fiscal to evaluate future travel plans as we go out, so to make evidence-based decisions as to where we invest our dollars.

Mrs. Sawhney: Well, I'm going to interject here just for a moment. Thank you for that, Jasmine.

Certainly, these questions that you're posing, Member Bilous: I have posed similar questions myself. I know that Jasmine was actually employed with the government of Alberta and has a very strong background in implementing controls. We had a very detailed conversation on: how has this organization evolved to adopt these controls so we have more clarity around what our future budget is going to look like and how expenses are going to be approved? As we went through that process, I'm satisfied that significant progress has been made. You know, they're not where they need to be at, but it's a new organization, stood up in 2020, lots of growing pains, and I look forward to having this discussion again a year from now to understand how some of these other additional elements in the control framework will be implemented.

7:50

The other aspect that I wanted to mention: Rick had talked about reaching out to other jurisdictions that Alberta traditionally has not played in, invested in, or had boots on the ground in. I have indicated my preference that we take a strong look at the Indo-Pacific. The federal government came out with an Indo-Pacific strategy last year, and I will be undertaking a trade summit later on this year with the western provinces to talk about how we're going to talk about a concerted, focused, common vision in terms of how we want to develop our own Indo-Pacific strategy. This has been communicated to Invest Alberta to ensure that they are also taking a look at that, and that has to be factored into their budget as well.

I just wanted to make sure that I got those comments in. I know you have more questions.

Mr. Bilous: I do. You know, I appreciate Rick's comments, but I'm not asking about Invest Alberta's market presence for all of the staff. Again, I mean, there are questions around: how are we using our international trade offices where we have boots on the ground? I know that there are 30 planned missions that are outgoing this year.

I'm talking specifically about the CEO's travel. Obviously, there's a need for the CEO to travel – I'm not trying to argue against that – but if the quarter from October to December is any indication or average, that's \$300,000 per year for CEO travel exclusively. That seems a little high. I know for a fact that a flight that Rick took to Singapore was over \$13,000. I'm assuming we're flying business class on these trips. Could you please confirm if you're flying business class?

Mrs. Sawhney: You know, all of these expenses are publicly disclosed. They're on the Invest Alberta website. All of the invoices are included there as well. I personally don't know if business class was used for every mission, but I think we'll have to get back to you in terms of – and it's on the website, so you can have a look. If there are any specific expenses that you're concerned about, just flag those.

Mr. Bilous: Yeah. The \$13,000 flight to Qatar is what I'm curious about.

Mrs. Sawhney: Okay.

Mr. Bilous: I understand that Invest Alberta – in addition to all of the FTEs, the 44, there are a number of contractors on staff. Can you share who they are and how much they're being paid annually for '23-24?

Mrs. Sawhney: Okay. I just want to go back to the previous conversation about flights. It's imperative for me to share that

IAC's travel, hospitality, and working session expense and disclosure policy is guided by Treasury Board directives, May 2020; a ministerial order from February of 2021; and the government of Alberta's travel, meal, and hospitality expenses policy from April of 2021. There are mechanisms in place to make sure that they are in compliance with government policy. I just want to make sure that that's out there.

Mr. Bilous: I'm not challenging the policy. I mean, maybe the policy needs to be reviewed, but it just seems to me that \$300,000 on travel for one person per year is a high number.

Sorry, Minister. If we can jump over to the contractors, I'm curious to know how many Invest Alberta has. I'd love to get details on that if we could, the number of contractors.

Mrs. Sawhney: Yes.

Mr. Bilous: What is their average salary?

Mrs. Sawhney: Well, I don't have their average salaries. I do have a table here that outlines the individuals that are on contract in the various different jurisdictions.

Mr. Bilous: Are you willing to share that, Minister?

Mrs. Sawhney: Actually, let me just provide some more information. I know that Invest Alberta doesn't hire FTEs; they actually hire consulting services. Like, for example, in New Delhi, India, they work with an organization called Global Dynamic Consulting, and the budget for that particular consultant is \$170,000. I do believe right now that there are two individuals who are contracted through the New Delhi office, so you can, you know, do the math on that.

In terms of the other jurisdictions I have the names of the contracted supports as well as the budget for resources, and we can certainly share that with you.

Mr. Bilous: Could you share that, please?

Mrs. Sawhney: Yes.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Minister.

I mean, my question around – you know, this is a great example of a company that's being contracted in India, yet Alberta has a trade office in India. Now, it was gutted three years ago, but we do have a trade office in India. So how is this not a duplication of services if we have boots on the ground in India and we're paying a contracting company in India?

Mrs. Sawhney: Well, again I would go back to the mandate of Invest Alberta, which is mainly investment attraction whereas the Alberta international offices do policy advocacy. They work with individuals in regard to our immigration policies, and we also expend significant efforts trying to attract postsecondary students. So while there might be some overlap, there is not significant overlap.

Mr. Bilous: Okay. But four years ago, Minister, our trade offices were able to do both. They provided support for outbound, like trade missions of companies going global, and also worked on investment attraction.

Mrs. Sawhney: Right. But we did hear from many people, many organizations that the government had a fragmented approach, and it was recommended at that time that we had some sort of a body in place that actually was focused exclusively on investment

attraction, and that is the mandate of IAC. While they may have done both – and you said yourself that you were fully supportive of having a Crown corporation at that time that was exclusively focused on this. Again I would go back to the point that – and who knows what the future might hold? There might be an amalgamation, again, of the international offices with Invest Alberta.

Mr. Bilous: I'm only smiling. Should the outcome of the election go one way, there'll be changes.

Mrs. Sawhney: Yeah. And it won't go that way. I know what you're thinking. It's not going to go that way. It's going to go a different way.

But I think this is going to be a good opportunity to do an assessment to understand, you know, how effectively the Alberta international offices are able to deliver on that mandate of talking about Alberta's immigration policies, our value proposition, and attracting more postsecondary students.

Mr. Bilous: Okay. Minister, with respect, I'm going to keep moving. I have other questions.

My first one – again I would love to get Rick back up to the microphone, with your blessing, Minister. I'd like to know what role David Knight Legg is playing in Invest Alberta and what his compensation is. For people listening at home, David Knight Legg was the CEO of Invest Alberta appointed by Jason Kenney. He was then let go, but my sources tell me that he's been on the payroll since he was out of the role of CEO.

Mrs. Sawhney: Well, I can confirm that he is still employed or he has a contract with Invest Alberta and it is going to expire on March 31, 2024. There are provisions in place to review that contract as well. Like I said, I can confirm that.

Mr. Bilous: Can you confirm his salary? What services is he providing to Invest Alberta?

Mrs. Sawhney: Yes. I will ask Rick to provide some more information on that.

Mr. Christiaanse: David Knight Legg is the principal of Dartix, which is a company based in Singapore. He is being paid \$9,600 a month for his services, and we require that he meets a number of performance criteria, which include providing qualified leads and helping us tell the Alberta story around the world. He also provides strategic advice to the CEO and board.

With all contractors that we currently have agreements with, we evaluate their performance on a quarterly basis, and if we find that the performance does not meet the criteria that we've set out or the objectives that we have, we have a 30-day cancellation clause and the ability to cancel a contract.

Mr. Bilous: So he's been collecting \$10,000 a month for the past two and a half years operating in Singapore, and his metrics are investment leads and – what was the second thing that he said?

Mr. Christiaanse: He also provides strategic advice to both the board and to me. Just to be clear, he is based in Singapore, but he also leverages his network, which is extensive, in both London and Hong Kong and Singapore to drive investment into Alberta.

Mr. Bilous: Uh-huh. You know, I'll ask: I mean, how many investments were because of the work that he's doing directly? I mean, this question is a softball, but . . .

Mr. Christiaanse: All contractors are evaluated on a quarterly basis. I think the reality is that the cycle of how long it takes to bring investment into this market, as you well know, is three to five years. There are specific deals that he's currently involved with that we move forward.

8:00

Mr. Bilous: If I can ask, then. Since he was moved to this role – and correct me if my timing is wrong – it has been about two and a half years. How long have you been in the role as CEO?

Mr. Christiaanse: I've been in the role for a year and three months.

Mr. Bilous: Okay. I thought it was longer.

In that time – and I appreciate what you just said as far as the investment cycle and how it's longer. Do you have a number, then, on how many investment deals Mr. Knight Legg has brought to Alberta in his year and a half?

Mr. Christiaanse: Yeah. The number is currently at 12, and we'll continue to evaluate it each quarter, because he needs to deliver additional leads and additional business to us on a quarterly basis.

Mr. Bilous: Is it possible to give a breakdown of those 12 investments, the companies, the dollars that they invested in Alberta?

Mr. Christiaanse: I would have to check the records and come back to you on that.

Mr. Bilous: Yeah. Absolutely. Thank you. I appreciate that.

You know, questions that I asked in previous estimates were around the Alpine Canada sponsorship. We're now in our third year of sponsoring Alpine Canada. I'll be honest with you, Minister; I've never had good enough answers, considering Albertans are paying \$750,000 to Alpine Canada.

I also just want to flag, because I found it fascinating, that the current chair of Invest Alberta is actually on Alpine Canada and is the chair of their fundraising committee. I'll just leave that as a comment. But I'm curious. Invest Alberta is sponsoring Alpine Canada again in '23-24. What is the value of the sponsorship, what results can we expect from it, and how much money has Invest Alberta spent on that sponsorship to date?

Mrs. Sawhney: Okay. I will ask Jasmine to answer the specific questions around the value of the sponsorship. Certainly, I know that this question has been posed in the past and that what you were alluding to was perceived or real conflict of interest, so that's noted.

I have had some pointed conversations with both Rick and with other members in Invest Alberta about: how are we going to move forward in terms of sponsorships? Like, this was a real learning opportunity. What is the go-forward plan? I do have some notes here in terms of what the organization is going to adopt as we move forward. Each sponsorship is going to be assessed and approved individually based on the following metrics: does a company organization event align with IAC's values, mission, and mandate, does the sponsorship align with IAC's corporate outcomes, does the sponsorship provide a conduit to IAC's target market and target sectors, and so on and so forth?

I think it's very important again to point out that this organization was stood up in 2020. Growing pains: there are control frameworks that are in place right now that are significantly stronger than they were in the past, and I do expect to see that improve even more over time.

I will ask Jasmine to just comment on Alpine's remaining sponsorship commitments.

Ms Nuthall: Thank you very much. Jasmine Nuthall. Thank you, Member. I do want to highlight that it's not actually our board chair who sits on the Alpine board; it's actually his brother. So there is some separation there. In terms of that, he's not involved in any of the decisions in regard to Alpine. There has been a firewall put in place for that.

Mr. Bilous: Can I just ask about that? Is he involved in the conversations and just recuses himself for the actual vote?

Ms Nuthall: No. He is not involved in the conversation. What I see: our board members do adhere to a strict conflict-of-interest policy, and we have processes and mechanisms in place. They are recused from not only the decision but the conversations as well when a conflict has been declared, real, perceived, or potential, and that's at the board level.

In terms of the Alpine sponsorship, as you stated, it is \$250,000 a year for three years. The sponsorship will terminate March 31, 2024.

Mr. Bilous: This is the last year of the . . .

Ms Nuthall: This is the last year of that agreement. You know, we put a lot of controls in place to prevent a multiyear sponsorship like this from happening again, and I think it is what it is. It's very similar to the travel. We not only have preapproval, but we're also having postapproval to manage and monitor the outcomes from the sponsorships to determine whether or not they are of value for money for future years, so, again, switching to more of an evidence-based decision-making for future years.

Mr. Bilous: I'm biting my tongue right now. I'm wanting to make so many comments. No, I appreciate that, Jasmine.

Can you talk about – and, again, I recognize this is not Public Accounts, so I won't ask about the last two years. But what are your anticipated outcomes from this sponsorship? Quite frankly, you know, if it was determined that the sponsorship was a mistake but you signed a three-year deal and had to continue forward with it, I'd be happy to hear that acknowledgement, because I can tell you that when I talk to people, that's the optics of this sponsorship. But, please, what are the outcomes expected from it for this year?

Ms Nuthall: Well, the outcomes for the upcoming fiscal, again, are within the agreement of the sponsorship. You know, as I mentioned before, we would not enter into another agreement like this, going forward, based on the criteria we've set out. Now, what we're getting out of this: the Alpine Canada events are actually largely attended by a large European delegation, so we do have Invest Alberta banners up. As well, we are on their website, in their media materials, and that is important in getting the Alberta story out there.

We can talk about whether we should or should not have, but the fact is that it's a three-year agreement. We are unable to exit it, so that is where we're at. Again, I'm going to go to: for the upcoming fiscal year the processes that have been put in place are both preapproval but, then again, postapproval to evaluate the outcomes.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Jasmine.

I appreciate you talking about, you know, the number of European investors. Have any investments been made that can be directly traced back to an event – and I'm about to reference another event. I appreciate, Minister, that you talked about that there are much stricter controls today than there were two years ago. But I know for a fact that in 2023 there was the VCAA conference, where a whole lot of staff got paid to go skiing.

Ms Nuthall: Sorry; none of us actually went skiing.

Mr. Bilous: Nobody from Invest Alberta went skiing?

Mrs. Sawhney: This is why I caution against using anecdotes or hearsay or gossip or anything like that and asking those types of questions here. If you have something that's substantial and legitimate, I mean, those are fair questions to ask, but everybody has heard the gossip stories.

Mr. Bilous: Well, first of all, any direct investments that came from the Alpine Canada contract?

Ms Nuthall: Mphasis was one of the ones, going forward, that we can list. They actually, I believe, attended in 2021.

Mr. Bilous: Okay. The conversations with Infosys started, actually, in 2018 on trade missions to Silicon Valley.

Ms Nuthall: Mphasis.

Mr. Bilous: Both. I've met with both those companies.

Okay. Fair enough. I guess that's looking backwards. Okay. Never mind. I won't ask about the VCAA conference. I will catch you at – well, I won't catch you, but someone else will ask you at PAC.

Okay. I'm just seeing if I have any other questions for Invest Alberta. Okay. I think I've exhausted my questions on Invest Alberta for now.

Minister, I'm going to jump to a different line item in my last six minutes. You have in your ministry estimates, page 217, line 2.2 – actually, it's not 2.2; it's 2.1, your international trade policy – that you've increased the budget by \$3 million. I'm curious what the \$3 million is for. Are you working on any new trade agreements? Why that increase from last year?

8:10

Mrs. Sawhney: Yeah. I'm just looking at the chart. I know that there is a slight increase. It's not related to any additional work. It's mainly supplies and services and some salaries, wages, and benefits.

Mr. Bilous: Okay. Are there, you know, any current negotiations that are taking place that I haven't heard of between Alberta and other jurisdictions? Can you give a bit more of a breakdown on that line item, please?

Mrs. Sawhney: Yes. Well, again, that budget item is mainly for staff. The current trade priorities right now are that Alberta does have a seat at the table when there are any trade negotiations that are happening. I know significant negotiations were under way between Canada and the U.K., and Alberta was there at the table as well. It's the same with India. That negotiation has been going on for some time. I had the opportunity to speak with the high commissioner about Alberta's priorities. That is under way, and our staff are there.

I had mentioned the Indo-Pacific region earlier. That is an important priority for Alberta and for Canada as a whole. I know that our staff is most definitely focused on understanding what that looks like for Alberta and how we will represent at the federal tables. Of course, I'd mentioned the Indo-Pacific trade summit, that I'll be hosting with the western provinces, so there will be additional help with that.

In terms of some success stories let me just share a few items with you. The department will continue to promote the benefits of existing trade agreements to Alberta exporters. Now we've expanded the EEP, so that should help as well. We will also emphasize our agreements

with the European Union and the trans-Pacific partnership countries. I think I've answered that question for the most part. I could provide some more discrete details, but I think you're aware of most of the negotiations that are under way.

Mr. Bilous: Yeah. For now that's good. Thank you, Minister.

Madam Chair, I'm going to cede the rest of my time to my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

The Deputy Chair: Go ahead, Member.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much. Thank you, Minister and to the department officials who are here. My questions are going to focus around outcome 2 and the portion of the ministry that came from the former labour and immigration. To start with, I'd love to find out a little bit more about the settlement dollars, the settlement and integration initiatives. Provincial funding in this area is so important, and there are so many amazing settlement agencies that rely on this funding to do their work. The provincial dollars so often are used to kind of fill in the gaps where the federal programs are not meeting the needs. I'm just asking a very, very broad question about the trends you're seeing and any trends you may be seeing from the federal government and what they're doing with their dollars and how the province is responding to best support this entire area.

I'll just stop with that. You'll have about two minutes before we'll be cut off.

Mrs. Sawhney: Yes. Absolutely. I'm really glad, Member Gray, that you asked this question, because this is a significant area of interest for myself. We know that language supports are more critical now than they've ever been before, with the Ukrainian temporary residents. We have over 24,000, I believe, in the province right now. We have a number of Afghan refugees and Syrian refugees and refugees from other parts of the world.

We do have \$9 million allocated to newcomer integration, and that includes the ASIP grants, which are the SIL and the SNI grants. I'm sensitive to your comment around the fact that we have some amazing organizations within our province that provide these services. I won't have enough time to get into the particulars about my desire to make sure that we expand these services and provide more diversity in the offering of these services. Quite frankly, the face of Alberta is changing rapidly. We still have newcomers who have been in this province for years, often even a decade, who aren't even aware that these services are available.

Now, I do want to touch very quickly on some of my conversations with my federal counterpart. I was at the FMRI in Halifax last week, and one of the items that I had brought forward is that there should be some measure of devolution of these support services to the provinces and territories. Again, it goes back to the fact that each PT has their local, unique needs, and we can be more responsive and agile if we have more control over some of these settlement funds. I did put that to the minister, Minister Sean Fraser. He wasn't necessarily as enthusiastic about it as I was, as you can imagine, but because I have held the social services portfolio, I have a lot to say on this matter.

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

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

Mr. Stephan: If the minister is agreeable, I'd love to combine our time.

Mrs. Sawhney: Yes, of course.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Stephan: Wonderful, Minister. I appreciate, actually, the question by Member Gray because I want to talk a little bit more about it. In particular, key objective 2.1 of the business plan says that the ministry "[delivers] newcomer programming so international talent can put their skills to work in Alberta, including by ensuring new Albertans have access to language and settlement services."

Minister, I've become increasingly aware that the face of Alberta really is changing, and that's a wonderful thing. I see so many – even in Red Deer. Typically the larger centres, Calgary and Edmonton, often receive, you know, a disproportionately higher percentage of newcomers coming to Canada, but in Red Deer – I just talked about it yesterday in a member's statement.

I went to a French immersion school, and I saw all these students there, and I just felt prompted to ask: how many of them moved here from another country? About half the gym stood up, and that was amazing to me. It was amazing that the rest of the people in the gym all started applauding and clapping for these young men and women, you know, because it's kind of scary leaving your home, coming to a new land, and seeking a better life. I have a lot of respect and admiration for the courage and the character that it takes. They come here because there is such great freedom and prosperity in Alberta. We're seeing a record number of international newcomers coming to Alberta, and that's such a wonderful thing they have to offer. You know, we have this great prosperity, this great freedom, and opportunity for families coming in.

Certainly, ESL, as you mentioned, is a really important need. We have newcomers with great skills and talents, you know, and as they become more proficient in the language, that just allows them to become more self-reliant for their families and provide and serve in our communities. Could you just share some examples of some of the newcomer programming and settlement services that you have provided through the ministry? I'd love to give you the opportunity to expand on it. I know you didn't have as much time with Member Gray's excellent question. I'd like to give you a bit more time to talk about that and in particular talk about ESL. That's such a really wonderful, important thing that we can do as a province.

Mrs. Sawhney: Well, thank you, Member Stephan. Certainly, I have spent some time in your constituency, and the level of diversity that we are experiencing in the present is obviously unprecedented. As somebody who was born and raised in Calgary in the early '70s – I won't tell you exactly what year; I'm sure you already know – I can tell that often I was the only one in many different rooms who was someone from a visible minority background, so to be able to see the province and our nation today is very gratifying. We know that, of course, our country will grow through immigration. We're less than zero population growth, so it's important to create a very welcoming, inclusive, and celebratory environment.

I'm actually very proud of the supports that the government of Alberta does provide for newcomer supports. I also know that awareness of these supports is not where it needs to be, but I'll get into that after just describing some of the programs that are available.

8:20

We do have the Alberta settlement and integration program, which is the ASIP, and this funds ongoing services and time-limited projects that address unmet settlement needs and complement

existing programs. If there are gaps that arise due to insufficient funding from the federal government, the province kicks in some funding to meet those gaps.

Supports for newcomer integration, SNI, grants fund ongoing settlement and language services to support newcomers' integration while they live and work in Alberta, and there are three specific streams under SNI. There's settlement and community support services; there are language assessment and referral services streams that fund services to provide newcomers, again, with English language assessment; and English as an additional language, or EAL, drop-in services. This funds alternative, flexible, and short-term English language opportunities.

In essence, there are a number of programs that we have in the ministry that fund settlement services.

Mr. Stephan: Great. Just in connection with that, I know you mentioned a desire to increase awareness of these programs. You know, we do have these wonderful resources for newcomers. Sometimes perhaps there are language barriers and being aware of perhaps some of these opportunities that there are for them to support and love them as they, you know, get adjusted to our winters and acclimate to some of the new things that they're experiencing. What are we able to do as a government to increase awareness of some of these programs?

Mrs. Sawhney: Okay. Member Stephan and everybody in this room, I do want to address this in a little bit more detail. I told this story at FMRI, and Gosia and Ako were there when I was talking about this.

When my father immigrated to Canada in the late '60s, he was the only person in his family, out of five siblings, who had a university education. He had not one degree but two degrees, a BA and a BEd, and he taught when he was in India. When he came here, like many newcomers, he found it very difficult to get his qualifications assessed. He tried, but he just couldn't get into the labour force as a teacher. I remember – and he worked for CPR; very successful man. He would come home from work, and he would stand in front of the sink and just look at his hands, and his hands would be soiled, and he would say – and I asked him. I said: "Why aren't you just washing your hands? Like, what is this about?" And he said, "I never thought that I would have dirty hands here in Canada." He was a farmer back home. He thought that he would be able to realize his dreams of getting into a teaching profession. Years later, when I learned a little bit more about the services that were available, I asked him. I said: "Why didn't you avail yourself of these services? Like, there was Manpower at that time." And he said, "I just didn't know."

I come from a very ethnically diverse constituency, and I door-knock quite a bit, and this is a story I hear over and over again. Just recently I was door-knocking, just last year, and same story. I went to the doorstep of an individual who was a truck driver. When I asked him a little bit more about his background, he revealed that he was an engineer. Now, this time I knew the names of all of these settlement organizations: centre for newcomers, Calgary Catholic immigration services, immigrant services, et cetera, et cetera. I said, "Why didn't you talk to any of these organizations?" And it was the same story. He said, "I just didn't know."

So that's 50 years later, and we still have this issue of newcomers in this country who are here for years or maybe even days or months, and they don't know of the services that are available to them. Now, I know that in my binder I have notes that indicate that, you know, these organizations can hand out flyers, they advertise on their website, the government of Alberta advertises on its websites, but I will maintain that this is not enough. We need to understand why newcomers are not receiving the information that

they need to be able to help them settle more quickly and with more confidence.

Through my work in government, extensive work, especially during COVID when I was in the social services portfolio, we really need to engage grassroots organizations. We really need to talk to those individuals who are the community leaders within their own ethnocultural communities and make sure that they know what supports are available because this is, really, word of mouth. A different approach is required. Like I said, it's been 50 years, and we're hearing the same story, and that is something that in this short time I'm very much committed to do, and we have some great ideas under way. I also think that it's incumbent upon all elected officials as well, as we see more Ukrainian temporary residents come into the province, to make sure that they are fully aware of the supports that are available now and additional supports that will be available in the near future.

Mr. Stephan: Those are excellent comments, Minister. Actually, just from personal experience, I had the opportunity to worship on Sunday with members of the Sikh faith. There's a new temple that they've built in Red Deer. Before they just used to have temples in Calgary and Edmonton. It's wonderful for members of the Sikh faith to have that opportunity to gather and worship together. That's such a great thing for their community. One of the things that I appreciated was the opportunity to worship with these families and could feel their love and desire to worship and just to express the desire. You know, as elected servants we are their servants, and I think it is good to make sure that there is awareness. Certainly, there are great leaders of different ethnic groups in our communities wherever we serve, and there are opportunities to reach out and partner with them and help them know about some of the opportunities that they have so that they can better serve and lead in their communities as well. Some good insight there, Minister.

I want to talk just in terms of the Alberta advantage immigration program that we have. Page 136 of the business plan talks about this being a performance measure. This is of course related to a specific program of residency for newcomers, and the nominees under this program have skills that will help fill some of the job and labour shortages that we have in Alberta, which are many with our wonderful, growing economy and the prosperity that we're seeing. Nominees under this program have the skills, were entrepreneurial, and wanting to start a business, which, of course, is something we love in Alberta. We are an entrepreneurial and prosperous jurisdiction and place.

My understanding is that in 2022 the number of certificates issued under the Alberta advantage immigration program was 6,554, and the target for 2023 is 9,750. That's a huge increase, and that's a wonderful thing. My understanding is that this target was recently confirmed in a news release identifying that the federal government has granted and partnered with Alberta in these nominations. I'd like to ask what your ministry is doing to ensure that the federal government expands the number of immigrants accepted under this program. And in connection with that, how will your department meet the increased target in provincial nominees?

Mrs. Sawhney: Okay. Well, thank you for that great question. There's so much background information that I want to share. We had a target of 6,500 nomination certificates last year, and we have filled all of them. I know that when I was first sworn into this ministry, this was a topic of great discussion between myself and the former minister, Minister Madu, who's in Skilled Trades and Professions.

We had talked about the fact that he had made a very audacious ask last year at FMRI; he had basically asked for double the nomination certificates. When the plan was introduced in November of 2022 by the

federal minister of immigration, we had a feeling that we probably wouldn't be getting those numbers, but certainly I did my part. I contacted Minister Sean Fraser and said, "Look, I would love the opportunity to sit down and meet with you and to tell you the story of Alberta." Like, we're talking about energy transition. We're talking about the hydrogen economy, CCUS. There are so many technical professions that are required to help actually actualize some of these elements, and the only way we can do that is to make sure we leverage all tools at our disposal, and one of those was our immigration stream.

8:30

You know, we had a two-and-a-half-hour meeting in my office, and we've got a former minister of labour and immigration here who understands the value of getting those targets increased. So when I got the letter indicating that our targets had increased by 50 per cent, which is much more than what other jurisdictions received, I was thrilled. This is monumental news, to be able to get almost 9,800 nomination certificates for 2023, and we will fill them. We have put some money in our budget for additional staff to make sure that that work is under way, and I know that Gosia, my ADM, has it all mapped out and all planned out, how it's all going to happen.

But even our allocations in the subsequent years are really something. So when I was at FMRI, there were a lot of envious glances in our direction when these numbers came up because we did get more – I don't want to say our fair share, but we certainly did get more as compared to other jurisdictions, and that really is an indication of the fact that we need highly skilled, qualified labour.

We have seven immigration streams within the Alberta advantage immigration program. Three are worker related, and four are for entrepreneurs, and that includes a farm stream. I have to tell you, Member Stephan, that the level of excitement that I heard from immigration consultants was next level. Even from individuals within communities around the province, like, this just means that it opens up more avenues for people who have family members who are highly qualified and who want to apply through express entry.

Those numbers have suddenly gone up because we've prioritized family connections. That was always there – like, you could always talk about that – but we've actually intentionally put policy in place that indicates that a certain proportion of express-entry applicants have to have a family connection or that we're going to prioritize those applications.

There are a lot of good-news stories here in the immigration portfolio. As I mentioned earlier, we have space in our budget for additional staff, and I'm working on some other elements in regard to policy with some of our other immigration streams. Hopefully, we'll have some good news to share shortly.

Mr. Stephan: Well, that's wonderful. I have no doubt that we will see a record number of individuals wanting to come here. This is such a blessed place. There are so many opportunities, and I'm so grateful that it's a win-win, for sure. I know that a lot of the newcomers have talents and skills and gifts, and they're going to make Alberta better. I'm really excited for the great work that you're doing in the ministry. I really appreciate you answering my questions, Minister.

I'll turn the rest of my time over to my friend Member Allard.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you. Thank you, Chair. We don't have much time left, Minister, so I'll just get started with my questions, and we can pick it up in the next round. I wanted to build off what MLA Stephan was talking about with respect to page 136, the performance metrics, the number of nomination certificates issued

by the Alberta advantage immigration program. I just wanted to confirm: AAIP is what was formerly known as AINP?

Mrs. Sawhney: Yes. Correct.

Mrs. Allard: Okay. I was pretty sure, but I just wanted to make sure we're talking about the same thing.

The targets for '24 and '25 are 13,000. Are those confirmed, or are those just aspirational?

Mrs. Sawhney: Those are aspirational. I mean, we have our targets from the federal government. It's just shy of 11,000 for year 3, and it's 10,000 – I can't remember the exact number. But you know what? There is a provision within the whole federal allocation that if there are some jurisdictions who are unable to use their nomination certificates, other jurisdictions can apply to get those. So those numbers are 13,000 and they're aspirational, but we have our actual targets delivered by the federal government.

Mrs. Allard: Well, as an employer who supported immigrants coming in under the foreign worker program and then availing themselves of opportunities to stay and become permanent residents, I applaud the effort. I think it's a lot for immigrants to come in, and I can attest to the fact that from the settlement side of things, it's a lot easier for someone to come in if they know that they can bring a family member in the near future. It's heartbreaking to see moms leave their kids for five and 10 years. So I just applaud you for that, through the chair.

We don't have much time left. I will ask one more question. In your conversation with MLA Stephan you talked about the newcomer programming and that international talent can put their skills to work in Alberta, including by ensuring new Albertans have access to language and settlement services. You have about 40 seconds left. Just wondering if you can identify areas that Alberta can improve upon in terms of improving newcomer programming so that they can fulfill their potential in the labour market.

Mrs. Sawhney: Yes. I know we don't have much time left, but it goes back to what I was saying before, that there are many newcomers here in this country, including Ukrainian temporary residents. We think that we've done so much in terms of providing supports – and we have as a government and the federal government; as a nation we have much to be proud of – but there is still a gap in knowledge in terms of what individuals know and what information they have been exposed to. So we're going to have to find some other ways and some other avenues and mechanisms to ensure that this information is being disseminated properly and it's being received appropriately.

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

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

Ms Gray: Yes, please.

Mr. Stephan: Aren't we taking a break?

The Deputy Chair: We will be taking a break after this rotation.

Mr. Stephan: Sorry about that. Sorry, friends.

Ms Gray: And we're good to share time minister?

Mrs. Sawhney: Yes.

Ms Gray: Fantastic. Let's keep talking about AAIP because I want to understand the budget that's being allocated with the 50 per cent increase and the increases that will happen in 2024 and 2025. I understand the department is trying to get ready to manage that new higher level, but looking at the budget – and I'm specifically going to look at page 138 of the business plan because you can see the forward targets. I'm seeing on the immigration and multiculturalism line an increase for this year. It says \$32 million there, but for 2024 and 2025 there's actually decrease to those lines. So with the number of nominees increasing each and every year, I'm just curious when it comes to staffing or hiring. Are you doing all of that this year and then it stays flat for the next future years even as the number of nominees increases?

Mrs. Sawhney: The immigration and multiculturalism line is collapsed, but if you divide it out and if you're looking at newcomer supports only, that should be fairly flat for the three years.

Ms Gray: Okay.

Mrs. Sawhney: The multiculturalism component is going to go down in subsequent years, and that's because of the Ukrainian supports, right? They are going to be funded this year and a little bit next year, so that's why you see that total budget number going down, because of the multiculturalism component.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much for that. Okay. So that's going to stay flat; that's helpful. And you answered one of my questions. Just to run that performance metric 2.a, I was curious why it was set to 13,000, but you're hoping that perhaps other jurisdictions won't use all of their nominations and you may be able to go higher than the target set by the federal government. So in 2024 the 10,849; you've got your target in the business plan set to 13,000.

Mrs. Sawhney: Yeah, and that's a forward-looking number because the federal government might come back with revised targets as well, just depending on, you know, what the geopolitical situation is. Like, nobody ever anticipated the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and there are so many things that – I mean, it's brought additional gravitas to this whole conversation around immigration. Those are our targets, but, again, I just have a sense that they could be subject to change as well, and of course we would obviously welcome any unallocated nominations, too.

Ms Gray: Well, I'm incredibly supportive of the increases that Alberta is getting. I was very disappointed when this government capped the nominations at 4,000 just a couple of years ago and didn't take advantage of all the opportunity, and I hope that didn't negatively impact the conversations or make it harder when you were having conversations with the federal government. I realize you were not the minister at the time, but . . .

Mrs. Sawhney: Yeah, but I'll just . . .

Ms Gray: Oh, please.

Mrs. Sawhney: . . . address that really quickly if you don't mind.

Ms Gray: If you'd like to comment on that.

Mrs. Sawhney: Yeah. I think that happened around COVID – right? – when there were no flights, and we weren't having people coming in, and it was a pandemic-related decision.

8:40

Ms Gray: Understood. Understood. I just very much was concerned about the potential impact it could have because Alberta was the only province that was doing that, as far as I'm aware. Feel free to correct me. I tried to look, and it didn't seem like other provinces or jurisdictions were taking the same measure, so it put Alberta in a unique boat. But I'm glad to see the increase is happening now, as much as I disagreed with the decision there.

I'm looking on the website, and it shows that AAIP is assessing applications received before December 20, 2022. I realize the website might not be fully up to date, but given that we are on March 14, that's, you know, three months back. I'm wondering if we're seeing the processing time really starting to get a bit longer. Are we concerned that it is taking a little bit longer for – and, again, the date there means that those applications received after December 20 have not been assigned to an officer for assessment.

The only other comment I'll add – and then I'll turn it over to you and officials for your response – is that one of the reasons why I look at that very carefully is because when I was first in the role of minister responsible for immigration, the provincial nominee program at the time really had some backlog issues. It was a huge driver for the changes to the program in 2018 and one of the reasons why things were streamlined. The trend from this government has been to create more streams; we kind of brought things together, and it's expanding out again. I would hate to see backlogs or issues with processing start to happen. So please tell me your perspective and how things are looking from your seat right now.

Mrs. Sawhney: Okay. Well, thank you for those questions. I've been speaking to immigration consultants because they usually are a wealth of information in terms of processing times, because this is their bread and butter, and I haven't heard that feedback from them, that they have seen a big backlog. I know that the Alberta opportunity stream takes about three months, one to two months for the express entry, and the tech pilot is about a month. And, you know, as I've been speaking to members of the team, I don't believe we have had any significant feedback from anyone indicating that there is a backlog.

Ms Gray: And would you be able to tell me: is it trending that the processing times are growing longer, shorter, or staying the same?

Mrs. Sawhney: I believe they're staying the same, because, again, I've been talking to people within the industry, like, in the consulting industry. I've also had an opportunity to speak to individuals who – and, you know, they didn't even know that I was a provincial immigration minister; they just knew that I was something in the provincial government. Of course, everybody always wants to know about immigration, and they were asking, like, "What do you know about the federal policies?" and "I've applied for AAIP; I haven't heard anything yet." So that gave me an opening to say: well, these are the processing times, but they hadn't met those thresholds as of yet.

We don't have any backlogs for express entry. I know that Ako is sending me a note here as well. We met all of our 2022 nominations in early December, and the throughput is about 550 applications per month.

Ms Gray: That makes more sense. That's great. These are numbers that I'm just going to continue to watch through the estimates process.

I'm curious if you can tell me how many people have gone through the accelerated tech pathway. You've mentioned about one-month processing time for that. Just looking at the website, it

seems it started off as very open ended. Like, tell us who you are, and then the department reaches out to start a conversation. How many people have used that so far?

Mrs. Sawhney: Well, it's a great program, and I hear quite a bit about this through many different stakeholders. Since inception we've processed 1,200 applications.

Ms Gray: Oh, sorry, can you . . .

Mrs. Sawhney: Twelve hundred.

Ms Gray: Twelve hundred. Thank you. Thank you very much for that.

And then the website talks about the low volume of applications for farm stream, foreign graduate entrepreneur stream, graduate entrepreneur stream, and rural entrepreneur stream and, for that reason, doesn't provide processing times. Can you contextualize that for me? What is low volume of applications, either in numbers or percentage, for those four streams?

Mrs. Sawhney: I would say very low in terms of absolute value, in terms of numbers. Some of these programs, these streams are fairly new, so we just haven't had the uptake. COVID has had an impact. I'm taking a deeper look at some of these streams to get a better understanding of why the uptake is not where it should be.

Ms Gray: One hand or two. Okay. Very low. Understood.

You've mentioned the opportunity stream. You were talking about the family connection. Minister, just when you were speaking, you said it in two different ways. I'd like to know, just more specifically, how the family connection works. You said that it was a percentage of express entry, but then you also used the word "prioritized." Is it a target percentage, or is it a change to the process? How does the family connection come into play that is different than how it used to work?

Mrs. Sawhney: There is more of a concerted effort. I believe that 25 per cent of all express entries that have a family connection, so a relative, meaning a parent, a sibling, or a child: those applications will be prioritized, up to 25 per cent of express entries.

Ms Gray: Do you know what it used to be?

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

At this point I would now like to call the previously agreed upon five-minute break. We will be resuming at 8:52. Thank you.

[The committee adjourned from 8:47 p.m. to 8:52 p.m.]

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, members. I would now like to resume.

As there are no independent members in the committee meeting, I would now like to turn it over to the government members. I would suggest that perhaps someone from the government . . .

Mr. Walker: I'm happy to go.

The Deputy Chair: Mr. Walker, please go ahead.

Mr. Walker: Yeah. Thank you so much. Everyone, get in here. Come on. Happy to speak here today. It's been an enlightening conversation and lots of good back and forth. My questions will focus on trade and investment. I want to begin with just speaking to the importance of and the distinction between the Alberta international offices and calling them, erroneously, trade offices. Yeah, the minister and Member Bilous had a great back and forth on this, and I really appreciated that. I would just reinforce again

that they are not trade offices specifically; they are international offices. That's a really important distinction. Besides trade and investment, which are critically important, they also are mandated for formal government ties, so diplomacy. They engage in intercultural exchange, and they advocate for Alberta on a government-to-government basis, so incredibly important.

Furthermore, the previous relationship Invest Alberta and the Alberta international trade offices were in, the former framework they were in, I would just say, mildly and politely, we found out did not work. So I am happy and I'm glad to see – and thank you, Minister, for your influence on this and everyone else. It was the right decision to separate Invest Alberta from the international trade offices under different jurisdictions, in terms of cabinet, with Executive Council and TIM. It has worked out well. They should always be – and they are now – separate, co-equal entities that co-operate, but one doesn't report to the other. That was not working, and I'm glad to see that corrected. Again, just on the record, that was the right decision.

Then, furthermore, I would say that it's incredibly important that we have Invest Alberta and the Alberta international offices separate but working together, because in the Indo-Pacific region, which has 57 per cent of the world's population – it is hungry, and it consumes more than 50 per cent of the world's energy resources, including a huge portion of the world's food – in those countries the government relationship is incredibly important, and it is elevated on a very high pedestal. In those countries status, rank, and prestige are incredibly important. They want to see, for example, the international offices in Executive Council because they see things through the prism of rank, status, and prestige.

So we elevate the international offices when we put them back, rightly, I would say, into the Executive Council. It is incredibly important as we penetrate and advance further in the Indo-Pacific region, which Alberta's economic destiny is tied to. I am so happy to see them back there. I just wanted to put that on the record. They are international offices.

Okay. My question now, Minister. Your mandate letter directs you to ensure Alberta is seen as a top destination for foreign investment and a primary Canadian headquarters for new market entrants. Page 135 of the Trade, Immigration and Multiculturalism business plan identifies \$45 million in funding over the three fiscal years of Budget 2023 for the investment and growth fund. We had a great conversation on this, too, back and forth.

You know, we are Texas north, if you will. We have to compete with the Texas enterprise fund to close deals. That's incredibly important. That was established in 2003. It's incredibly successful in Invest Alberta and those other programs that you listed in a great conversation, I would say, through the chair, with Member Bilous. It was very enlightening. Again, what is the purpose of this fund, and how will this fund help make Alberta a top destination for foreign investment in Canada? That's my first question.

I'll also just say that it's always great to see TIM in the new iteration. It's really exciting. Hello to Gosia, my former boss; it's really great to see you. I just want to give a shout-out to IQAS and AINP, where I worked for many, many years before I flipped over and became an MLA. So just wonderful.

Minister, as I understand it, just to be consistent, we're going with shared time here. If you want to go with my first question, I'd appreciate that.

Mrs. Sawhney: Sure. Well, I learned something new about you today, Member Walker. I had no idea that Gosia was your boss. That is interesting. I'll have to ask her some questions, and we'll get some stories out of her.

But I do want to say that I appreciate your opening comments around the cultural implications of how prestige and status and rank are perceived in many countries in the Indo-Pacific and certainly in Asian countries. You're right that if, you know, offices directly link to the top level of leadership, which is the Premier, it's perceived very, very differently. It was a good reminder for me when I travelled – and I always forget that I'm a minister. The whole minister thing never really impacts me in any real way when I'm here, but when you're travelling overseas, particularly to those jurisdictions, it's a very important station to hold as you're talking about negotiations and trade agreements and things like that. I mean, the conversation completely shifts.

Your comments were very well placed, and you're right. You know, in terms of the international growth fund it's an important tool that we use within the government and with our other partners to make sure that we can attract investment. It is one of the first deal-closing investment programs in Canada. I mean, we were inspired by the Texas enterprise fund. This is very different from that; obviously, it's catered to the realities of Alberta. But it has helped.

I was mentioning seven IGF applications that were approved, and the funding has gone out. It's just another element of making our jurisdiction more competitive with competing jurisdictions. We know that that's a reality. We do know that many companies just need a bit of a push to make that final investment decision. I've heard that from, you know, the two companies that I worked with, Siwin Foods and Appexus; both were being courted by other jurisdictions. Just knowing that they had additional help through the concierge service, through everything that's provided by Invest Alberta, and additional funds to help them settle and move, it was very, very successful.

Incentive grants, like the IGF, regardless of the amount, show serious investors that investment attraction and, in particular, high-impact investments that create meaningful jobs and contribute significantly to economic growth are a high priority for the province. It's essentially a statement that we take this job seriously and that we will do whatever we need to to compete with other jurisdictions.

9:00

Mr. Walker: Thank you so much for that. Again, just to echo your comments on the importance of having the Alberta international offices in Executive Council, nine of our 16 international offices, as you would know, Minister, are located in the Indo-Pacific region. Frankly, I'll be advocating that we need a few more, probably, there in that dynamic region. Again, it's just so important that we have both Invest Alberta and the international office network co-operating, complementing each other, sometimes hunting as a pack, but sometimes the international offices will enhance relations through soft diplomacy. Like, in the 1980s we brought curling to Hokkaido, our sister province in Japan, through grassroots work through Barrhead, a great community, but also we brought GOA people over there to foster that relationship. In whatever predecessor was your ministry back in the 1980s, a great guy, Stan: he was part of that. He's a retired GOA civil servant in Sherwood Park in my riding. He tells me all about these important stories.

I guess I would just continue on here with the investment and growth fund, Minister. On page 135 of the Trade, Immigration and Multiculturalism business plan – and I know what a strong advocate you are for multiculturalism. I greatly appreciate your work on this file. How does the investment and growth fund elevate Alberta's competitiveness with investors in general?

And then the performance measure for the investment and growth fund is \$245 million of cumulative capital investment in Alberta committed to by recipients of the program in 2023-2024. How does the ministry expect to achieve such ambitious targets for a comparatively small investment by the government?

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you. And let me just say that I really do appreciate your knowledge of Japanese culture and the business environment. I mean, you have expressed that in terms of your knowledge around – did you say curling?

Mr. Walker: Yes. Yeah, I was at the AJO in January. It was great.

Mrs. Sawhney: Yeah. That's incredible.

In answer to your question, you know, the IGF targets new investment into the province as well as expansion of domestic companies looking to increase their competitive advantage in the global market. An increase in capital investment in the province creates more jobs for Albertans and is a catalyst for economic diversification.

Mr. Walker: [Remarks in Japanese], Minister. There we go.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you very much.

Now it is time for the Official Opposition and Member Gray. Are you wanting to continue with combined time?

Ms Gray: Yes, please. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Minister?

Mrs. Sawhney: Oh, yes. Thank you.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Minister. So I think I kind of blurted the last question. I was just asking: prior to the change for processing family connections – the target has been set at 25 per cent. I was just wondering if the department had measured, prior to that new specific target, what percentage of all express entry that had family connection was being processed beforehand.

Mrs. Sawhney: I'll just give you absolute numbers instead of percentages. Right now we're estimating about 1,200 based on how we've prioritized the program. Prior to this policy change we had maybe about 50 that we can count that had that family connection. So it has made a difference to intentionally, you know, put that policy lever in place.

Ms Gray: Yeah, to lift those applicants up in the ranking system. Thank you. That's very helpful to understand how big of a change that is, so I appreciate that very much.

Now, I had a couple of questions about your performance metrics. I already asked the one about 2(a). For 2(b), I just noticed that the IQAS survey is currently biennial and will be moving to an annual basis, and I was just wondering: why the change?

Mrs. Sawhney: Okay. That's a good question. Thank you. The answer to that is to get more frequent results.

Ms Gray: Okay. I appreciate that. Thank you.

Then, on performance metric 2(c), Alberta's percentage share of the total number of permanent residents in Canada, I realized, looking at this, going back to 2017, that there appears to be a clear trend of decrease, and I wondered if you or the experts within your department might be able to just talk a little bit about why we think that is and what targeted measures we may be taking to correct that.

In 2017 we see 13 per cent; 2018, 13; 2019, 12; 2020, down to 11; and then 2021 still remaining at 11. So it seems to be trending in the wrong way.

Mrs. Sawhney: Yes. Yes. You're absolutely right. I mean, our last actuals are in 2021-22, as you can see, but I think our new allocation of nomination certificates is going to have a significant impact.

I know that our Alberta Is Calling campaign is very intentional about talking about, you know, Alberta as a destination of choice for newcomers to come and settle in. There is so much we have to offer here, including that we have a low-tax climate here, we've got affordable housing, and the quality of life here is touted in surveys. I mean, I think Calgary was voted one of the most livable cities in the world, and I think Edmonton was up there as well.

I think all of these measures that we're taking in terms of campaigns, in terms of our immigration programs, in terms of our investment attraction activities will inevitably lead to these numbers being skewed in the right direction, and they will be higher.

Ms Gray: Is there any aspect of the Alberta Is Calling campaign that's designed to target or specifically speak to permanent residents? I ask only because you suggested that that might be a positive influence. Has the program been designed to speak to permanent residents or reach them?

Mrs. Sawhney: You know, there are not specific elements that are within the program right now, but when I was planning my trade missions, that was one of the elements that I was planning to build in. I was planning a trade mission to Asia, which, unfortunately, didn't materialize, but part of the Alberta Is Calling campaign was to talk about our Alberta advantage immigration programs and our postsecondary.

I know that Invest Alberta, through the work that they do, quite often do bring this up as well, in terms of the value proposition for newcomers to have a life here in Alberta. When I speak to our other partners like Edmonton Global and Calgary Economic Development, I mean, this comes up over and over again as well. Like, how do we tell the Alberta story? It is just organically being mixed into the Alberta Is Calling strategy by various different ministries. I'll be more intentional as well as I design and change or modify some of our immigration policies to make sure that it is intentionally a part of that marketing campaign.

Ms Gray: Okay. Thank you very much for that.

I wanted to ask next – your business plan refers to foreign credential recognition, and you've certainly spoken about that and the importance of that, but my understanding, having just attended the Skilled Trades and Professions ministry, was that the fairness for newcomers office resides in that ministry. I believe that's the bulk of the work when it comes to foreign credential recognition, but I'd be happy to be corrected. Do you have budget money within your ministry targeted to foreign credential recognition?

Mrs. Sawhney: You're correct that the fairness for newcomers resides within Skilled Trades and Professions and that the bulk of that particular effort is within that ministry, but we do have IQAS, which we talked about earlier. That's a \$5.6 million line item in the budget. That's within the ministry.

Ms Gray: Okay. Yes. That work continues, and the budget there tends – well, the budget and revenue for IQAS are applicant based, right?

Mrs. Sawhney: Yes. That's correct.

Ms Gray: So the more applicants there are, the more work that will happen there. Perfect.

The last question I was going to ask is actually kind of a repeat of the very first question I had, which is: what trend are you seeing from the federal government when it comes to their funding of settlement services, again getting back to the idea of the province putting in the stopgap? What are they focusing on? Have there been any changes or trends, and how is the province responding to best hit those needs?

The other comment I will make, just because this may be my last opportunity, is about looking at the funding for newcomer supports. We talked about that line item, and into the future you talked about it remaining flat. I will just say that I'm disappointed that we're not seeing an increase, more investments, more dollars to go out to settlement agencies, because if we want more language supports, if we want more services for people, having more dollars to be able to offer would be good. But you've already identified that this line item stays flat. So information about the federal government and, please, anything about how Alberta is targeting their dollars to best serve the needs of the newcomer community.

9:10

Mrs. Sawhney: Yes. Well, thank you for those questions. In regard to what the federal trends are looking like, when I was at FMRI and we had all of the immigration ministers in the country around the table, either in person or virtually, the comments were generally, because we're seeing such an influx of Ukrainian temporary residents and refugees and asylum seekers, that the need for more settlement and integration supports was very evident. That was something that was expressed by almost everybody who was present at those tables.

Certainly, there was also an ask for more supports for Ukrainian temporary refugees, who are seeing some food security issues here in Alberta. I did raise that, and I had asked about the status of their existing supports, whether they would be extended into the future. I do believe that there'll be some announcements forthcoming in the future around that.

We do have \$7 million allocated every year for settlement and integration supports. I mean, this is what we have in the budget, but I've certainly been very clear that we have to assess the reality of the situation. If it is insufficient in the future, we will have to address that because if we are wanting people to be successful, we have to support them at the outset. We know that there is not only the moral imperative to do so, but there is a very clear economic imperative as well.

You know, I just want to mention that we also have additional supports in the budget. We have an additional \$1 million for settlement supports for Ukraine, and it's in recognition of the fact that there are gaps.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much for that response. My understanding – and I suspect it would be true today – is that most of the grants and the funding are fully utilized.

The other comment I will just make is that I know that many of the agencies have talked to me as critic, that they'd be interested in any ability to do longer than two-year funding, like the grant . . .

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

At this point, as there are no independent members in the committee meeting, I will turn it over to the government members. Ms Rosin, are you wanting to go back and forth with the minister?

Ms Rosin: Yes. I would love to if that's okay.

The Deputy Chair: Minister?

Mrs. Sawhney: Yes.

The Deputy Chair: Go ahead.

Ms Rosin: Perfect. Well thank you, Minister, so much for being here tonight. I know we've had a lot of conversation so far about the investment that has come into Alberta in the past three years and your ministry's ongoing efforts to attract investment to our province, whether that be through immigration, whether that be through Invest Alberta, and, of course, just our general business and taxation policies that we have changed and implemented in the past few years. Attracting investment has undeniably, I think, been a focal point of our government's work and something that, I would argue, we've seen tremendous success in over the past few years, whether that has been big investments from other jurisdictions and companies in Canada or from international companies. I think there has been no question as to whether that's been a very serious priority for our government and one that we have seen a lot of success in.

But I do want to branch off that and, rather than talking about just the investment, focus on the actual trade side of that conversation, because I don't think it's been discussed enough tonight yet. I know that when I was on the Fair Deal Panel back – gosh, I think it's been almost three years now. One of the things that we had looked at was whether or not Alberta should be sending a representative to participate directly in trade deal negotiations. Typically in the past we have let the federal government negotiate on our behalf, and we haven't participated directly. There was significant conversation at that time about whether or not Alberta should participate directly and, if so, what that level of participation should look like.

Fast-forward a few years. I just want to highlight your budget. Of course, page 135, specifically, in your business plan describes the outcome of your ministry as: "Alberta's trade and investment interests are advanced to support a strong and prosperous Alberta." More specifically, key objective. 1.3 on that same page says that your ministry is responsible for advancing and defending "Alberta's interests with the federal government in the negotiation of international agreements to enhance trade and investment." I suppose, given the name of your ministry, that that probably should be obvious. But I would just like to ask what actions your ministry is taking today to protect and defend Alberta's trade interests and our investment interests and what our level of participation is or is projected to be in the further negotiations.

Mrs. Sawhney: Okay. Thank you, Member Rosin. I really do appreciate this question. It's an important question, and as you mentioned, we have not focused enough on this particular aspect of the portfolio. I have a lot of information here, and because it is so important, I'm going to read all of this so that the public is aware of what we're doing within the ministry.

First of all, Alberta is globally connected through 15 international free trade agreements, through which we have preferred market access to 51 foreign countries and more than 1.5 billion potential customers. We want to build on this and expand our markets in Asia. I know MLA Walker had said that we need more offices, and I agree with you, particularly given our Indo-Pacific strategy that the federal government has announced and that we're working on. We've got economies like India, the fifth-largest economy in the world – we only have one office there. So there are opportunities right there.

TIM leads Alberta's engagement in international trade negotiations, working with other departments and stakeholders to identify and promote provincial interests. I have to give a shout-out

to the department, who has been at those federal tables with the trade negotiations. They are most definitely representing Alberta's interests. TIM officials attend negotiating rounds and advocate for Alberta with federal government officials to ensure that as trade agreements develop, they reflect Alberta's export and investment goals and jurisdictional interests. In addition to securing additional market access for our exports, Alberta also seeks greater confidence in the stability and predictability of other countries' regulations, more transparency and efficiency as goods cross borders, and improved ease of movement for business professionals.

I'm just going to give a very quick example here as well. I know that when our officials were at the federal table negotiating with the U.K., we had some conversations around really wanting to promote Alberta beef in the U.K. Now, it's a tough proposition, but our officials were very vocal at that table, and this is just one example of how Alberta really talks about our value proposition in this province to make sure that we are represented in those negotiations.

TIM will continue to pursue Alberta's interests in Canada's trade negotiations, including with the U.K., which I just mentioned, India – that's ongoing right now – Ukraine, of course, and other ongoing negotiations with the Indo-Pacific and Latin American partners.

There's much more that I can say to elaborate on that, but I just want to hand it back to you, if you might have some more questions around this.

Ms Rosin: I do. Thank you for the answer.

I actually appreciate that you mentioned our negotiations reflecting our export goals because that is also something that I wanted to talk about. Certainly, we know that there are many exports we have in Alberta, whether that is beef or agriculture products, like you noted, our energy resources. We have so many entrepreneurs in Alberta, who may produce beers or kombucha – I know I have a really prominent kombucha producer in my constituency – or any other products that we produce in Alberta. We have so many entrepreneurs and innovators and industry workers who produce goods that are ready for export and should have such potential in international markets. So I want to focus on what we're doing as well to assist with furthering our export capabilities.

I know that page 135, specifically, of your business plan identifies \$3 million in funding over the next three years for the Alberta export expansion program, specifically to support Alberta businesses entering strategic new markets and to help them increase their exports into key international markets as well as support incoming international buyers who are interested in Alberta products and services. I'm just wondering if you can speak a bit more to what the Alberta export expansion program is, for those who may not know, and how it helps Alberta businesses directly. I'm also wondering if you can speak to what other programs or services are available within your ministry and department to help deliver diversity of our product offerings in export markets.

Mrs. Sawhney: Okay. Excellent. Yes, I'm very happy to talk about the EEP program, and I know we touched on that earlier on this evening. You're right. We do have \$3 million allocated over the next three years to ensure that we are supporting this program. We are seeing much more uptake recently than we did before, and that's a testament to the fact that this program is working and people are very appreciative of it.

9:20

But just to give some more background, it is a grant program that supports small and medium-sized enterprises, municipalities, industry associations, Indigenous communities, and economic development organizations to promote Alberta exports through

outbound international business travel and incoming buying expeditions. Essentially, it provides funding to help cover eligible travel, exhibition, and trade show costs for Alberta businesses and not-for-profit organizations targeting foreign markets or bringing potential buyers to Alberta. I did share some testimonials early on, and I know we have some more testimonials about this EEP program and how it's benefited companies here.

There is a similar program that does exist at the national level, and that's the CanExport program, but we found that a lot of our applicants here in Alberta were unable to meet the eligibility requirements. The EEP program is actually much more accessible.

Just to share some stats, since reopening in June 2022 – we had paused it during COVID, for obvious reasons – EEP has approved grants to 94 unique organizations, including about 80 SMEs. That is the EEP program.

In terms of what else we're doing, obviously we have concierge services that help with that investment attraction, but often in those conversations there are conversations around trade as well. So just opening those doors and having those conversations and making those connections is also part of the job of the department as well as Invest Alberta.

Ms Rosin: Thank you.

I've got 55 seconds left. I do have one follow-up question to that. I'm just actually curious on this one. How long has the EEP program been in existence? You mentioned that it was established to fill a bit of a gap that existed between the federal program and what Alberta producers needed to be eligible. I'm just curious what year this program was brought in or how long it's been in existence.

Mrs. Sawhney: Well, it was 2016, and the former minister is in this room right now. He introduced that program at that time. It was definitely undersubscribed. These things take time to, you know, develop. I will use the same analogy with our Crown corporation. Sometimes it takes some time to hit your stride, and this was one of those programs. That's why we have increased funding for it, and we're going to monitor it as time goes by, and if it requires more . . .

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.

At this point I'd like to turn it over to members of the Official Opposition. Mr. Deol, are you wanting to go back and forth with the minister?

Mr. Deol: Yes, I would like to.

Is it okay?

Mrs. Sawhney: Yes.

Mr. Deol: Yeah. Thank you. Bear with me. I have some voice problems. Hopefully, it will not be a huge problem. Minister, my questions are around – you know, curiosity of questions basically about, most of them, multiculturalism. Looking at line item 3.2, multiculturalism, on page 217 of the government's estimates, the figure says \$9.2 million in the budget for 2023-2024. It can be interpreted in many different ways. One way, it looks like it's going down from \$350,000, \$350 million, to \$9.2 million. The other says that, like, the ratio is small, going up from \$1.7 million to \$9.1 million.

But when I see the ministry's business plan, on page 137 it says:

A cumulative total of \$9.8 million in funding is provided over three fiscal years, from 2023-24 to 2025-26, for grants to ethnocultural communities and organizations to provide supports and services to help build diverse and inclusive multicultural communities throughout the province.

So my question to you, Minister, is: how much of this \$9.8 million will be spent in 2023-2024 for ethnocultural communities, and how much is for next year and the year after that?

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Member Deol, for your questions. This is also another really good-news story for this budget because I think everybody in this room knows how important it is to me personally to ensure that we are looking at multiculturalism and antiracism grants. We have about half a million assigned for those grants for the next three years, and this year we're actually funding more than \$1 million for these grants. We have \$4 million allocated for this year for ethnocultural organizations, and there's going to be some fluidity in that amount, and we are going to be a little bit agile, nimble, particularly as we see what happens with Ukrainian temporary residents and refugees and asylum seekers. But I think it's a historic amount for multiculturalism initiatives within the government of Alberta.

Of course, I can't forget the Premier's council on multiculturalism. This was part of my mandate letter as well. I think it is a brilliant idea. I've mentioned it several times already, that the face of Alberta is changing, and it's changing rapidly. It's important to have a council together comprised of community leaders and influencers from multicultural communities who can provide advice to myself as minister and to the Premier on the emerging priorities. There is \$100,000 in the budget for the next three years for the council.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Minister, for your answer. I understand from your answers that \$4 million out of that \$9.2 million on page 217 is allocated to the ethnocultural communities this year.

Mrs. Sawhney: Four million dollars, yes.

Mr. Deol: Four million dollars.

The second initiative on page 137, I believe, of the business plan also states: \$8.3 million funding to address the needs of the Ukrainian evacuees for the next three years. My question is actually similar around this. Like, how much of that \$9 million is going to be spent to address the needs of Ukrainian evacuees this year?

Mrs. Sawhney: That would be \$3 million to support the Ukrainian evacuees, and there is an additional \$1.3 million to implement recommendations from the Premier's task force.

Mr. Deol: So understanding the questions that – so \$8 million out of \$9.2 million for the next three years will be invested in this year's budget?

Mrs. Sawhney: Okay. So . . .

Mr. Deol: So \$9.2 million total for the multiculturalism; \$8 million of that will be spent these years combined on the needs of the Ukrainian evacuees and the multicultural?

Mrs. Sawhney: Okay. Can I just for clarity – so I know that our budget for 2023-24 is \$9.2 million, and I've outlined the elements of that, what adds up to that. But are you talking about a different \$9 million?

Mr. Deol: No. That's what I'm talking about, \$9.2 million.

Mrs. Sawhney: Okay. I'll just break that down again. We have \$3 million for support for Ukrainian evacuees . . .

Mr. Deol: Three million?

Mrs. Sawhney: Three million, yes.

... an additional \$1.3 million for support for Ukrainian temporary residents as well, \$4 million for ethnocultural organizations, \$100,000 for the Premier's council on multiculturalism, and \$500,000 for the multiculturalism and antiracism grants. All of those numbers should add up to \$9.2 million.

9:30

Mr. Deol: It states in the business plan: \$9.8 million in funding over three years. Would you have a number for, like, how much you will be spending next year, then?

Mrs. Sawhney: Yes. For this year, for the ethnocultural grants, it's \$4 million, for next year it's \$2 million, and then beyond that it's \$2 million for the ethnocultural grants. We have half a million dollars every year for the multiculturalism and antiracism grants and then \$100,000 every year for the Premier's council on multiculturalism. Everything is the same except for the ethnocultural grants. It's \$4 million for 2023-24 and then \$2 million for the two years thereafter.

Mr. Deol: I would just like to take a better look at the grants. Thank you for your answer, first of all. I'm just trying to see how we have been actually doing on multiculturalism. It was kind of tricky to look through the information given that a lot of ministry portfolios changed and shuffled. According to the records – I have been over the public records – over the last four years multiculturalism and antiracism grants have decreased basically over \$5 million from 2018 compared to what we have spent historically in the recent four years. Do you think this \$4 million grant in this year will make up for the momentum? The communities are really struggling and complaining.

Mrs. Sawhney: Yeah. Yes, you're right. I would agree. There's a lot of struggle. There's a lot of distress. There are mental health issues. I know that when the ministries were changed, the funding that came from the multiculturalism ministry at that time was \$500,000 when it was transferred to labour and immigration. That was way back when it was status of women, culture, and multiculturalism.

You know, we have taken a very hard look at this, and this all ties in with our immigration numbers and our immigration policy and our antiracism initiatives and strategy. The reality is that we need to do more to make sure we're funding grassroots organizations to ensure that they can develop antiracism policies and celebrate their culture and heritage and actually do that.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.

At this point I would like to now move to the government caucus as there are no independent members present. I would like to know: Member Rowswell, are you wanting to go back and forth with the minister or combine time?

Mr. Rowswell: Let's keep the roll going here, yeah.

Mrs. Sawhney: Sounds good

Mr. Rowswell: We're doing pretty good that way.

Mrs. Sawhney: Sounds great.

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you. You did talk about this a bit earlier, but on page 135 of the Trade, Immigration and Multiculturalism business plan key objective 1.2 talks about the ministry's role in promoting trade, investment attraction, and engaging with stakeholders, including businesses and other governments and then partner ministries, Invest Alberta Corporation. It sounds like that

could get to be a fairly complex environment to be working in, especially when Executive Council is responsible for the international offices. You spoke about that a little bit once already.

I just wonder, if you could, how the ministry is working with Executive Council and the international office network, partner ministries, and Invest Alberta to support the province's international trade promotion and investment attraction. I don't know if you got to explain all of it, how it all works together. There might have been parts to it. I just wanted to give you a chance to explain how you put all those things together and make it work.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Member Rowswell, and you are correct that it can be a very complex environment to work in. That's where trust and collaboration are essential. Certainly, changes were made. The international offices are within the Executive Council, as you had pointed out. Then, of course, we have our Crown corporation, Invest Alberta, and our own department, that is very competent and capable and has a track record of, you know, investment promotion and trade promotion.

It's incumbent that we all have to work together. We are Team Alberta. I can tell you that TIM officials and Invest Alberta collaborate with the Alberta international offices. There have been a lot of changes, and there will be more changes in these international offices in the future. I've already alluded to the Indo-Pacific strategy and the need for having more offices in certain countries. All of us do collaborate, to the best of our abilities, to develop targeted programs for outgoing missions and for priority incoming foreign delegations.

I'll just give you a quick example. I had a trade mission to South Korea just recently, and, you know, it required the interaction of the department of Invest Alberta and our Alberta international offices. Everybody working together resulted in a great amount of support for both myself and Minister Jean in terms of market intelligence, in terms of cultural nuances that we needed to be aware of, and in terms of understanding the organizations that we were meeting with, their market caps, their financial statements, all of those kinds of things. This is just a very concrete example of how all of these elements work together.

We also engage regularly with Alberta businesses and economic development agencies and with other government organizations like Global Affairs Canada to ensure that there is a consistent and collaborative approach to promoting Alberta and its trade and investment interests. Global Affairs Canada, so the federal government, when we were in South Korea, also had a representative join us at one of our meetings, and that was quite interesting. We had some interesting conversations. But, again, you know, everybody was sharing market intel at that point. I mean, when you're outside of the country, nationally, provincially we have to be aligned. That's just a reality.

We also work with partners to plan and execute missions to targeted foreign markets to support export growth and diversification for Alberta companies. What these missions do is that they demonstrate the importance that the province places on doing business with priority markets. I mean, we have to have boots on the ground. I hear this all the time everywhere I go, and I know this from my own business development background, that you have to be there in these jurisdictions. You have to have those face-to-face conversations. You have to really invest in that relationship-building to create that level of trust. I know, MLA Walker, you had mentioned about rank, status, and all those other items, so having government officials and representatives of governments go to be in these jurisdictions is tremendously helpful.

This is just a little bit of a snapshot about how we all work together to promote trade and investment attraction.

Mr. Rowswell: And the stakeholders of the business interests: they go with you, I take it, then, do they?

Mrs. Sawhney: I'm sorry. Can you repeat that?

Mr. Rowswell: Do you take businesspeople with you?

Mrs. Sawhney: We do, yes. For this particular trip, we didn't really have any businesses coming with us, and there were some businesses there who were quite interested. But, yes, we do many missions where Alberta-based businesses are invited to join, at their own expense, not through taxpayer dollars – let me clarify that – and it's an opportunity for them to explore foreign markets as well.

You know, I also wanted to mention, because I didn't get a chance to mention this at all this evening, that we are working very closely with the Canada West Foundation. We recently conducted two round tables with Calgary and Edmonton businesses to talk about the Indo-Pacific trade strategy, and we're going to be working even more closely with them as we talk about what our western provinces' response is going to be.

Mr. Rowswell: So it might be complex, but it works.

Mrs. Sawhney: Well, it's complex. It works, and it doesn't work, and you just try to make it better. But right now I've given you a snapshot of a specific mission that I was on, and it was very successful.

9:40

Mr. Rowswell: Okay. Well done. Thank you very much.

I'd like to draw your attention to page 138 of the business plan for Trade, Immigration and Multiculturalism. I just want to ask you a few questions there, just get some clarification on certain line items. I see there's a line called other revenue, \$678,000. I'm just wondering what the revenue is for and what programs are delivered as a result of that revenue.

Mrs. Sawhney: An excellent question. The dedicated revenue initiative is a program the Ministry of Trade, Immigration and Multiculturalism uses to raise money from Alberta industry to utilize on outbound trade missions. The funds raised from industry contributions for trade missions covers various costs such as the construction of Alberta space at a trade show; hiring service providers in markets – providers like consultants, legal advisory consultants – to help Alberta companies; and to offset the cost of food or beverages or room rentals, things like that, for company briefing sessions. The amount in the business plan reflects a projected matching amount of funds that are raised from industry.

I do want to end by saying that Alberta industry has signalled a strong commitment to be a part of outbound trade missions – and we were just talking about that – and businesses are very much interested. Since October 2022, which was not too long ago, actually, over 100 Alberta companies have participated in person on six Alberta-led international trade missions.

Mr. Rowswell: Good.

There's another one. Revenue from the government of Canada, \$1.6 million: I just wondered what that revenue is for and the programs delivered as a result of that.

Mrs. Sawhney: Yes. That \$1.6 million is a workforce development agreement, and it's funding that comes from the federal government and is earmarked for some of these settlement and immigration programs that we were talking about earlier. Very important funds, and they go to organizations like Calgary Catholic Immigration Society, the Centre for Newcomers, and they are designed to ensure

that, you know, newcomers get language supports and other settlement supports.

Mr. Rowswell: Okay. Very good.

The last one is revenue from premiums, fees, and licences, and that was \$8.2 million. If you just wanted to expand on that and what programs are delivered for the fees. If you'd just expand on that part of it.

Mrs. Sawhney: Sure. Of that \$8.225 million in revenues, \$3.9 million relates to fees charged by the Alberta advantage immigration program and \$4.333 million relates to fees collected by the international qualifications assessment service. IQAS is the acronym for it. IQAS helps to get recognition for education and training received outside of Canada.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you very much.

At this point I will now turn it over to the Official Opposition, and I understand, Mr. Deol, that you're going to be speaking. Are you wanting to share time or combine time?

Mr. Deol: Yeah. I would like to keep sharing.

Mrs. Sawhney: Yes. Sounds good.

Mr. Deol: Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Minister, for your answers. I do have a question. You said that you have \$100,000 for the Anti-Racism Advisory Council. Looking on your website, I see, basically, right now, no meetings scheduled for the Anti-Racism Advisory Council for the year 2023. My questions around this are: are there meetings scheduled for this year, or did the 2022 meetings occur, and if there were meetings in 2022, do we have the minutes for those meetings?

The recommendations from the Anti-Racism Advisory Council came out in March 2021. Can the minister share what the council has been working on since then? Does the council have any specific objectives? What were their performance indicators for 2022, and are there any changes this year? What is the status of the recommendations from the council? How many of them have been completely implemented? Which ones are yet to be implemented, and will the minister be prioritizing them during this budget?

Mrs. Sawhney: Okay. There's a series of questions here, and I think . . .

Mr. Deol: Yeah, it was around just the advisory council. I thought I could just do them at once.

Mrs. Sawhney: Yeah. That's fine. That was a good idea, actually.

Last year the Anti-Racism Advisory Council met at least four times. That's part of their mandate, to meet. They may have met more. We do have minutes for all of those meetings. I was very fortunate to be able to attend one of those meetings shortly after being sworn in. I know that there were recommendations that were issued some time ago. The former minister MLA Muhammad Yaseen had actually put forward an antiracism action plan in July of 2022, last year.

Some of the work that we've been doing since then – because I know you're asking, like: what has been implemented and what hasn't been? Some of the work that we're doing since that point is extensive stakeholder engagement because we are wanting to design antiracism legislation that will focus on some of those recommendations. You can't do all of them. That's just a reality.

As much as we might want to, the reality is that you have to start somewhere, and this is very new work across the country. There are only a couple of other jurisdictions that have legislation in place.

Part of the work that we did – and the council was involved in this work as well – is to have stakeholder engagement sessions across the province. We had some in Fort McMurray, in Grande Prairie, in Red Deer, in Medicine Hat. The idea was to garner more feedback in terms of what we need to see in the legislation. This work complements the work of the council, and it's necessary because whenever you put forward any legislation, as we all know, you have to have that element of stakeholder engagement, so that's what we were doing. We included Indigenous communities as well within that engagement. That is the status of where we're at in terms of trying to actualize some of those recommendations in the report.

Mr. Deol: Yeah. Thank you for your answer. I hope this is not duplicating lots of the work that has already been done. I understand that the Alberta Anti-Racism Advisory Council is comprised of many diverse community experts and community leaders, and they have done some consultation for the recommendations.

Mrs. Sawhney: Can I add on to that? That's always a concern, the duplication of efforts, and there will be some, but, you know, the world has changed drastically since last year with the Russian invasion of Ukraine, like I've mentioned before. There's an additional gravitas now to all the work that we do. We have welcomed so many temporary residents into the province. It's worth while to engage and re-engage to understand what the additional stresses are to different cultural communities. We've also welcomed so many refugees from Afghanistan, and that has also required additional engagement. I understand your concern about duplicating efforts, but it was necessary to re-engage to a certain extent with some of these communities and with new communities. That's part of the reason why we have the Premier's council on multiculturalism as part of our budget.

Mr. Deol: We're not spending a lot of time on this question. I understand that we don't have a lot of time, actually.

Looking into the multiculturalism portfolio, if I understand correctly – you can correct me if I'm wrong – two antiracism grant programs exist right now. They are the antiracism community engagement grant and the multiculturalism and antiracism grant program.

Mrs. Sawhney: Yes. That's correct. The engagement grants were announced last year. I think all of the organizations have actually taken that part of funding. It was small funds to actually have some community engagement sessions that allowed them to talk about, you know, antiracism policies and other issues affecting their communities.

9:50

Then we have the multiculturalism and antiracism grants, that are up to a maximum of \$30,000. We are just finalizing some of those grant applications right now.

Mr. Deol: Yeah. I'm a bit sad to say that, you know, we have seen that huge cut to multicultural initiatives. Then we also lost the human rights education and multiculturalism grant fund, and it never got reinstated. I'm stating this.

My questions around these two grants. You know, it says that this is one of the multiculturalism initiatives. What I would like to know from the minister: how many grants have been given out – if you have the information, you can do it now, or you can just get me the answer later on in writing – through the antiracism community engagement program and multiculturalism antiracism grant

programs? How many applications did the ministry receive for the first intake? What is the average amount of money that a successful grant was given? How did the ministry advertise and promote this grant? How has the community responded to this grant, and does the minister think that this is enough to support initiatives? Will there be an expansion of this program with the increase in this budget assigned to multiculturalism?

I would like to hear from the minister, but if there is time, I have a very concerning question around – and you already touched on it – the old AINP program. I'll be happy to ask a question on that.

Mrs. Sawhney: Okay. Well, let me just say that I very vehemently disagree with your statement that there were cuts to multiculturalism programs. That's absolutely not the case. In fact, it's the opposite. We have funded these programs to an extent that we have not historically seen before; \$4 million for grants or for programming for ethnocultural communities is something that the government of Alberta has never provided before.

In terms of the antiracism grants that was a one-time grant, the small amounts. We announced them last year, and the organizations have already undertaken their engagement sessions. I think there were around 60 grants that were approved and funded, and now we have the multiculturalism and antiracism grants.

The question was: like, how did we advertise them? How did we talk about them? Well, everything is on our website, but I spread the word through my own multiculturalism roundtable engagements. I did about six or seven with the Sikh community, with the Hindu community, with the Filipino community, with the Black community, and many more. At every table I informed them that these grants were available and informed them of the deadlines and dates.

We've had really good uptake on that. I think we have 211 applications that were submitted and quite a few from Edmonton. I was very deliberate about making sure I spoke to community leaders in Edmonton so that they knew, because I just wasn't sure how else they were going to find out. Sometimes – we're all guilty of this, all elected representatives – there are lots of grant offerings out there at times, and we don't inform our constituents.

I'll pause there.

Mr. Deol: Can I ask a quick question?

Mrs. Sawhney: Sure.

Mr. Deol: How much of this \$4 million this year has been actually kept for those two grants?

The Deputy Chair: Thank you very much.

I would now like to turn over to the government caucus as there are no independent members in the room. Member Allard, are you wanting to combine time with the minister?

Mrs. Allard: Yes, in the few minutes we have left, if that's okay.

The Deputy Chair: Minister?

Mrs. Sawhney: Yes.

The Deputy Chair: Go ahead.

Mrs. Allard: Through you, Chair, to the minister, I just wanted to pick up where the minister left off with MLA Rowswell with respect to the international qualifications assessment service. Your key objective 2.3 on page 136 of the Trade, Immigration and Multiculturalism business plan says that the ministry works "with partner ministries to address Alberta's labour market gaps for the

benefit of Albertans and [supports] the recognition of international credentials.”

I guess I have two questions. How does your ministry work with other ministries to address Alberta's labour market gaps? You have a very short time to answer that. Then how does the international qualifications assessment service fit into this work? I just wanted to give the minister an opportunity to fill that in.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Member Allard. The ministry is working with other departments to identify labour needs and design immigration pathways to address those needs. For example, we're working with Skilled Trades and Professions on identifying opportunities for international skilled tradespeople and to address barriers that trades are experiencing, which will help the construction industry. We're also working with Forestry, Parks and Tourism on identifying immigration needs related to the tourism and hospitality industry that may be needed in conjunction with category-based selections for the industry through express entry, which is for higher skilled positions in the industry. I know that Member Rosin is very passionate about this particular work that we're doing. Thank you for all your advocacy and your hard work on this. Additionally, the department and Health are collaborating on the design of a dedicated pathway for select health professionals, and I really hope to have something that I can announce in the coming weeks on this particular stream.

The international qualifications assessment service, or IQAS, supports fair recognition of international educational credentials by issuing comparative statements to Albertan, Canadian education standards. For any newcomer a comparison of credentials earned outside of Canada is a first step to employment or licensure. IQAS assessments are used by regulatory bodies, educational institutions, and employers and indirectly support all ministries who are striving to fill labour gaps. Now, specifically, IQAS works with the Ministry of Seniors, Community and Social Services to provide assessments at no cost to facilitate entry into the workforce and address labour market gaps. That is how IQAS fits into the work.

Mrs. Allard: Excellent. Thank you, Minister. We have a little bit of time left. I wanted to take a moment to express my gratitude, through the chair, to the minister for your work on this file. I know that there was a lot of change in government in the fall and new ministries. I think the members opposite have talked about some of the shifts in the ways that the ministries have been split up, so I just really wanted to commend the minister for her work on behalf of all Albertans and certainly on behalf of communities that are ethnic minorities. I think that you've represented them well, through the

chair – I will speak through the chair – and will be sad to see you go at the end of this term. I just wanted to put that out there.

Minister, is there anything else you wanted the committee to hear before we close our time?

Mrs. Sawhney: Well, thank you, Member Allard. You might just make me cry a little bit. Thank you for your comments. This has definitely been the honour of a lifetime, to be able to serve and particularly to be able to serve during the pandemic, when we saw such incredible vulnerability in so many communities across the province, particularly in our ethnocultural communities, which is why I was very grateful when Premier Smith asked me to take on this ministry.

Having the multiculturalism portfolio meant that I could further some of those priorities that really needed to be furthered, which is why I was really pushing back on Member Deol's comments around, like, there have been cuts to the multiculturalism file that there have not been. We've enhanced the expenditure and the programming that will go to ethnocultural communities because of all the reasons that I'd mentioned earlier, because our immigration numbers are going to go up, our growth in our country and province is going to come through immigration. Now's the time. Now's the time to make sure that multiculturalism is no longer just an aspirational framework, that it's actually something that is a reality and rooted in acceptance and celebration and not just tolerance but beyond that.

It's been quite the honour for me to be able to build on the work that I did in community and social services and, actually, in transportation, too. Some of my driving back to work grants were definitely targeted towards some newcomer populations. I worked with some of the organizations that served, particularly, women from newcomer communities to make sure that they had access to these funds that were traditionally offered to men because they were male-dominated industries.

In closing – we have about 10 seconds – I will also take the opportunity to thank everybody who has joined us this evening for this session in committee on supply. Thank you to my staff, and thank you to all of my government colleagues.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

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

I'd like to remind committee members that we are scheduled to meet tomorrow, Wednesday, March 15, 2023, at 3:30 p.m. to consider the estimates of the Ministry of Forestry, Parks and Tourism.

Thank you, everyone. This meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 10 p.m.]

