



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Standing Committee
on
Alberta's Economic Future

Immigration and Multiculturalism
Consideration of Main Estimates

Wednesday, March 20, 2024
9 a.m.

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First Session**

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP), Deputy Chair

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Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Participants

Ministry of Immigration and Multiculturalism
Hon. Muhammad Yaseen, Minister
Ako Ufodike, Deputy Minister

9 a.m.

Wednesday, March 20, 2024

[Mr. Getson in the chair]

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

The Chair: Folks, I'd like to bring your attention, call the meeting to order. Welcome, everyone in attendance. The committee has under consideration the estimates of the Ministry of Immigration and Multiculturalism for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

I'd ask that we go around the table and have the members introduce themselves for the record. Minister, if you could introduce your officials who are joining us at the table. For everyone's attention who may not be familiar, *Hansard* is actually running the microphones, so you don't have to touch them. To show you how this works, I'll get it started on this end. My name is Shane Getson, the MLA for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland, better known as God's country. We'll start introducing our members to my right.

Mr. Wright: Hi. My name is Justin Wright. I'm the MLA for the charming constituency of Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Ms de Jonge: Chantelle de Jonge, MLA for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Mr. Cyr: Scott Cyr, MLA for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

Mr. Yao: Tany Yao, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yaseen: Good morning. Thank you, Mr. Chair. My name is Muhammad Yaseen, the Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism. I am very pleased to introduce the ministry officials here at the table with me. To my immediate right is Ake Ufodike, deputy minister; to my far right is Lisa Ross-Rodriguez, assistant deputy minister, newcomer and multicultural supports; to my immediate left is Gosia Cichy-Weclaw, assistant deputy minister for immigration; and to my far left is Thierry Karikuru, acting assistant deputy minister and senior financial officer.

Mr. Haji: Sharif Haji, MLA for Edmonton-Decore, critic for Immigration and Multiculturalism.

Member Tejada: Lizette Tejada, MLA for Calgary-Klein.

Member Loyola: Rod Loyola, Edmonton-Ellerslie.

The Chair: Perfect. I appreciate it, members. It doesn't look like we have anyone participating remotely, so that'll save me about five speaking points here.

Committee proceedings are live streamed on the Internet and broadcast on Assembly TV. The audio- and videostream, transcripts of the meetings can be accessed via the Legislative Assembly website. Please set your cellphones to the least disturbing mode possible. We're in the boardroom, so no ringing, ringing.

I do have to read a couple of items into the record. I apologize to everybody for that, but the clerk keeps me on my toes and makes sure everything is official. So fasten up; here we go.

Hon. members, the main estimates for the Ministry of Immigration and Multiculturalism shall be considered for three hours. Standing Order 59.01 sets out the process for consideration of the main estimates of the Legislative Assembly policy committees. Suborder 59.01(6) sets out the speaking rotation for this meeting. The speaking rotation chart is available on the committee's internal website, and hard copies have been provided to the ministry officials at the table. For each segment of the

meeting blocks of speaking times will be combined only if both the minister and the member speaking agree. If debate is exhausted prior to three hours, the ministry's estimates are deemed to have been considered for the time allotted in the main estimates scheduled for the committee and will adjourn. Should members have any questions regarding speaking times or rotation, please e-mail or message the committee clerk about the process. He's to my left. You could even wave your hand in here, and he'll probably see that, too.

With the concurrence of the committee I would like to call a five-minute break near the midpoint of the meeting. Basically, it's a biobreak, folks. That's really what we need, the minister and myself – we really can't move around – and the folks at the table. Are there any concerns with having a five-minute break, considering that once we do that, the shot clock will still continue for the overall meeting time? Any concerns? The chair much appreciates that first consensus that we have.

Ministry officials who are present may, at the direction of the minister, address the committee. Ministry officials seated in the gallery, if called upon, have access to the microphone in the gallery area and are asked to please introduce themselves before recording in to the committee. Just the podium at the back there, folks.

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.

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

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

Finally, or mostly finally, the committee should have the opportunity to hear both the question and the answers without interruptions during estimate debate. Debate flows through the chair at all times, including instances when speaking time is shared between the member and the minister. You will find a friendly face; I will nod and smile regardless of what you're saying. If you start to engage the minister and you start to lock horns, I'll nicely pull you back. The way we run the committee meetings in here is like a boardroom. The Leg. Assembly stuff, all the heckling and all that stuff: that stays parked over there. We've got business to do here.

The other thing that's very beneficial for everybody at home and the chair: we've got a lot of really good books. We've got the government estimates. We've got the fiscal plan. We have ministry business plans. We have strategic plans. Reference those. The chair will know what the heck you're talking about, and we can follow along. The minister and his staff will be able to respond to your answers a lot better, and the folks at home will see it as well. Best of all, it mitigates the use of points of order and really makes the flow go well in the meeting. Having said that, is everyone comfortable with the rules of engagement? Away we go.

Minister, the first block of time for you is 10 minutes. Over to you, sir.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you. I'm happy to discuss the 2024 budget for Immigration and Multiculturalism. We'll now move into the details of our budget. Immigration and Multiculturalism's consolidated 2024-25 operating expense is estimated at \$41.8 million, compared to the 2023-2024 forecast of \$39.1 million. The year-over-year change is primarily due to an increase in the international qualification assessment service, associated with fee increase, and

additional funding for the Alberta advantage immigration due to the increased number of applications, streams, and pathways.

With this new budget Immigration and Multiculturalism will continue to help address key labour gaps, strengthen and grow the economy. We will continue to help newcomers settle across the province by providing settlement, integration, and language assessment support and English language services. We will continue to foster a province where people from all backgrounds are valued, promote the advantage of a multicultural society, and support antiracism initiatives.

The ministry's immigration division supports Alberta's competitive advantage and helps maintain our position as Canada's economic engine by attracting in-demand workers to fill key labour shortages. We must attract more skilled labourers; this is critical to Alberta's long-term economic success and is very important to support our growing economy. Immigration and Multiculturalism does this through our economic immigration program called the Alberta advantage immigration program, or AAIP. AAIP helps strengthen and grow Alberta's economy by attracting talented, in-demand workers to fill labour gaps and challenges and by attracting entrepreneurs wanting to grow businesses and create jobs in our beautiful province.

We have created specific streams and pathways for employers to attract and retain workers in key sectors such as health care, construction, technology, agriculture, tourism, and hospitality by nominating them for permanent residence. Our AAIP pathways and streams include a dedicated health care pathway for select internationally trained health care professionals who are ready to work, an accelerated tech pathway for tech workers with job offers in the sectors, and our rural renewal stream, which focuses on rural economic needs. In February I announced the latest AAIP stream with the Minister of Tourism and Sport, targeting the persistent shortage of skilled workers in the tourism and hospitality sectors.

This is a time of opportunities for our economy. Canada's immigration levels are projected to increase over the next two years. Currently Alberta receives approximately 12 per cent of permanent residents coming to Canada. In 2023 the federal government granted Alberta a 50 per cent increase in nomination allocations from 2022 with further increases for 2024 and 2025. Budget 2024 will provide \$25.3 million over three years to enable us to keep attracting skilled workers from around the globe to address key labour shortages across Alberta's sectors. Of this, \$1.2 million will enable us to expand our application processing capacity and enhance program integrity.

My ministry continues to collaborate with others on ministry-specific job attraction strategies to raise awareness among new Albertans about jobs in skilled trades and professions, including pathways for education, apprenticeship, and training. Through our international qualifications assessment service we assess foreign credentials received outside of Canada to help immigrants and new Albertans fully participate in Alberta's economy using their education and training.

Newcomers enrich Alberta's workforce, bringing fresh ideas and skills that are vital for economic growth while still maintaining essential support postarrival to Alberta. That is why a key Immigration and Multiculturalism priority is to increase access and enhance funding opportunities for mentoring, labour attachment, and labour market integration programs for immigrants and newcomers. Budget 2024 allocates \$7.8 million over three years for settlement and integration initiatives such as labour market attachment grants to assist newcomers in integrating into the province's labour market.

9:10

My ministry further supports labour market integration by funding settlement integration and language services and projects, including the Alberta settlement and integration grant program, which provides settlement integration services, language assessment, and English as a second language drop-in service, and the Alberta immigrant mentorship and innovation program, which helps remove barriers and provides career mentorship opportunities for new Albertans.

The microloan initiative helps newcomer professionals with low-interest microloans for expenses like licensing, training, exams, and skill upgrading. We further address newcomer labour market integration needs by providing mentorship opportunities, licensing supports, community capacity building, and system improvement. These programs collectively support newcomers, ensuring they integrate well into Alberta's diverse community, fostering a sense of belonging. We value their skills and contributions.

We created the Alberta newcomer recognition awards to recognize and celebrate the outstanding contributions of Albertans born abroad, each of whom has contributed to our province through volunteerism, leadership, innovation, and business, academic, or professional achievements. Last year we received more than 140 nominations and honoured 31 award recipients.

According to 2021 census data of Alberta's total population 23 per cent are immigrants, and 27 per cent are visible minorities. Those numbers continue to grow as we continue to draw people from across the world. We will continue to promote the benefit and value of a multicultural Alberta, celebrating and supporting cultural diversity and fostering a more inclusive province where people want to live and work.

As Alberta's population becomes increasingly diverse, it is vital for our government to promote the value of a multicultural society and provide opportunities to learn from each other and share our unique cultures. We do this in many ways, including grant programs to support community-driven multicultural and antiracism initiatives; working with the Alberta Anti-Racism Advisory Council, Premier's council on multiculturalism, and our newest council, the Alberta Black Advisory Council; and by hosting cultural events such as Black History Month, Lunar New Year, and Diwali.

Last year the ministry separated its multicultural and antiracism grant program into two distinct programs to better recognize that these are two separate concepts. We received an amazing response to both new grant programs, and we are currently reviewing the numerous applications received. Budget 2024 will provide funding to continue both of these programs: \$12 million over three years for ethnocultural grants and \$1.5 million over three years for antiracism grants. This funding helps community organizations promote cross-cultural knowledge and understanding, celebrate and support cultural diversity in Alberta, and combat racism, all of which helps foster and build even more inclusive communities.

Helping to inform government's efforts to address racism is the Alberta Anti-Racism Advisory Council, whose recommendations guided the Alberta antiracism action plan. The plan's first annual report, published in December 2023, outlines 26 actions that have been completed across 25 ministries. We are proud of the significant progress made last year. Our actions are helping foster a more inclusive province.

Mr. Chair, these are some of the highlights of Immigration and Multiculturalism's budget. My department remains dedicated to working hard to attract workers with essential skills for Alberta's current needs as well as to foster diverse, inclusive communities. Thank you for your time, and I look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Perfect. Thank you, Minister.

The first block goes over to the members of the opposition. I know we're old hands at this now. This is, like, our 10 or 11 meeting or hundredth. It feels like a lot more. I know this is our last one. The first block of 60 minutes of time can be combined, or it can be block time. Regardless of which both the member and the minister agree to, you can't speak longer than 10 minutes, and then it switches back to the other person, and you can cede your time in this block as well, so you can pass it back and forth.

With that, who would like to go first?

Mr. Haji: Yeah. I'll go first. I would like to request if we can do combined.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Yaseen: I would like block time, please.

Mr. Haji: Okay. Thank you. Thank you, Minister, for the overview and indicating the importance and the value that the ministry contributes to Alberta's vibrancy. On page 73 of the business plan the ministry mandate is promoting and enabling an inclusive multicultural society that embraces Alberta's diverse community and attracts and supports immigrants to strengthen and grow Alberta's economy.

Again, the same on the fiscal plan, page 37, it shows that the net international immigration is expected to remain robust in 2024, Mr. Chair. This means that the ministry should step up and provide the support that will enable new immigrants to settle, integrate, and thrive. As indicated in the fiscal plan again, immigrants will remain the significant driver of the growth of this province. However, they tend to face barriers in joining the workforce.

I've been engaging with stakeholders, and I've been receiving feedback. What I'm hearing is that the support systems are not keeping up with the immigration growth. In my conversation with Edmonton and Calgary settlement services organizations they experienced a growing wait-list for language assessment and support. In fact, the proportion of new immigrants in shelters has significantly increased. Mr. Chair, I understand that settlement and immigration is a federal responsibility, but it is also shared, and I know that the province has its role, and that is why we have such an important ministry.

My question to the minister, through you, Mr. Chair: what is the province doing to address the growing wait-list of language assessment, language training, the growing unemployment among new immigrants, the overrepresentation of immigrants in shelters, including women and 2SLGBTQIA-plus, and other marginalized groups? That's overall the first question on the mandate aspect of it.

Now going into the two outcomes that the ministry has, citing the first outcome: international talent is attracted and supported to strengthen and grow Alberta's economy. There are a number of objectives, key objectives for the ministry, that I would like to have a better understanding of, the key objectives that inform the ministry's spending.

Key objective 1.1, which is on page 75 of the business plan, is to maximize the annual nomination allocations on the Alberta advantage immigration program by the federal government and support opportunities for all sectors of the provincial economy to attract international talent. Under this objective the ministry plans include addressing health care challenges, through the Alberta advantage immigration program, by increasing the proportion of health care workers.

My question here, through the chair: how is the minister addressing this through the AAIP given that in 2023 the allocation of health care workers was less than 2 per cent? Rural Albertans

need more health care workers, and this strategy is not working thus far, based on the percentage that we see in the ministry's documents. So, through the chair, how will we know that the department's performance on attracting international talent through AAIP is tracked?

Again, similarly, key objective 1.2 is to address labour market gaps and support skilled worker retention. The question here is: how does the minister intend to address the retention challenges that Alberta is experiencing now? Our province has lower retention rates of skilled workers and skilled trades than British Columbia, which retains 67 per cent of those who land there. Ontario retains 81 per cent, Quebec retains 91 per cent, and most Atlantic provinces retain more than 63 per cent. However, Alberta retains only 63 per cent, which makes it lower than the other competitive provinces.

9:20

While under this outcome let's also talk about the Alberta advantage immigration program. Based on the minister's mandate, the AAIP is the key instrument for the province to address economic migration, growth, and stability. The department has allocation that changes depending on how the ministry negotiates with the federal counterpart. While the numbers change, usually upwards, it doesn't go downwards. Through the chair, can the minister provide targets either in the percentage or in the number for different streams? For example, in the dedicated health care pathways the government issued 75 certificates out of 9,750. This is less than 1 per cent, and given that the minister has indicated in his opening remarks how important it is to address the health care workforce gaps through this program.

I would also like to understand how the entrepreneurial stream is going to address the needs that we report to build our economy. That was included in the minister's opening statement. There are four entrepreneurship streams that the minister has under nonexpress entry streams; however, there were only five certificates that were issued last calendar year. The same applies to the other streams. So I would like to see what the targets are and what the achievements are so that we can see the performance that these streams are doing to fill the gaps that we have in various sectors or within our economy.

Going to the second objective, which is on page 75 of the business plan under bullet 2, the minister plans to assist prospective and newly arrived international talents with support and services to help them integrate into Alberta's labour market. As mentioned earlier, our retention strategy is not working, especially on the skilled workers and trades, and international talent needs support to settle and stay in this province. Through the chair, I would like the minister to explain what support services are being provided to assist the skilled trades and the skilled workers in our province so that we can be competitive with other provinces that are ahead of us in terms of retention. Because when we lose, it adds on the other provinces. So we are losing to other provinces in this case.

On page 76 of the business plan and then going into the performance aspect of it, the measure 1(c) measures Alberta's percentage share of the total number of permanent residents in Canada. Alberta's share of permanent residents, according to the business plan, is an indicator for the province's ability to attract skilled international professionals compared to the rest of Canada, which I really debate on this because permanent residents include children, include seniors. That doesn't provide you with a very good picture, an indication to see whether you are retaining skilled workers. My question is: why does the ministry use a permanent resident as an indicator when Stats Canada provides retention of skilled workers in each province, which would be a much better suited indicator than the permanent residents?

Through the chair, again staying with the same indicator although I don't think that it provides us a better measure when we are competing with other provinces, the number of PRs from year to year seems to be constant and did not change. In addition to the business plan the metric does not provide a comparative national average so that we can see in terms of even how we are attracting immigrants in our province. Apart from having numbers, we could have comparative data that shows how we are competing with the other provinces. So if the minister could provide some indications and clarification on why that is the case.

Again, still staying on the same outcome on page 75 of the business plan, objective 1.3 is to increase access and enhance funding opportunities for mentoring, labour attachment, as the minister indicated in his opening remarks, and other related labour market integration. As someone who immigrated to this province and can relate to the value of mentorship and how it helps, I'm curious about the available supports and had serious conversations with stakeholders. Stakeholders expressed their pressing need for mentorship program funding that helps labour attachment and integration. Through the chair, can the minister provide clarity on how the minister is increasing access to the funding opportunities based on the increasing population, particularly on immigration and the attraction that we are doing on skilled work through the various programs that attract skilled workers? What are some of the increases that will help us with that?

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Member Haji.
Minister, back to you.

Mr. Yaseen: Yeah. Thank you very much, Member Haji, for your comments, questions, and observations with respect to our Alberta advantage immigration program. Our settlement and integration program funds settlement, integration, language assessment supports, and English language services to help immigrants and refugees settle. We collaborate with other ministries and the federal government to discuss needs and priorities and to help maximize provincial investment and ensure funding doesn't duplicate existing programs and services.

I will try to address some of your comments. The government Opportunity Alberta website offers comprehensive and easy-to-find information for newcomers and prospective immigrants about the different immigrant pathways and streams under the Alberta advantage immigration program as well as information about relocating to Alberta. For internationally trained professionals there is updated online information about international qualification recognition, including a step-by-step process on how to become licensed and work in a regulated occupation in our province. This information about living and working in Alberta is important to manage expectations for those considering immigrating and those who are already here.

To ensure Alberta's continued economic growth and diversification, we must create more opportunities for people to immigrate and settle, fill labour gaps, start businesses, and create new jobs. Immigration and Multiculturalism supports newcomers in Alberta by offering settlement, integration, language assessment, and English language drop-in services. We also address the newcomer labour market integration needs by providing mentorship opportunities, licensing support, community capacity building, and system improvement.

Some of the labour market attachment projects bolster sectors such as trade and health care. One project helps international medical graduates to maximize, to use their medical skills and

knowledge to obtain employment to support the skills shortage in the health care sector.

The supports for newcomer integration provide settlement and language support and services for newcomers while they live and work in Alberta. Settlement and community support services provide eligible newcomers with settlement and integration support. Language assessment and referral services provide English language assessment and assist newcomers in finding education or training options to enhance their language abilities. The drop-in English as a second language services provide English language learning opportunities for newcomers who cannot access regular English as an additional language programming. Settlement, integration, and language projects fund projects that address emerging sector needs like system improvements, capacity building, newcomer labour market integrations, and other identified government priorities.

9:30

The Alberta immigration mentorship innovation grant supports organizations in delivering career mentorship programs to support newcomers in finding meaningful employment based on their work experience and education and skills. Internationally trained professionals can get support with skill upgrades and licensing fees from Windmill Microlending and Bredin Centre for Career Advancement in partnership with Servus Credit Union.

Your other comment was about maximizing allocations. What is the ministry doing to maximize our numbers? The Alberta advantage immigration program is an economic immigration program that allows Alberta to nominate individuals for permanent residence. In the express entry stream the Alberta advantage immigration program added pathways and initiatives to facilitate opportunities for applicants whose primary occupation is in high demand in Alberta and have close family relatives living in Alberta and for those in the accelerated tech pathway, the health care sector – we have another pathway for that, a dedicated health care pathway – agriculture, construction, tourism and hospitality priority sectors.

In 2023 Alberta nominated 48 per cent of express entry allocations for the tech sector, accelerated tech pathway; 20 per cent for priority sectors, which are agriculture, construction, tourism and hospitality sectors; and 3 per cent for the health care sector through the dedicated health care pathway. One hundred and eighty-nine of the 2023 express entry nominations were issued to candidates through construction-specific draws. These draws continue and may help to recruit workers to address the housing crisis and construction industry labour needs.

The dedicated health care pathway showed early signs of success, issuing nominations for 20 family physicians, 55 registered nurses, and 47 other eligible health care professionals; 47.5 per cent of the pathway nominations in 2023 were designated and connected to jobs located outside of Calgary and Edmonton; 42 per cent, or eight out of 19, of the general practitioner family physicians were designated and connected to jobs located, again, outside of Calgary and Edmonton.

With respect to your comments about foreign professionals, the graduates, foreign graduates, and rural entrepreneurial streams, why only five nominations were issued – I think that was your comment. Are they meeting the needs? Just trying to get to that here. In the graduate, foreign graduate, and rural entrepreneurial streams business applications, applicants whose application is approved must own and operate their business in Alberta for a minimum of one year and meet all terms and conditions of a legally binding business performance agreement with the government of Alberta prior to becoming eligible for nomination. Since these three entrepreneurial streams were introduced, the program has received

more than 100 expressions of interest and selected 70 of those to submit business applications. Those not selected were ineligible.

The graduate entrepreneurial stream has received 18 expressions of interest, selected 12 of those to submit business applications, with three business applications submitted and approved from those selections, and had two nominations issued since it started.

The foreign graduate entrepreneurial stream has received 34 expressions of interest, selected 13 of those submitted business applications, with 12 business applications submitted and approved from those selections and no nomination issued until the stream's entrepreneurial applicants have owned and operated their business for at least one year.

The rural entrepreneurial stream has received 53 expressions of interest, selected 45 of those submitted business applications, with 18 business applications submitted and approved from those selections and one nomination issued, with others still needing to meet the one-year business requirement.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

I'm not sure if it was the first block of questions or your compelling 10-minute introduction, but we have three more MLAs that have joined us for this estimate. So if we can just go to those MLAs to my right, introduce your name for the record.

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

Mr. Dyck: Nolan Dyck, MLA for Grande Prairie.

The Chair: Another MLA to my left.

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

The Chair: Perfect. Now we have everyone on the record and looking forward to the next round of questions from the members of the opposition.

Who would like to go? MLA Tejada.

Member Tejada: Okay. Thank you, Minister. Would you like to do block time or combined?

Mr. Yaseen: Block time.

Member Tejada: Okay. Thank you. Thank you, Minister and ministry staff, for dedicating yourselves to this very important work. As we know, the Alberta story is ever-changing, and a critical part of our success as a province is how well we support newcomers and create inclusive communities. In reference to page 77 of the business plan, 2.2, advance the province's antiracism initiatives, with advice from the Alberta Anti-Racism Advisory Council, to address systemic barriers and challenges facing racially marginalized and Indigenous peoples in developing and implementing antiracism legislation to build on Alberta's culture of inclusion and respect, as the minister noted, of course, the antiracism council made public its recommendations. It also did the report, which I read in December 2023, and one of the themes accompanied by several recommendations was around accountability. So through the chair, can the minister provide some clarity on the Anti-Racism Advisory Council and how it's being engaged in terms of helping shape antiracism legislation?

For my next question, when looking at the statement of operations, page 78 of the business plan, I'm seeing very general numbers in terms of operational spending for the Ministry of Immigration and Multiculturalism. I know that you'd made reference to a few of the numbers there. When I look at the estimates table, they're very general numbers again; no mention of

any of the councils that have been listed in the business plan. So can the minister provide more detail in terms of the breakdown by council, in terms of spending for each council? Currently we have the Premier's council on multiculturalism, the Anti-Racism Advisory Council, and now the Alberta Black Advisory Council. Specifically, what is the overall amount spent on each of these councils and on the initiatives that are driven by these councils? I'd also like to know how many FTEs are employed for each council and if there are any vacancies.

It's heartening to see that the government business plan also includes mention of the work being done on these initiatives, but as the old adage goes, we need to put our money where our mouth is, so while the mention is great, I'm struggling to see evidence of where the monies are actually allocated. Aside from the \$13.5 million in the business plan, do we know how the distribution is determined? And in addition to the grants, where in this budget can we see how the funds are allocated now and over the next three years? Are the grants tied to the councils by name? Under outcome 2, objective 2.1, promote welcoming and diverse communities with advice from the Premier's council on multiculturalism and the Alberta Black Advisory Council, through the chair to the minister: can Albertans get some clarity on this first item?

Within ethnocultural communities we have a vast array of identities and ethnicities and racial composition, including Indigenous peoples. On a personal note, as a Latina identifying as mixed heritage, I know that within my own cultural group there's a representation of several racial identities, and I've heard much the same from other groups. There's that old saying, you know, that we're not a monolith. So my question is: why would the antiracism council not be included in that objective?

9:40

My next question is still on the same key objective: establish and support working councils to advise on supports for Alberta's diverse ethnocultural communities. Can the minister please clarify how the working councils are comprised? Are these in addition to the three councils that have already been named? If these are to be additional, how can Albertans follow the work being done, and how will this be reflected in the budget year over year?

I've spoken to many stakeholder groups engaged in antiracism work, and one of the things they've expressed to me is the need for ongoing and predictable supports for systematic change. I do see that this is one of the goals noted by the government in that report from 2023. Although individual grants are always appreciated and critical to the work that they do, there's also a need to plan for the years ahead to help make lasting improvements in communities. The question is: can the minister confirm what funding mechanisms there are for organizations doing this work outside of the grants?

My next question is: can the minister provide transparency on community engagement in terms of what's being done on antiracism? What entities across Alberta have been engaged? How have they been engaged, and how is this reflected in the current and forecasted budgets? This is not anything that I was able to find in the tables, so it'd be nice to have a little bit more detail on that.

As part of the antiracism council's recommendations one was to adequately fund the Alberta Hate Crimes Committee, so can the minister provide some transparency as to where in the budget the funding for this very important initiative resides? I don't see it as a line item or referenced in any of the budget documents, but I know that a significant amount of work was done last year. I met with the Alberta Hate Crimes Committee when they published their report. If not with Immigration and Multiculturalism, is there another ministry where we should be looking for those numbers? In addition to the question on numbers, I would ask how the

antiracism council will continue to be engaged, if these are ongoing engagements that will be happening, if we have a schedule, and if there's somewhere we can follow the progress of that work.

Of course, as part of my role in advocating for 2SLGBTQIA folks, I'm hearing that some of our immigrant-serving agencies are actually experiencing a large influx of 2SLGBTQIA folks. Though these organizations are committed to developing their offering in order to meet their needs and serve all of those communities within all of their intersections, gender-diverse immigrant populations are most at risk for homelessness and marginalization. Given the rise in hate crimes against this vulnerable group of folks and increasing anti-2SLGBTQIA rhetoric across communities, can the minister confirm if work is being done to address this particular segment of the population?

I also see that as performance indicator 2(c) in the business plan, on page 77, we have the indicator referring to complaints based on race, colour, ancestry, origin, religious beliefs. In terms of the 2SLGBTQIA community who are also racialized, will the ministry be looking at expanding that metric so that we can see how to properly address the safety of immigrant and racialized 2SLGBTQIA Albertans?

This is one of the questions where I'll be referring to the general government strategic plan, and that's in terms of Alberta missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, the road map created by government, which is stated to guide the actions of government across ministries. My question is: how has it guided the work within your ministry? What are we doing to reduce violence towards 2SLGBTQIA people and Indigenous people through the antiracism ministry? I would love to get some detail on that.

I'm not sure how much time I have.

The Chair: You still have a minute and 23. Just up on the wall it shows the overall speaking time, the block time, and then the remaining meeting time.

Member Tejada: Actually, just referring to 2(b) in the business plan, the average amount of funding provided to organizations through the antiracism grant, it's set at \$7,692 per recipient for the next of the three fiscal years. Given the complexity and the depth of the issues related to racism and discrimination, do you believe this funding level is sufficient to effectively support the delivery of antiracism initiatives and build organizational capacity within affected communities?

Would you be able to provide any rationale behind setting the average funding amount at \$7,692 per recipient? How was the figure determined? What factors were considered in assessing the financial needs of organizations working on antiracism initiatives? What measures are in place to ensure that funding provided through the antiracism grant adequately meets the diverse needs of not-for-profit and community organizations? How does the government ensure equitable access to funding for organizations representing different racialized communities?

All right. Thank you.

The Chair: That's it.

Minister, back to you.

Mr. Yaseen: Well, thank you very much for your comments and observations and questions. I think the first thing to talk about is clarity on the Alberta Anti-Racism Advisory Council. I will try to get to all of your concerns and questions.

Let me talk a little bit about the Alberta Anti-Racism Advisory Council. We created the Alberta Anti-Racism Advisory Council to

provide insights and advice on addressing racism from those with lived experience. The council is comprised of up to 25 members representing Alberta's multicultural diversity. The council's recommendations helped inform the government's actions on the Alberta antiracism action plan.

The plan, a first for any government in Alberta, was launched in July 2022. To date 26 action items have already been implemented. The Alberta council's antiracism action plan is helping address discrimination and racism in our province. In 2021 the council submitted 48 recommendations to government on actions to address racism. These recommendations informed the development of Alberta's antiracism action plan, the government's road map to combat racism, promote social inclusion, and celebrate diversity and multiculturalism.

Many of the council's recommendations have been acted on: legislation to ban police carding and diversity training for law enforcement – that is one of them – amended the Police Act to establish an independent civilian complaints commission to investigate complaints against police officers; created the Alberta Hate Crimes Coordination Unit and hate crime community liaisons. The Alberta security infrastructure program funds security assessment and infrastructure improvements for facilities, communities, and groups at risk of racist incidents.

The council, as I mentioned before, is comprised of 25 members, including two chairs representing Alberta's multicultural diversity. Currently the Alberta Anti-Racism Advisory Council includes 19 members, including two co-chairs. Council members are recruited through a mix of direct appointments, public recruitment, and reappointments. One of Alberta's Anti-Racism Advisory Council members is cross-appointed to the new Alberta Black Advisory Council to ensure synergy. So we have taken one member from this council to be part of our Alberta Black Advisory Council. The annual budget to support the Alberta Anti-Racism Advisory Council is \$50,000 per year. Council members receive remuneration and reimbursements of related travel expenses through schedule 1, part B, of the committee remuneration order.

9:50

With respect to ARAC legislation, the Alberta Anti-Racism Advisory Council, we are all Albertans regardless of origin or background. Combatting racism is a top priority for Alberta's government. We condemn racism and are committed to promoting and fostering respect and inclusion. The council and the Alberta antiracism action plan are helping address discrimination and racism in our province. The council was consulted on antiracism legislation.

The question was: are the funding targets established sufficient given the complexity of the work? This is a new performance measure for our ministry. The antiracism grant program was launched in December 2023, so the last actual result is not yet available for the measures. The measures will demonstrate the average amount of financial resources that very small, not-for-profit organizations serving racially marginalized and Indigenous people and community development organizations were able to successfully access through the antiracism grant program.

The program is designed to help these very small organizations build capacity and obtain the knowledge, expertise, and human resources necessary to enable them to successfully access financial resources to support their program. These financial resources will enable them to develop expanded initiatives for community partnerships, support antiracism projects, and create awareness of the impact of racism faced by racially marginalized and Indigenous people. Targets for these new measures are based on the program budget, the maximum amount of funding available to organizations

through the two program streams, and the potential number of organizations that could access funding through the program.

With respect to support for all four committees in this ministry – there are four committees, right? Actually, there are four committees, and there are four FTEs looking after all these committees. The total budget for all three councils is \$350,000.

I think I have more or less answered all of your questions

The Chair: Did you want to turn it back to the member?

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you. I will turn it back to them.

The Chair: Sure.

And back to the members of the opposition.

Mr. Haji: Thank you. Yeah. Through the chair, I will ask about the business plan and the budget. That is what I am looking into in terms of how it will address the problems that I see, the problems that we hear from stakeholders.

I do appreciate the minister providing an overview of the programs, but I think the intent of the discussion is more around current challenges and what Budget 2024 and the business plan are going to do to address them. For some of those questions, I would like it if the minister could provide it in writing if it is possible. These are the growing list of new immigrants in shelters; the growing list of wait-lists; the growing list of unemployment rates among new immigrants; the retention of skilled workers compared to other provinces; the indicators that are being used which are not specifically relevant to the measure that is being measured. Those are some of the questions that I haven't had a response to, so if the minister could provide it in writing, I would appreciate that.

I will continue on the performance measures. On page 76 of the business plan performance measure 1(d) measures Alberta's labour force growth as well as the labour force contribution through landed immigrants. Despite the growing immigration, despite Alberta Is Calling, the metric shows that the per cent of immigrant contributions to the labour force is not getting better.

The Chair: For the chair's benefit, which part of the estimates were you referring to, sir?

Mr. Haji: I'm referring to page 76 of the business plan, performance measure 1(d), which measures key objective 1.3.

The Chair: Perfect. Thank you.

Mr. Haji: Through the chair, what are the plans that the minister is putting in place to improve the situation? On one hand, we see the labour contributions of landed immigrants declining. On the other hand, we see unemployment of new immigrants growing. It seems that there is a mismatch, that we are not putting this into force. I'm just trying to see what plans are in place in Budget 2024 to address this challenge.

Again, continuing on the government's performance measures either in spending or in performance metrics – that is, what is in the business plan – the performance measure of the total number of newcomers supported by the Alberta settlement integration program, which is ASIP, demonstrates the number of individual newcomers' integration that is supported through this program.

Through the chair, can the minister explain what objectives this performance metric is measuring? Last year we saw that the number of new immigrants supported through the program was 16,279. Based on the economic outlook the fiscal plan shows that we are going to see a spike in immigration. However, the measure is constant. It's not changing. The question that I have is: why is the

performance measure dropping in terms of targets instead of increasing because we are seeing high numbers in immigration?

Again, going through that ASIP program, is there a wait-list of newcomers seeking ASIP services that the minister is aware of, that the minister can share? What measures are being taken to reduce wait times and ensure timely access to settlement and language services? What is the average duration between newcomers' arrivals in Alberta and their connection to ASIP services or programs so that we can plan accordingly based on what we see? How is the process tracked and monitored to make sure that the appropriate allocation is put in place by the government to support the services? How frequently are ASIP program services assessed or evaluated to gauge their impact and identify areas for improvement?

I'll jump to outcome 2, which my colleague had already touched on a little bit, but I'll highlight a few things here as well, page 76. It's mainly seeking advice of various stakeholder advisory committees that the minister alluded to, whether it is antiracism, multiculturalism, or the other newly created committee. Through the chair, can the minister tell the committee how many resources the government has allocated? I think you have answered that question, so I can jump from that question so that we don't have to waste time on that.

On page 73 of the business plan, however, the minister states that the recently established Alberta Black Advisory Council is needed to advise on addressing specific barriers that Black Albertans face, and this includes disparity in education – that's what the council will advise on – employment, income disparity, food insecurity, health disparity, mental health and well-being, housing disparity, and disparity within the justice system. In my view, this is quite an important file and a significant social issue for our province, and I'm glad that the minister is taking note of this important disparity to create such a committee and put it in place.

10:00

Having worked in addressing this issue in my previous roles, it's something close to my heart. Through the chair, why is this not reflected in the ministry's outcomes, and why is it not reflected in the ministry's key objectives? What are the budget lines to address some of these issues? This is something that I feel like it is important, as alluded to in the mandate aspect of the business plan but not reflected in the metrics aspect as well as on the budget side.

Based on the ministry being the ministry of multiculturalism, I also have to make a compliment in terms of diversity that I see on the seat. That is kudos to the minister and his team.

On page 77 of the business plan objective 2.2 is to advance antiracism work. In 2022 – I think my colleague had touched on this one as well, but I will go back and ask some questions on outcome 1 and the budget allocations, which is: why did the government allocate \$25 million over three fiscal years to Alberta advantage immigration given the magnitude of the labour market? We can see that there is an increase in immigration, there is an increase in number, but in terms of the allocations that are put in place, it seems to be the same as what it was previously in terms of: how do you do the labour attachment, how do you address the gaps that we see in terms of unemployment rates among immigrants?

Also, on page 75 of the business plan, with \$7.8 million allocated over three fiscal years for grants supporting labour market attachment, is the government truly committed to assisting newcomers integrating into Alberta's labour market? Does the funding reflect the urgency of the integration challenges faced by immigrants, particularly accessing employment?

One more question that I would like to go back and ask is: which initiatives are currently being funded to support mentoring and

labour attachment and other labour market integration programs for immigrants and newcomers? Is there any research and evaluations that have been done by the department to provide in terms of better understanding of the department's performance on these, mentorship and labour attachment? What measures are in place to ensure the efficiency and accessibility of these pathways?

Particularly, I'm interested to see the one on entrepreneurship. There are four pathways, and I haven't heard the minister respond to that. There are only five certificates out of 10,000. In terms of, like, entrepreneurial building in the province and how this program is contributing, is there any evaluation done on that and why such a low attraction when it comes to entrepreneurial streams within that? Could you elaborate if there was any research or evaluation being done to assess efficiency funding on the labour market?

Finally, my final question is that on your performance, when it comes to grants, the minister is not measuring the impact but instead how much money is given out. I don't know if the average amount of money given out gives Albertans a better understanding that these dollars are making an impact. I wanted to see the change that is happening, especially around antiracism, the change that is happening in attitudes, the change that is happening within the society, and how much these resources are contributing to that.

Thank you.

The Chair: Right to the wire. Well done.

Minister, over to you.

Mr. Yaseen: Yeah. Thank you. Thank you very much for your comments and questions and observations. I appreciate your comments with respect to diversity. This is diversity in practice on this side. Thank you for that.

Your question with respect to total measures of newcomers supported, can the minister explain what measures are in place: I would like to start off by addressing that. The total number of newcomers supported by Alberta's settlement and integration programs, or ASIP: this measure demonstrates the number of individuals the ministry's Alberta settlement and integration program has impacted through the provision of settlement and language services to support newcomer integration, including into Alberta's labour market. These are individual newcomers whose needs would not have been met otherwise. The services provided under the program complement different federal government services and responded to emerging issues and addressed gaps in the system of supports for newcomers.

In 2022-23 a total of 16,279 newcomers were supported through these streams of services funded by supports for newcomers integration grants under the Alberta settlement and integration programs umbrella; 1,006 newcomers were provided English as an additional language, or EAL, drop-in services; 4,307 newcomers were provided language assessment and referral services; 9,794 newcomers with settlement and community support services.

This total exceeded expectations for the program as extraordinary accommodations were made by service providers to support Ukrainian evacuees in the province. Targets for the next three years are set at 16,000 newcomers supported each year and are based on historical results and programs, including program funding levels. In setting the targets, consideration was also given to the continued extension of the program supports to Ukrainian evacuees and anticipated increases in the number of immigrants to Alberta.

Our government plays a key role in helping newcomers settle, and we agree that language learning is crucial. This is why our Alberta settlement and integration program includes settlement and language assessment supports and English language services. In

2022-23 we provided almost \$9.5 million to support agency settlement and language services. We continue to collaborate with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada in funding immigrant settlement agencies.

We also agree qualification recognition is important. Our fairness for newcomers act was designed to help newcomers fully participate in Alberta's labour market using the skills and education earned elsewhere. The act helps improve the fairness and timeliness of international qualification recognitions by professional regulatory organizations.

In 2022-23 almost \$2 million was spent to help build communities' respective capacities and their readiness to welcome, attract, settle, and retain newcomers. The eight projects have two years to complete. Each community has identified specific activities to support employers, organizations, and community members in welcoming, settling, and retaining newcomers. This, in turn, will help newcomers and their families to find meaningful ways to connect and be retained in the communities.

One of the projects is to educate employers and enhance service provider knowledge to create a welcoming and inclusive community where the voices of everyone are heard, valued, and understood. Employers, service providers, ethnocultural organizations, and all community members have a role in filling labour gaps, stimulating the economy. Activities include hosting employer engagement sessions, developing an integration road map, and employer retention and cultural integration guides on building and networking with different organizations.

10:10

With respect to the two-year retention rate, five-year individual, and indication why they're falling down, just to get into that comment of yours, this indicator demonstrates Alberta's ability to retain immigrants in the province five years after they first arrive. This is important because when we attract international talent to Alberta's labour force, we want to build on that growth so that our economy can continue to develop and grow. Many factors influence where a person chooses to live and work, including their ability to find work in their chosen professions, feeling welcomed by inclusive communities where diversity is respected and valued and where they are free from barriers to achieving their full economic and social potential.

Alberta maintained a retention rate around 90 per cent for immigrants that landed in our province between 2011 and 2013. This means that between 2016 and 2018 less than 10 per cent of those same immigrants had left our province. Since then retention rates have fallen to 84.5 per cent for immigrants that landed in Alberta in 2015, which means that by 2020 almost 16 per cent of immigrants that arrived in Alberta in 2015 had left the province. While the ministry's work contributes to the results for this performance indicator, we know that these results are also influenced by other factors as well. For example, in 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic had significant influence on people's decision about where they worked and they lived. Today inflation and affordability issues are also impacting these decisions and will doubtlessly influence future results for this indicator as well.

Immigration and Multiculturalism will continue to provide services and supports to ensure we are attracting international talent that matches our labour force needs and to help them settle and integrate into diverse and welcoming communities across Alberta to help ensure they stay in our province. Retention is higher than 2015 to 2019.

I can pass on the question regarding the entrepreneurial stream to our deputy minister.

Mr. Ufodike: Thank you. Just a quick clarification on the process related to the entrepreneurial stream. There's a one-year lag typically before those applicants translate to certificates. They need to operate their businesses for a year before they can, you know, be considered for a certificate. So there are, I believe, 70 people currently in the entrepreneurial stream program that have been invited to submit a business plan and 12 foreign graduates. So 82 in total, but they need to operate their businesses for a year before they translate to nomination certificates.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you.

I think we have answered the questions.

The Chair: That's very generous of you. You gave back an extra 16 seconds.

Back to the members opposite, who would like to speak?

Member Tejada: Yeah. I can.

The Chair: Sure. MLA Tejada.

Member Tejada: What's that? You can. Sure.

Mr. Haji: Okay. Well, thank you, Minister and Deputy Minister, for the clarifications.

On the Alberta opportunity stream there is a fee increase on the qualification assessment, and the Alberta advantage immigration fees have gone up. My first question will be: how much of these are going back into the labour integration? Given that this is revenue coming through the AAIP as well as the qualification assessment, are these resources going back into labour integration as well as mentorship programs that will address it? If that is the case, how much will that be based on your outlook for the 2024 budget?

The Chair: I guess we'll go back to the minister. Is that what you're trying to do? Okay.

Minister, with 10 seconds. And time's up. The minister is good – I know he's got a reputation – but I don't know who's that good.

With that, we'll go over to government caucus time. There are 20 minutes. Again, the member or whoever may be speaking to the minister have to agree on whether it's blocked or combined, and no more than 10 minutes at a time. With that, I recognize MLA Dyck.

Mr. Dyck: Excellent. Thank you very much, Chair. Minister and staff, thank you so very much for being here today. I really just appreciate your time. I know there are a lot of questions coming your way. I just really appreciate you being able to bring clarity to this really important file. It's close to my heart. I have several friends who have immigrated here. I just really think the world of them. I think what you're doing is super important, so thank you for that.

I guess I should ask the minister if he wants to do block time or back and forth. What would you prefer?

Mr. Yaseen: Considering, I think we'll go block time.

Mr. Dyck: We're going to go block time. Well, I'm going to throw so many questions at you, then. I've got a question here just on credential recognition. One of the biggest challenges many of our newcomers experience is that once they get to Canada and then once they get to Alberta, it's difficult to secure employment if they don't have their credentials recognized. I think it's so important what we're doing. You know, they have so much education when they are in a skilled workforce. They have an opportunity to come be part of the Alberta advantage. They have opportunity to continue thriving. That's what Alberta is about, the Alberta advantage. One

of the challenges here is just having their prior education, their skills and credentials, recognized by both employers and regulatory bodies. There are two parts there.

As I see in the key objective in 1.2 in the business plan, your ministry is tasked with the responsibility of recognizing international credentials. I think this is super important. I see this as a huge step forward for Albertans, and I think we've done really good work. My questions on this one are: what steps has the Alberta government taken to facilitate the recognition of foreign credentials? I know we've done a bunch, but I would love some clarity on just what we have done. As well, what resources and supports are available to newcomers navigating this process of credentialing recognition in Alberta?

You know, we've had so many people move here. My heart goes out to the Ukrainians who have had to step in, who maybe weren't planning on coming here. But they're here. Many of them are thriving. In my constituency I have one guy who has worked as a major crane operator in Ukraine, the giant ones in buildings, and he's building swamp mats. To me that's a huge recognition that we need to continue to work on.

What kind of supports are available for newcomers as they step in as well? What can the government do to highlight issues around foreign credential recognition for both employers and regulatory bodies?

A slightly different topic as well – I'm going to speed up because I think I'm going too slow; otherwise, I'm not going to get through all my questions. Outcome 1 in your business plan is about attracting skilled labour to Alberta. On page 76 of the business plan performance indicator 1(c) is "Alberta's percentage share of the total number of permanent residents in Canada." Why was the percentage contribution of landed immigrants to Alberta's labour force so high in 2021 compared to other years? Can you outline the initiatives undertaken by your ministry to attract skilled newcomers to the province? I think this is so key as well. We have major projects coming who have committed to us, and I think that this is going to be a huge way to fill that gap.

Are there any professions or skills that the government is specifically targeting here in Alberta?

10:20

Another slightly different topic: labour market gaps. On page 75 of the business plan key objective 1.2 continues to state that you will "work with partner ministries to address Alberta's labour market gaps, including through the recognition of international credentials and supports for the retention of international talent." Super key. On the same page the business plan directs that the ministry "work with Advanced Education on increasing and accelerating autocredentialing for workers from national and international jurisdictions with similar standards." This is super key for me. I've got a private member's bill on the table in the House right now. It's going to hit third reading this next week. This one's really near and dear to my heart.

How does your ministry work with other ministries to address Alberta's labour market gaps and create ministry-specific immigration streams in Alberta? What work, analysis, and investigation goes into collaborating with these ministries to identify that a specific immigration stream is the best solution? How does the international qualifications assessment service fit into this work? That's a very interesting one to me. Then how will a dedicated immigration stream help increase the number of workers in specific sectors as well?

As well, just a follow-up on the last question, still referencing autocredentialing in Advanced Education. For all the tens of millions watching right now, what exactly is autocredentialing?

How is your ministry working with Advanced Education on increasing and accelerating autocredentialing for international workers?

Now, just continuing on another question. We saw in 2021 that Alberta saw a huge surge of growth in the labour force corresponding with a large surge in landed immigrants joining the workforce. What factors led to the sudden surge specifically around landed newcomers who contributed 123 per cent of the total growth? Just a huge increase.

I've got four minutes left. Can I cede my time over to Member Cyr as well?

The Chair: Yeah. You sure can.

MLA Cyr.

Mr. Cyr: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the minister for being here. You know, whenever it comes to our immigration within Canada, we all are immigrants in some way, shape, or form except for our First Nations, sir. This is clearly something that is important to all of us.

I am hearing some concerns specifically about some of the federal policy that has been brought forward. Outcome 1, the growth of Alberta's labour force, a key contributor to economic growth, is dependent on the province's ability to attract and retain international talent. In January of this year the federal government announced a decrease in the number of new international student permits in 2024. Given that many international students who come to Canada may decide to stay here either as a permanent resident or seek citizenship, has your department anticipated any impacts to Alberta's immigration numbers as a result of this policy? Has your ministry worked with the Ministry of Advanced Education in this issue? Do you foresee any changes to the Alberta nomination allocation amounts as a result of this policy?

Where this is important is my constituency up in Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul. We've got a very strong foreign student program up at Portage College, and it would be nice to ensure that we still have the foreign students coming in. I will tell you that while some of our province is struggling with excess employment issues, we are pretty much fully employed in my constituency. Bringing up workers in every way possible is something that's especially important. We have the Cold Lake Air Force base that's going to be bringing in – they're anticipating up to about \$10 billion over the next 10 years for those F-35s. We have the Pathways Alliance up in my area. That one there is the carbon capture project, sir.

I'm going to say that bringing in these foreign students, especially in my area, is going to be critical for us to be able to succeed, which is why ensuring that my local college, if it is going to be impacted by the reduction in foreign students being allocated – now, that doesn't mean that I'm looking to replace my local students. Clearly, we want to make sure there are enough spaces for all of the rural youth that are trying to get in through the programs. What I am saying is that we're going to have a massive labour issue when it comes to up in my area, from trades to professionals in every way possible. I look forward to seeing this, but it needs to be managed correctly.

I see a real opportunity, especially with the strong Ukrainian community within my constituency. Also, with the Ukrainians coming in from abroad that I've heard are highly qualified, sir, in a lot of areas, putting them to work in the areas that they're trained in is all that much more important, especially when I'm getting close to zero per cent employment rates. Minister, I'm just curious on how you've been dealing with that, and I would appreciate any input that you've got in that because your advocacy for our foreign

students through your immigration file is widely known. I thank you for that, sir. I know that I myself value it, and I know that Albertans value it.

Thank you.

The Chair: Over to you, Minister.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you very much, MLA Dyck and also MLA Cyr. I'll go back to your questions first. I really appreciate your interest in foreign qualification recognition and your dedication and commitment towards that. I am thankful to you for that. You asked a bunch of questions; I will go in that same series in terms of answering those questions back to you.

So the first question: what steps has the Alberta government taken to facilitate foreign credential recognition? I'll just start from that and go on to your second and third questions. International qualifications assessment service, otherwise known as IQAS, helps people get recognition for education and training they received outside of Canada. IQAS issues certificates that compare educational credentials from other countries with the educational standards in Alberta. This helps newcomers put their skills to work quicker, which in turn helps strengthen and grow Alberta's economy. IQAS also supports employers, professional regulatory organizations, and postsecondary institutions in making informed, fair, and consistent qualification recognition decisions. Immigration and Multiculturalism has its mandate to work with the Ministry of Advanced Education on increasing and accelerating autocredentialing for workers from national and international jurisdictions with similar standards.

With respect to your question 2, the opportunity, the Alberta immigration website has up-to-date information about foreign qualification recognition for internationally trained individuals, including a step-by-step process on how to become licensed and work in regulated professions. Advanced Education is leading the crossgovernment work on credential recognition and increasing and accelerating autocredentialing for workers. My ministry has participated in a round-table hosted by Advanced Education recently with various health regulatory bodies to discuss the definition of autocredentialing and its implementation within the professional regulatory organizations, registration, and assessment pathways.

Advanced Education's plan is to have round-table discussions with other professional regulatory organizations to gather information from multiple sectors before determining next steps in achieving this mandate item. These round-tables are important opportunities to highlight issues related to foreign credential recognition. By having these discussions with regulatory bodies, it may help to reduce administrative burdens on applicants by streamlining assessment processes for all individuals domestically and internationally trained.

10:30

With respect I will now go to your question 2. In 2021 Alberta's labour force increased by a total of 53,200 participants, off-setting much of the losses from 2020. Landed immigrants contributed 123 per cent of Alberta's labour force growth that year. This was due to the easing of border restrictions and solutions to support immigration and cross-border mobility for newcomers and refugees. Landed immigrants admitted in 2021 played a key role in supporting economic recovery during the pandemic, filling critical labour gaps in the essential services sectors. Over the same period the number of participants born in Canada, Canadian citizens born abroad, and nonpermanent residents in the province's labour force continued to decrease.

Since 2020 Alberta has created many new immigration streams and pathways to increase opportunities for skilled in-demand workers to further strengthen Alberta's economy. We have maximized our annual nomination allocations except in the year 2020, when we issued 4,000 nominations of the 6,250 because of the global pandemic at that time. We issued nominations across all sectors of the provincial economy and a vast range of occupations.

Budget 2024 allocates \$25.3 million in funding over three years for the Alberta advantage immigration program to attract skilled workers from around the globe to support provincial labour market needs. Immigration and Multiculturalism engages with partners in Alberta and internationally to promote Alberta as a place to live and work and provides information for workers interested in moving to Alberta as well as highlights key immigration programs such as Alberta advantage immigration program. Immigration and Multiculturalism also works with Alberta's international offices to support Alberta's international presence with a key focus on talent attraction.

Your last question was about AAIP. I can say that the AAIP is currently expected to prioritize and process applications received in the accelerated tech pathways, dedicated health care pathways, tourism and hospitality stream, and the rural renewal stream. In addition, the AAIP draws through its express entry streams, targeting occupations in the construction, agriculture, and tourism and hospitality industries. Draws in these streams are also conducted based on those with close family relatives in the province and whose occupations are in demand based on Alberta's occupational outlook and short-term employment forecast resources.

Question 3. The ministry works closely with ministries to address Alberta's labour market gaps – the question was about labour market gaps – including creating specialized immigration streams. For example, we are working with the Ministry of Advanced Education on increasing and accelerating autocredentialing for workers from national and international jurisdictions with similar standards. We continue to work with the Minister of Health to streamline the immigration process to support health care and staffing challenges, particularly in rural areas. My ministry also led work with Tourism and Sport to establish a dedicated tourism and hospitality immigration stream in Alberta recently. The new tourism and hospitality stream, announced on February 13, 2024, and implemented on March 1, 2024, will help attract and retain the experienced workers, providing stability for business to focus on growing the visitor economy throughout the province.

With respect to your question "What exactly is autocredentialing?" autocredentialing aims to enable regulatory bodies to review their registration and assessment practices, identifying areas for process improvements. This includes reducing the administrative burden on applicants by streamlining assessment processes for all individuals domestically and internationally trained. Newcomers who want to work in jobs that require a licence or certificate must have their international skills, education, and work experience recognized.

Going towards MLA Cyr's, immigration and multicultural – the question was around the federal government and involvement with AAIP and how we work together and international students that have recently made headlines in the media as well. The federal government has recently introduced a cap on international students to address . . .

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt, but we have reached the halfway mark, so as promised at the front end, we do get a five-minute break. The shot clock will still continue to run. Five minutes is it; if you're not here, we're going to start without you. With that, see you in five.

[The committee adjourned from 10:36 a.m. to 10:41 a.m.]

The Chair: Thank you, folks. Welcome back.

Now we're into the rapid-fire round, as it's been called so nicely here. This section is a little bit different. You can't cede your time. It is 10 minutes. You still have to ask whether it's combined or back and forth – shared time, I should say, or block time, and you can only speak five minutes at length and duration.

With that, over to the government opposition.

Member Tejada: I will start.

The Chair: Please proceed.

Member Tejada: Thank you. To the minister: would you like to do combined or block?

Mr. Yaseen: We'll do block.

Member Tejada: Okay. Thank you.

Just circling back to a couple of the questions, I know we spent quite a bit of time on the antiracism council. I appreciated the detail that we got there. Is the ministry able to provide any more detail on what entities have been engaged in terms of the antiracism council? I don't see any mention of that in the budget, but it would be great even if you can give me an indication of where to find that information. That would be wonderful.

Another part of the antiracism council's recommendations was to adequately fund the Alberta Hate Crimes Committee. I don't believe I heard any detail on that unless I – there were a lot of answers there, but just wondering if we have some transparency on how much we're spending on the Alberta Hate Crimes Committee, if we have information on the ongoing work for the Hate Crimes Committee, and if it will continue to address sort of the evolving issues around discrimination that we're seeing in the province.

Again, returning to the question around, specifically, supports for newcomers who are 2SLGBTQIA, of which we're seeing a great number end up in homeless shelters, from what I'm hearing from stakeholders. Given the rise in hate crimes and that influx of immigrants that's specifically in this segment of the population, what measures is the ministry taking to address those needs on an ongoing basis?

Again, just returning to that performance indicator 2(c) on page 77 of the business plan, where we've included race, colour, ancestry, origin, and religious beliefs under what we're measuring for discrimination in terms of complaints, I'm wondering if at some point we're going to expand that metric to include the gender-diverse community.

Just to explore some other questions here, I'm just wondering: how is the government monitoring the effectiveness of the ethnocultural grant program? This is still under outcome 2 in terms of supporting ethnocultural events and activities and building capacity for these organizations. Considering the targets that are set out for the average amount of funding provided per recipient, what measures are being taken to ensure that they actually are building capacity? Is that something that we're monitoring?

Another question around the antiracism grant program. In terms of advancing antiracism initiatives and building organizational capacity, how are we making sure that that is happening? Are we going to be providing metrics in, let's say, next year's business plan? Given the relatively modest average funding per recipient what does continued support look like, and what does support outside of the grant look like for this ministry, for those organizations?

From here I would like to cede my – we're not able to cede time? Okay. I'll go back to some of my other questions.

The Chair: It's up to you. Just giving you options, Member: you can continue talking, give it back to the minister. He can only speak for five, and then it would come back to you, but up to you.

Member Tejada: I have a few more questions.

The Chair: Just keep running and gunning, then. That's probably the best.

Member Tejada: Okay. Again, just revisiting the issue of, like, the Indigenous segment of the antiracism piece of the multicultural ministry. In terms of the road map that was created by government and referenced in the strategic plan, can you inform us on how the road map is being used and referenced for the work that you're doing?

Let's see. There are some other questions in here that I wanted to revisit. All right. Sorry. Oh, this was around the grants, actually. With the introduction of two intakes per year starting in '24-25 – this is around the ethnocultural grants – how does the government plan to ensure timely and efficient processing of the grant applications? What steps are being taken to streamline the application process and reduce administrative burden?

The Chair: Minister, back to you for five minutes.

Mr. Yaseen: Well, thank you very much for your questions and observations. With respect to antiracism initiatives, your first comment and question, Alberta's government condemns racism and is committed to promoting and fostering respect and inclusion for all. All Albertans regardless of religion or background enrich our province and contribute to its vibrancy, economy, strength, and overall success. Alberta's government is committed to working closely with communities in preventing and combatting racism.

Immigration and Multiculturalism leads several initiatives to address systemic barriers and challenges faced by racially marginalized and Indigenous people. The Alberta Anti-Racism Advisory Council provides advice on efforts to combat racism and promote more inclusive and accepting communities across Alberta, co-ordinating crossministry efforts through Alberta's antiracism action plan, providing funding for community organizations to undertake antiracism education and capacity-building initiatives through the antiracism grant program, establishing the new Alberta Black Advisory Council to consider the unique needs and challenges of Alberta's Black community.

Antiracism education and initiatives help to promote welcoming communities where people want to work and live and to enable labour market attractions, especially to sectors where there are labour shortages. As Alberta's population grows more diverse, becomes more diverse, it is important to educate all Albertans on the effects of racism such as lost economic potential and greater reliance on social services. Immigration and Multiculturalism's various councils provide a connecting point of community leaders to provide recommendations on various programs and policies. They also provide a diversity of viewpoints when considering legislation.

10:50

The Ministry of Advanced Education has engaged with the Alberta Anti-Racism Advisory Council and the Premier's council on multiculturalism in developing curriculum. The Ministry of Arts, Culture and Status of Women will be engaging with the Alberta Anti-Racism Advisory Council, the Premier's council on multiculturalism, and the Alberta Black Advisory Council on the 10-year strategy on gender-based violence in 2024.

You had a question with respect to hate crimes. I would share with you that that particular matter resides in the Ministry of Justice. We have worked very closely, as I mentioned before, with other ministries. In this particular case we have worked with the Ministry of Justice, and I would refer you to that.

With respect to a question regarding grants and performance metrics, Alberta Immigration and Multiculturalism's grant programs help to support grassroots community initiatives and encourage partnership to build capacity. Last year our multiculturalism and antiracism grant program provided \$3.63 million to 130 community organizations to increase cross-cultural awareness and to promote understanding of and help address racism. Each grant recipient provides a final report which provides information on which grant program objectives and outcomes have been achieved in each of their programming.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Over to the government caucus. I guess the best way to describe the time at the end – the clerk just corrected me – is use it or lose it. So whether it's in the block, it gets tacked on to the end, but it'll have to be chewed up between the block.

Which member wants to go? MLA Yao, over to you, sir.

Mr. Yao: Thank you so much. And through the chair to the minister, thank you so much for all of your hard work and your entire team as you help promote, you know, Alberta's multiculturalism. It's what adds to our strength.

Good Minister, what is your preference? Would you prefer to do block time or a back-and-forth conversation?

Mr. Yaseen: We can have back and forth with you.

Mr. Yao: Well, thank you so much, Minister. I greatly, greatly appreciate that.

My first question deals with the business plan and key objective 1.1, which directs that the ministry continue to work to streamline immigration processes to support health care staffing challenges, particularly in rural areas.

First off, you have just such an interesting job, portfolio, working with several of the other ministries to achieve these goals. The Alberta labour market is experiencing a growing demand for health care workers, as you know, particularly in rural areas. It's not just Alberta. This is a nation-wide endeavour that we're attempting to overcome.

The disparity in health care workforce distribution between urban and rural regions has created a pressing need for skilled professionals in underserved communities. With a higher concentration of health care facilities in urban centres rural Alberta faces challenges in accessing essential medical services. Recruiting and retaining health care workers in these areas is crucial to ensure equitable health care delivery across the province. Now, I do know that our government is doing things like expanding the medicine programs, as an example, so that they're teaching doctors now in Lethbridge and Grande Prairie. We certainly hope that will expand to other areas like Fort McMurray, as an example.

A big part of how here in Canada we try to achieve our goals of getting health care workers is that we are going international. I understand that you might have been doing some good work on some other nations, possibly the Philippines, possibly India, as a couple of examples of some of the places we are trying to bring in good staff from. We seem to have problems maintaining or retaining the current staff we have, so we'll pillage the other nations of the world to get these good health care workers. South Africa has been dealing with it for years as we take their doctors.

But my question is: what is the minister doing to streamline immigration processes to support health care staffing challenges, and how are these challenges being addressed for rural areas?

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you very much, Member Yao, for your question and for your concern and for your dedication to ensure that the health care shortage that we have in rural Alberta needs to be mitigated, and we are doing our best to do that. We continue to help address health care staffing challenges through the dedicated health care pathway, that was announced in April 2023, under the Alberta express entry stream. We have nominated over 200 health care professionals through this pathway since its inception, with many destined for rural areas. So, yes.

Mr. Yao: Thank you so much for that. You mentioned that there've been 200; that's fantastic success, and those are much-needed medical professionals that we're getting. Just to clarify, are those 200 mostly settling in rural areas? Do we have the statistics for that, or is it more of an urban choice for these folks?

Mr. Yaseen: Forty-seven point five per cent of the pathway nominees in 2023 were destined for or connected to jobs located outside of Calgary and Edmonton.

Mr. Yao: That's fantastic, and it's great to see that your ministry is really ensuring that the rural communities have access to these very much needed professionals. As you know – oh, go ahead, please.

Mr. Yaseen: And 42 per cent, or eight out of 19, of the general practitioners, family physicians, are destined or connected to jobs located outside of Calgary and Edmonton.

Mr. Yao: Rural Alberta thanks you, sir. As you know, the rural communities have a harder time attracting people to live and work in their communities as they don't tend to have the amenities that a magnificent city like Calgary or Edmonton has, right? That's so fantastic that you've been able to get a lot of these folks to go out to those rural communities.

On page 17 of the government's strategic plan, it states that as a way to address the province's critical nursing shortage, the government is working to make "it easier for credentialed nurses from outside of Alberta/Canada to bring their skills to Alberta." Again, I'm wondering if you can explain for everyone: just how is your ministry working with the Ministry of Health to attract these internationally educated nurses? And how will you work to streamline the immigration process for these health care professionals?

As you know, we desperately need nurses. My own mother was a nurse that came from Japan. She got her training at Columbia University in the United States after World War II, before moving to Canada with my father. Back then, you know, everywhere in the world needed everything, so I mean it was a bit of a different story. And, again, we've always relied internationally to grow Canada's population as well as get our professionals that we desperately needed.

So, again, my question to you is: how are you working with the Ministry of Health to attract internationally educated nurses, and is there any work that you can do to streamline the process for these people?

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you for your questions. As I mentioned before, we continue to help address health care staffing challenges through the dedicated health care pathway, that was announced in April 2023, under the Alberta express entry stream. The purpose of a pathway is to expedite the processing time for those workers under

that particular stream. We created a couple of pathways. Health care is one of those two pathways. We are also exploring adding options for nomination outside the stream to maximize access to nominations for health care professionals in demand who may not be able to meet all express entry criteria but are authorized to practise their professions in our province.

11:00

With respect to your other question regarding immigration processes, our immigration processes are being streamlined through the dedicated health care pathways whereby nominations are processed within two weeks of receiving a complete application, and federal processing times to express entry have been reduced to six months.

Mr. Yao: Wow. That is absolutely fantastic work, Minister. That's greatly appreciated. You are working above and beyond to ensure that our health care capacity in our province is able to cope with the demand that we currently have in our province. Again, so many people in Alberta lack the ability to have a family physician right now. We need nurses as well, which you've been addressing and identifying. So that's just fantastic work. It's so important.

I wonder if we could just expand a little bit more into the newcomer supports that your ministry makes available to all these new Canadians. In the business plan, performance measure 1(b), we track the total number of newcomers supported by the Alberta settlement and integration program, also known as ASIP. In addition, as per performance metric 1(b), the Alberta government fund supports for newcomer integration and settlement, and settlement integration and language project grants – my goodness. Sorry. I stumbled over that. Let me reread that.

Alberta government funds supports for newcomer integration, also known as the SNI, and settlement integration and language project, also known as SILP, grants to provide settlement and language supports and services for newcomers while they live and work in Alberta, ensuring newcomers have the appropriate supports to reach their economic potential.

First off, I think it's absolutely fantastic that our government provides so much to support newcomers. One would argue that these are a lot in the federal jurisdiction to provide these supports. Certainly, in Fort McMurray I know a lot of the funding for some of these immigration services that support language and everything does come federally, but I'm really happy to see that we have some stuff provincially. [A timer sounded]

Aw. I didn't ask my question.

The Chair: Unlike QP prep, we don't restart the clock.

Over to the members from the opposition.

Mr. Haji: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll follow up on the question that I earlier asked that the minister didn't get a chance to respond to before the break. In the government estimates, page 121, line item 1.1 and 1.3 and 3.1, I see a huge funding cut to the minister's office, corporate services, and multiculturalism and community supports. Through the chair, there is a massive backlog of application in the AAIP process. The website demonstrates that the department is still processing the September 2023 applications, and the AAIP applications: some of the streams have been paused.

One that comes to my mind is the Alberta opportunity stream, which has had some sort of anxiety and concerns within some communities, particularly the Ukrainian evacuees that reached out to my office, some who live in Calgary-Foothills, some who live in Calgary-Currie, some who live in my riding. This was the only stream that would have enabled them for a pathway for permanent residency, specifically those who have imminent passport and visa

expiry, because the emergency visas that they have are a three-year, and if your passport is expiring within one year, then that is irrelevant. So you have to get a renewal of a passport. They don't get their passport through an embassy; you have to fly back to Ukraine, which is impossible. So there have been some concerns and outcry within the Ukrainian evacuees, particularly those who are in Calgary. There is also talk of what some of the options are for them in terms of whether it is going to Ireland or whether it's going to other places when we need people here and particularly, as MLA Cyr was indicating, when you have quite a number of skilled workers within that particular population. So this stream has been paused, and it's causing some concern.

Back to the question. The AAIP application paused due to these many newcomers, the majority of whom have Canadian experience in education, are risking their careers and losing their status, and businesses are losing their skilled workers as well. My question to the minister, through the chair, is whether this funding cut would impact this process and would lead to further delays down the line.

What is the AAIP application process timeline, and how are you supporting it? How much money will the ministry receive from the additional fees of almost \$400 per application? Will the ministry use this money to fund the programs to expedite the processes to clear the backlogs, or will it go back to the general revenue, which potentially becomes a different discussion of where the funding will be allocated?

In the same question on the AAIP is the dedicated health care pathways. Again, I'm just looking into what is available to me on the website, which is up to October 23. There have been only 75 certificates. There may have been others after, but I don't know, and that's why I ask the question. Again, to the question of MLA Yao: how are you addressing the rural needs if the only certificates that you have issued are a smaller percentage? It's even less than 1 per cent of the total certificates that have been given out in 2023 out of the 10,000 certificates. So my question is: how are you addressing that?

Then also the same applies to the fee increases. There is a significant amount of revenue that is generated from there, and I'm just wondering: how will that feed back into the program to bolster the need that we have, whether it is skilled or general immigration support?

The Chair: Thank you.

Over to the minister. Five minutes, sir.

Mr. Yaseen: Well, thank you. Thank you very much for your questions. With respect to the reduction in 1.3 I can say this to you: it was based on transferring corporate services for trade to JET, that reduction, Jobs, Economy and Trade. For 1.2, new structure to recognize a smaller ministry after transferring trade. This ministry used to be called trade, multiculturalism, and immigration; we have taken trade away. These changes are with respect to that. Net increase was \$2.1 million, 5.3 per cent, year over year. This \$6.4 million increase was off-set by \$4.3 million in one-time funding for Ukraine evacuees in 2023-2024.

11:10

The main reason for \$2.1 million increase in 2024-2025 is \$2.4 million additional resources required for the Alberta advantage immigration program due to increased number of nominees, applications, and program complexity, new streams and pathways, including establishing an antifraud unit; \$1.5 million relates to the international qualification assessment service fee increases needed to align with rising program costs and fees charged by the other jurisdictions. The fee increases that we have are just literally to

cover the cost of the program, so \$2.5 million additional funding towards the labour market attachment initiatives to assist newcomers in integrating into the province's labour market; 100 per cent of AAIP fee increase is going towards labour market attachment.

With respect to dedicated pathways, how are we addressing rural needs? We work with AHS. Only those with job licences are nominated, so they can work right away. You know, the way the immigration program works: people have to be qualified to be able to work. We are working with AHS and the Ministry of Health to meet those needs.

The question has been generally, your earlier question with respect to fee increases, whether it was AAIP or international qualification program, IQAS. IQAS fees were adjusted because last time they were adjusted, it was sometime in the mid-90s. As costs have gone up, when we provide services, the fees go up. Same goes with respect to Alberta advantage immigration programs. With these increases that we have, we are still very competitive on comparable jurisdictions. Our fees are not the highest in Canada or anything like that.

Number of nominated in health care with respect to nurses: number of nurses nominated in 2022 was 22, and in 2023 was 168, or 700 per cent increase. They largely came from Jamaica, Philippines, India, and Nigeria and were added to a substantial agreement equivalency. Number of doctors nominated in 2022 was 29. In 2023 it was 42 per cent or 30 per cent increase. We are doing to the best of our resources and our abilities to maintain and manage all the needs.

The Chair: With that, back to the government caucus side. MLA de Jonge.

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Chair, and thank you through the chair to the minister. I hope you're able to hear me all right. My voice isn't able to carry like it was a few days ago. Minister, do you want to have a dialogue, or do you want block time?

Mr. Yaseen: We can have back and forth.

Ms de Jonge: Okay. Thank you very much.

Minister, as you know, I'm proud to represent the constituency of Chestermere-Strathmore, which is comprised of many small and rural communities as well as one of the fastest growing cities in all of Canada, and that is Chestermere, which many newcomers to Canada and specifically to Alberta are choosing to call home. I see outcome 1 on page 75 of your ministry's business plan speaks to attracting and supporting international talent to strengthen and grow Alberta's economy.

Immigration is almost entirely at the control of the federal government, and provinces certainly work collaboratively with them, but the rate of immigration approvals and safety and security are decided on at the federal level. Through the chair, Minister, can you explain how closely you do work with your federal counterparts to ensure that Alberta remains an active participant in Canadian immigration while also maintaining our province's immigration priorities around enabling an inclusive multicultural society that embraces Alberta's diverse communities and attracts and supports immigrants to strengthen and grow Alberta's economy?

I'll just add on to that a couple of questions if you're able to address them together. Looking again at outcome 1, I read, "the growth of Alberta's labour force, a key contributor to economic growth, is dependent on the province's ability to attract and retain international talent." What degree of autonomy does Alberta have from the federal government when it comes to promoting Alberta

and attracting newcomers to Alberta? And then, on the Alberta advantage immigration program, which works to attract newcomers to support Alberta's labour force and economic growth by issuing nomination certificates towards permanent residences, I'm wondering how your ministry works with this program to nominate individuals for permanent residency and how objectivity is maintained within this program.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, MLA de Jonge. I'm so happy that you're representing the constituency of Chestermere-Strathmore. Thank you for your questions.

For your first question, "How closely do we work with the federal counterparts?" I can say this to you, that as the Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism I am continually engaging my federal, provincial, and territorial counterparts, promoting a co-ordinated approach to addressing immigration opportunities and challenges based on the principles of shared jurisdictions and respect for both federal and provincial or territorial roles in immigration. In the fall of 2023 my fellow provincial immigration ministers and I met with the federal immigration minister, at which time I expressed Alberta's perspective, including that provinces and territories should have a greater control over immigration and decision-making so regional and newcomer needs can be better addressed via collaboration with local communities, industries, employers, and immigrant-serving organizations. There should be greater provincial and territorial control over settlement program design and delivery with settlement programs well funded by the federal government.

Your question 2 was with regard to the growth of Alberta's labour market force. I would like to say this to you, that immigration is an area of shared jurisdiction among the federal, provincial, and territorial governments. Within this, Alberta has broad policy direction on provincial immigration strategies such as our Alberta advantage immigration strategy and attracting newcomers through our provincial nomination program, the Alberta advantage immigration program, which is very affectionately called AAIP. Under AAIP we created specific immigration pathways to target labour shortages across all sectors of our economy, especially in key areas like health care, construction, technology, and tourism and hospitality as well as rural Alberta focused themes and pathways.

Immigration and Multiculturalism engages with partners, Albertan and internationally, to promote Alberta as a place to live and work; provides information for workers interested in moving to Alberta; as well as highlights key immigration programs such as Alberta advantage immigration program. Immigration and Multiculturalism also works with Alberta's international offices to support Alberta's international presence with a key focus on talent attraction. We focus on priority sectors such as health care, tourism and hospitality, construction, agriculture, and technology.

11:20

I think you asked the last question that was around: Alberta advantage immigration program works to attract newcomers to support Alberta's labour market. Alberta's government continues to grow the economy, address labour gaps, and promote Alberta as Canada's destination for jobs. The AAIP helps strengthen and grow the province's economy by attracting talented, in-demand workers to fill labour gaps as well as entrepreneurs who want to start or grow a business and create jobs for themselves and also for Albertans. There is a limited number of nominations available to the program each year, and that is important. Our nominations have come from the federal government. They are allocated by the federal government, and they are limited. We continue to advocate for an

allocation that meets Alberta's long-term economic immigration interest.

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, through the chair, to the minister. I appreciate your answer and the good work you're doing specifically to tailor programs under your ministry to address some of the needs in Alberta's labour market.

I want to talk a bit more about the AAIP, and I know we've spent some time already discussing this today. I can see on page 75 of the business plan that \$25.3 million is being provided over the next three years towards this program. I'm wondering: what specific elements will this \$25.3 million fund within the AAIP? And, again, does the AAIP fund nominations for all newcomers to Alberta seeking permanent residency, or does it just fund those found through the program's attraction and retention efforts?

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you very much for that question. Alberta advantage immigration program capacity must keep up with the new streams and multiple pathways and increasing demand for AAIP services. Application submissions have been outpacing processing capacity and nomination allocation availability. In addition, our rural renewal stream has 83 municipalities participating, each with unique needs, resulting in increased demands on AAIP resources to provide guidance and in-depth assistance on local labour market, immigration, and AAIP criteria. The funding will assist in adding new resources to expand immigration processing and engagement capacity and strengthen antifraud systems. The AAIP funding supports the evaluation process of all applicants seeking a nomination through the program to apply for permanent residency.

Ms de Jonge: Thank you very much, Minister.

I just want to ask a question about Ukrainian evacuee support. Approximately 370,000 Albertans of Ukrainian descent are here in the province. We're home to the largest population of Ukrainian Canadians in western Canada. Due to this, I understand that a large proportion of Ukrainian evacuees are choosing to settle in Alberta. What specific measures is your ministry implementing to support Ukrainians fleeing the war?

Mr. Yaseen: My ministry has worked . . .

The Chair: Time is up, sir.

Back over to the loyal opposition.

Mr. Haji: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thanks, Minister, for providing the remarks and responses. My first question will be around the key element of your objectives, which is retention. There are two points. One is attraction, which we talked quite a lot about. The second piece is retention, and my concern is that that is where we would be having a problem. Attraction will not make a dent if your retention is not to that level, because we will be losing people to other provinces. A couple of things in terms of retention are that – the deputy minister commented on the retention of new permanent residents, but my concern is more about the retention of skilled workers, and that is where we are falling behind.

The council that you have or committee – I can't remember what the term was for the Black council. One of the things that contributes to retention is enabling an environment that is welcoming, and I think a piece of the strategy around that is creating this antiracism council of Black entrepreneurs, the Black council. Two things. The first question is that, based on the language act of Canada, we need to attract and keep the percentage of francophones up to a certain level, and the majority of francophones come from

Black communities. So my question is: why doesn't the council have a representation of Black francophones?

The second question related to retention is the business of the streams that you have for entrepreneurs. We do know that there are a number of studies done by the banks that speak to the challenges that Black entrepreneurs face when it comes to running businesses, basically around the area of discrimination issues, around access to capital because of discriminatory practices, which – I do understand the ministry has a mandate, strategies to address that because it is a piece of the retention. What is your ministry doing to retain entrepreneurial streams of people of African descent that come with an entrepreneurship background?

The other question that I have is that the ministry invests in newcomer integration and multiculturalism quite significantly in the form of grants. Line 3.1 of newcomer multiculturalism support has gone down from \$9.8 million to \$5.8 million in the government estimates document. When we are increasing immigration, this has gone to a different direction of going down, so why that reduction?

The second question is around newcomer integration which is \$13.2 million, and it's mostly the delivery of programs in the form of grants. My question is that for the past couple of years we have been delivering this program through grants. What is the ministry doing to evaluate if Albertans are getting value for these investments that are done in the form of grants from an outcome perspective?

If you could clarify those three areas of questions. One is related to the francophone inclusion in the council; the second one is related to entrepreneurship, those particularly who are facing challenges and discriminatory practices to thrive in their entrepreneurship dreams; and the third piece is related to the reduction of multiculturalism support grant, which has a reduction of almost 40 per cent, and the \$13 million that we have been investing in these over the past couple of years annually and what the return is on that.

The Chair: For five minutes back to you, Minister.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you very much for your questions. With respect to our recent Black Advisory Council and the composition of it I can share with you that the process we used was a public recruitment process. We advised people who wanted to put their names in for the council. We do our best to make sure that we have a diverse Black advisory committee. We have also a francophone immigration committee with representatives from the francophone community to work together on immigration matters as well. That comment was very good. I think we are fully covered there as well.

11:30

Entrepreneur streams are open for everybody who meets the program criteria. People from all over the world can apply. It's not just people within Alberta but people who come here from anywhere. The entrepreneur stream used to require \$200,000 worth of a business, purchase of a business or opening of a business. We have reduced that from \$200,000 recently, about a year ago, to \$100,000.

Your second question with regard to 3.1 was related to one-time Ukrainian programs in 2023-2024. In fact, in 2024-2025 we have a new \$2 million for ethnocultural grants as well under 3.2.

It's important for us to make sure that our newcomers' needs are met through different means, you know, with respect to funding, with respect to welcoming them, with respect to having their needs met with respect to culture and faith. We do our best to make sure that we connect with them and we are aware of their concerns. We want to keep them here. People move to Alberta. People have been moving to Alberta, if you look at the last year, from across the world

and from within Canada as well now. We are seeing a lot of interest from those who are moving to our province.

The way our Alberta advantage immigration program works: we have allocations set each year by the federal government, and we do our best to keep asking for an increase in those total allocations. As you know, right now in this year we are at just about 10,000 allocations. We have asked for more allocations, and maybe we can work together to collaborate to make sure that we get additional allocations based on the way our economy is moving here and based on the labour shortage that we have in our province.

Since 2019 the retention rate has gone up; 2015 to 2019 was much worse, you know. In the last years, 2020-2021, because of the pandemic we didn't need that many allocations because there was not enough interest at that time. Since then we have asked for more allocations every year. As we speak, we have put in another request for a higher number. It's something that we do to ensure that everybody regardless of their faith, their culture, their background: when they're here, they have to make it through to their full potential. We ensure that everybody reaches their full potential without looking at the factors such as . . .

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

With that, we'll turn over to the government caucus. MLA Wright, you've caught my attention.

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Through you to the minister, would you prefer a back-and-forth conversation, or would you prefer block time? I'm good either way.

Mr. Yaseen: We're good back and forth.

Mr. Wright: I appreciate it, sir.

Again, through you, Mr. Chair, I'm going to revisit perhaps the question that my colleague from Chestermere-Strathmore was trying to get out right at the end with regard to the Ukrainian evacuee support. With approximately 370,000 Albertans of Ukrainian descent Alberta is home to the largest population of Ukrainian Canadians, specifically in western Canada, and due to this I understand a large portion of Ukrainian evacuees have chosen to settle in Alberta. What specific measures are you implementing within your ministry to support Ukrainians fleeing the war, and can you highlight any additional measures provided across our government ministries to support these folks? Is there a pathway for Ukrainian evacuees to seek remaining in Alberta?

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you very much for those very important questions. I can share this with you, that a couple of months back, actually last summer, our doorbell rang, and when I opened up the door, there was a young couple in front of our door. They asked me if we needed our windows cleaned. We had actually just done our windows, but I asked them a little bit more, and you know I discovered that this young couple, probably in their early 30s, had just arrived here about a month and a half before that time.

They were from Ukraine, and they were up and running their own business. They set up a business right after they came here. These are the people who, you know, will do anything to keep going on their own. But we do need to provide help that we need to provide them under these very difficult situations.

My ministry has worked closely with the federal government, business communities, the Ukrainian-Canadian community, and settlement organizations to ensure evacuees have access to information and supports that will help them settle and integrate into our communities.

Our government quickly came together to implement crossministry supports and services to help Ukrainian evacuees arriving in Alberta. Immigration and Multiculturalism itself has prioritized and waived service fees for permanent residency applications through the Alberta advantage immigration program, provided settlement agencies with temporary emergency grants for hotel accommodation for Ukrainian evacuees to meet critical gaps not met by federal programs, developed the Ukrainian evacuee support program to provide funding for language and employment supports and build capacity among service providers to support Ukrainian evacuees in Alberta.

Your second question: Alberta's government continues to support Ukrainians and welcomes evacuees. We continue to monitor the situation and work closely with the Ukrainian-Canadian communities and settlement organizations. In 2022-2023 Alberta provided nearly \$48 million in crossgovernment services, including settlement and language supports, emergency financial and housing assistance, education, as well as health care. Ukrainian evacuees continue to have access to many government supports and services: finding licensed child care, income support, health care, employment, settlement and language supports, school enrolment, child care subsidies, among other things.

Since February 2024 the Alberta advantage immigration program has reimbursed fees for and expedited applications received from Ukrainian nationals across all streams and pathways of the program. These options include federal programs such as express entry and the recently introduced policy to help families affected by the Russian invasion of Ukraine apply for permanent residency and reunite in Canada if they have qualifying Canadian family relatives.

I hope I have answered all of your questions. Yeah. This is an important matter in our ministry, and we are taking it very seriously and doing our best to make sure that we provide all the help that they need, you know, if they want to stay here to be successful Albertans and successful Canadians. We will continue to do our part to meet their needs and facilitate them into the workforce here.

I know many of them: they just want to have their own businesses right away. They're entrepreneurial type of people, and most of them are very educated professionals as well. It's unfortunate that they had to leave their country and the circumstances they're in. Our help and support are available for them.

The share that we receive in our province here of Ukrainians is, you know – they come to Canada, and the federal government gives based on percentage of population or whatever their share, but I understand that a lot of them want to come to . . .

11:40

The Chair: I know you're on a roll. I hesitate to interrupt, but you have chewed up five minutes.

It would go back to the member.

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Minister, through the chair.

It would be amiss for me not to bring up this next topic. This is something that I've heard from a number of my constituents both as consultants but also as new to Canada, recently transitioned to Alberta folks. Immigration fraud is a topic of conversation that gets brought up pretty regularly. With increased demand of skilled workers moving to Alberta, we hear incidents in my constituency both of fraudulent employers and applications taking advantage of immigration opportunities. What is your ministry doing to protect the integrity of our immigration programs here in Alberta? What are the resource requirements for these initiatives? What's been the biggest takeaway you've seen over this first year for this unit, and what will happen if an employer applicant is caught breaking these requirements that really put other folks at a disadvantage?

Mr. Yaseen: Yeah. Thank you for another good question. The AAIP continues to work with other government departments and the federal government to investigate and address fraud. AAIP's existing antifraud tools include employer site visits and verifying through multiple sources job offers and also reference letters – with respect to reference letters, we want to make sure that they are authentic – and working with the other organizations to determine legitimacy of businesses or an immigration representative connected with the application.

While the AAIP already has antifraud mechanisms in place, we are adding extra measures to increase protections and safeguards for immigrants. We are improving fraud detection by adding specialized fraud investigation experts through additional funding provided to the program. New resources will strengthen antifraud systems, develop comprehensive federal systems, and respond to requests for reconsiderations.

The biggest takeaway I expect from new resources focused on antifraud in its first year are to strengthen and quicken the pace of information sharing with applicants and enforcement authorities on outcomes of investigations resulting in confirmed fraud. When the AAIP confirms fraud as misrepresentation, applicants are prohibited from reapplying to the program for up to five years. The AAIP also works closely with the federal government and with Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction and the legal services to determine the extent to which additional legal actions may be taken to hold bad actors accountable for their misconduct.

Mr. Wright: Well, thank you, Minister, for taking those really key steps to making sure that we're protecting our newcomers to Canada and those looking to move to Alberta. I appreciate you taking the time for those answers. [A timer sounded]

The Chair: Right to the wire. Well done, gentlemen.

Over to the members of the opposition.

Member Tejada: I'm going to assume, Minister, that we're still doing block time. Is that correct?

Mr. Yaseen: Yes.

Member Tejada: Okay. Thank you so much.

All right. I'm just going to ask a couple of questions here based on outcome 1, around newcomer populations. Through the chair, why has the number of newcomers supported by the Alberta settlement and integration program decreased from 16,279 in 2022-23 to now 16,000, especially considering the forecasted increase in nominations for the AAIP?

My next question from there is based on the statement of operations. With the decrease in funding allocated to settlement this year, how will this impact the timeline and accessibility of services provided to newcomers? From there, will programs have to make adjustments to prioritize essential services or streamline services? Through the chair, as well, are there sufficient staff members within ASIP to meet the demand for settlement and language services?

Additionally, I'm actually hearing from some of the settlement organizations locally that they're very limited in resources, that they're strained to be able to provide language supports, housing supports, like, even just referrals to other agencies to support just their existing immigrant population and, on top of that, are having to support refugee populations in light of this growing affordability crisis. They're seeing that many of the refugee populations are facing houselessness and just an array of other issues that make them more vulnerable. They aren't actually provided funding to support refugee populations, so I'm wondering, you know, on top of some of the funding I'm sure comes in federally, if the province

will be revisiting funding to these organizations given the strains that they're already facing, if we are due to see an increase or any revisiting of funding in terms of refugee folks in our communities. They still are members of our communities and need support.

The other question is: are there any vacancies or staffing shortages affecting our newcomer program's ability to effectively support newcomers? We are hearing from a lot of nonprofits that, you know, they are also strained in terms of budgets and being able to provide the services necessary to their populations.

My next question is, again, sort of returning to the Anti-Racism Advisory Council. Given that we haven't had any more recommendations or guidance since 2021, how is the government planning to address the evolving challenges faced by our communities? What alternative mechanisms or strategies are being considered to ensure that antiracism initiatives are responsive to new issues that are arising? What measures are being taken to ensure that voices in affected communities are central to the legislative process?

Let's see how much time I have. All right.

Given that we have stagnant targets referred to in the business plan for the average amount of funding provided to organizations through ethnocultural grants over the next three years, can you explain why there hasn't been an increase in funding to meet the growth of need? What steps will the government be taking to support, outside of grants, the organizations and what their needs are? How will they be providing, say, referrals to supports, along those lines?

My next question is in terms of the mandate. I know that the mandate is to collaborate with other ministries, so can the minister provide some transparency around collaboration with key ministries where implementation of the antiracism council's recommendations would have long-lasting implications? Specifically, I'm thinking about collaborations with Indigenous affairs but, especially given the announcement of a rollout of a new social studies curriculum, what the collaboration has been like with the Department of Education.

11:50

The Chair: With that, back over to you, Minister.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Member Tejada, for your questions. With respect to your first question regarding numbers that are slightly down for ASIP: this measure demonstrates the number of individuals that the ministry's Alberta settlement and integration program has impacted through the provision of settlement and language services to support newcomer integration, including to Alberta's labour market. These are individuals, newcomers whose needs would not have been met otherwise. The service providers under the program commitment complement different federal government services, respond to emerging issues, and address gaps in the system of supports for newcomers.

In 2022-23 a total of 16,279 newcomers were supported through three streams of services funded by the supports for newcomers integration grant under the Alberta settlement and integration program umbrella. This total exceeded the expectations for the program as extraordinary accommodations were made by service providers to support our Ukrainian evacuees in the province. The targets for the next three years are set at 16,000 newcomers supported each year and are based on historical results and program funding levels.

With respect to ethnocultural grant programs, this is a new performance measure for the ministry. The ethnocultural grant program was launched in December 2023, so a last actual result is not yet available for the measures. This measure will demonstrate

the average amount of financial resources that small, not-for-profit ethnocultural, Indigenous community, and faith-based organizations were able to successfully access through the ethnocultural grant program. The program is designed to help these small organizations build capacity and obtain the knowledge, expertise, and human resources necessary to enable them to successfully access financial resources to support their work. These financial resources will enable them to deliver ethnocultural events and activities and continue to build their capacity to support the people and communities they represent. There is an increase of \$2 million in 2024-2025 and also 2025-2026 years.

Regarding antiracism grant program, this is a new performance measure for the ministry, again. The antiracism grant program was launched in December 2023, so a last actual result is not yet available for the measures. The program design is to help these very small organizations build capacity and obtain the knowledge, expertise, and human resources necessary to enable them to successfully access financial resources to support their program. These financial resources will enable them to develop existing and expanded initiatives for community partnership, support antiracism projects, and create awareness of the impact of racism faced by racially marginalized and Indigenous people.

With respect to collaboration with other ministries and councils Immigration and Multiculturalism's various councils provide connecting points to community leaders to provide recommendations on various programs and policies. They also provide a diversity of viewpoints when considering legislation. The Ministry of Education has engaged with the Alberta Anti-Racism Advisory Council and Premier's council on multiculturalism in developing curriculum in the social studies. It's an important aspect to continue to ask to work together with ministries.

The Chair: With that, we're over to government caucus. I see MLA Stephan.

Mr. Stephan: Yes. Thank you, Chair. Through you, Chair, to the minister: would he be agreeable to share time for this four and a half minutes?

Mr. Yaseen: Yes, back and forth.

Mr. Stephan: That's wonderful. Thank you, Minister. Maybe just to start out, we had a great experience a couple of weeks ago at Red Deer Polytechnic. The minister came and met with young adults who were pursuing their education from outside of Canada who had come to Red Deer Polytechnic, and for me, Minister, that was such a wonderful meeting, meeting those young men and young women who came to Alberta, such a blessed place, a place of freedom and opportunity.

Minister, just before I begin my questions as well, I remember your maiden speech, when you first became an MLA. I think you're a great example of an individual who came to Alberta, who worked hard, prospered, and succeeded. I appreciate I think your lived experience as you seek to serve those who visit Alberta, and I certainly have a lot of respect for you and any individual or family who comes to Alberta. It's such a great land we're blessed to live in.

Minister, I just want to ask a little bit of a high-level question. Outcome 1 in the business plan states, "The ministry works to address Alberta's labour market needs through strategies to attract, support and retain immigrants to the province." My question is this. In pursuing this outcome – I know that Quebec has more autonomy over their immigration, the execution of what I would expect would be a very similar desired policy – I'm wondering what strengths you

see with having the federal government be more involved in immigration versus Quebec's approach and perhaps some of the opportunities that would be there to further this outcome if we had more autonomy and control over immigration as opposed to having to work with the federal government as much on it. I know Quebec seems to be pursuing their own immigration. They seem to be happy with it, because I don't see them going back to the federal government and asking them to start controlling it more. So I'm just wondering, from kind of our market needs: what opportunities would you see if we had more control of our immigration, like Quebec?

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you very much, MLA Stephan, for your compliments at the beginning. I really appreciate the work that you do in your area to help our newcomers, so thank you. It was good to see you at the Red Deer college.

With respect to our involvement with the federal government to get more control on our immigration system, we have been very persistent in our ministerial meetings making that request, that if we have more control, we can better serve our newcomers here by working with the immigrants – helping agencies here because we understand how they work. We are locally on the ground, and we

can do a lot better if we had a little bit more, you know, control over the immigration system.

Your comparison of Quebec versus the rest of Canada: that's a unique thing. We would like to have as many, you know, provisions that Quebec has in Alberta as well in our immigration system. We continuously ask for better control. It is not only us. Other provinces are doing the same thing. In our upcoming meeting, whenever it happens at the end of this year, we will repeat that as well. I think our program can improve a lot better if we have control . . .

The Chair: I apologize for the interruption, but I need to advise the committee that the time for consideration of the ministry's estimates is concluded.

Since this is our last meeting, I would be remiss if I didn't thank everyone from the LAO staff, *Hansard*, the LAS, members, ministers, support staff for the ministers. Thank you so very much.

Nine meetings within seven days, and we only had one point of order called, which was overruled. Thanks, everybody, for practising the boardroom policies. That's how we get effective work done.

With that, this meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 12 p.m.]

