



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Standing Committee
on
Public Accounts

Labour

Tuesday, November 7, 2017
8:30 a.m.

Transcript No. 29-3-13

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The 29th Legislature
Third Session**

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake (UCP), Chair
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP), Deputy Chair

Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UCP)
Fildebrandt, Derek Gerhard, Strathmore-Brooks (Ind)
Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (Ind)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)
Gottfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UCP)
Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (NDP)
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)*
Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (NDP)
Malkinson, Brian, Calgary-Currie (NDP)
Miller, Barb, Red Deer-South (NDP)
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (NDP)**
Panda, Prasad, Calgary-Foothills (UCP)
Piquette, Colin, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (NDP)***
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)
Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (NDP)

* substitution for Cameron Westhead

** substitution for Nicole Goehring

*** substitution for Robyn Luff

Also in Attendance

Hunter, Grant R., Cardston-Taber-Warner (UCP)

Office of the Auditor General Participants

Merwan Saher	Auditor General
Rob Driesen	Assistant Auditor General

Support Staff

Robert H. Reynolds, QC	Clerk
Shannon Dean	Law Clerk and Director of House Services
Trafton Koenig	Parliamentary Counsel
Stephanie LeBlanc	Parliamentary Counsel
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Sarah Amato	Research Officer
Nancy Robert	Research Officer
Corinne Dacyshyn	Committee Clerk
Jody Rempel	Committee Clerk
Aaron Roth	Committee Clerk
Karen Sawchuk	Committee Clerk
Rhonda Sorensen	Manager of Corporate Communications
Jeanette Dotimas	Communications Consultant
Tracey Sales	Communications Consultant
Janet Schwegel	Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Participants

Ministry of Labour

Maryann Everett, Assistant Deputy Minister, Workforce Strategies

Dana Hogemann, Senior Financial Officer

Ross Nairne, Executive Director, Occupational Health and Safety Policy and Program Development

Lenore Neudorf, Acting Assistant Deputy Minister, Safe, Fair and Healthy Workplaces

Jeff Parr, Deputy Minister

8:30 a.m. Tuesday, November 7, 2017

[Mr. Cyr in the chair]

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

My name is Scott Cyr. I'm the MLA for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, chair of this meeting. I'd like to ask members, staff, and guests at the table to introduce themselves for the record, starting to my right.

Mr. Dach: Lorne Dach, MLA, Edmonton-McClung, deputy chair.

Mr. Barnes: Drew Barnes, MLA, Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Hunter: Grant Hunter, MLA, Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Derek Fildebrandt, Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Gotfried: Richard Gotfried, MLA, Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Nairne: Ross Nairne, executive director, OHS policy and program development, Alberta Labour.

Ms Hogemann: Dana Hogemann, senior financial officer, Alberta Labour.

Mr. Parr: Jeff Parr, Deputy Minister of Labour.

Ms Everett: Maryann Everett, assistant deputy minister, workforce strategies, Department of Labour.

Ms Neudorf: Lenore Neudorf, acting assistant deputy minister, safe, fair, and healthy workplaces, Department of Labour.

Mr. Driesen: Rob Driesen, Assistant Auditor General.

Mr. Saher: Merwan Saher, Auditor General.

Ms Renaud: Marie Renaud, St. Albert.

Dr. Turner: Bob Turner, Edmonton-Whitemud.

Loyola: Rod Loyola, Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Ms Miller: Good morning. Barb Miller, MLA, Red Deer-South.

Mrs. Littlewood: Good morning. Jessica Littlewood, MLA for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

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

Mr. Piquette: Good morning. Colin Piquette, MLA for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Malkinson: Brian Malkinson, MLA for Calgary-Currie.

Dr. Massolin: Good morning. Philip Massolin, manager of research and committee services.

Mrs. Sawchuk: Good morning. Karen Sawchuk, committee clerk.

The Chair: Thank you. There are no members that are teleconferencing. The following substitutions are noted for the record: Mr. Piquette for Ms Luff, Member Loyola for Mr. Westhead, Mr. Nielsen for Ms Goehring.

A few housekeeping items to address before we turn to the business at hand. The microphone consoles are operated by

Hansard staff, so there's no need to touch them. Committee proceedings are audio- and video streamed live on the Internet and recorded by *Hansard*. The audio- and video stream and transcripts of recordings can be accessed via the Legislative Assembly website. Please set your cellphones and other devices to silent for the duration of the meeting.

Let's move on to the approval of the agenda. Are there any changes or additions to the agenda? Seeing none, would a member like to move that the agenda for the November 7, 2017, meeting for the Standing Committee on Public Accounts be approved as distributed? Mr. Panda. Any discussion on this motion? Okay. All in favour? Any opposed? Thank you. The motion is carried.

We've had two members join us, Mr. Panda and Mr. Fraser. Could you announce yourselves to the committee for the record?

Mr. Fraser: Rick Fraser, Calgary-South East.

Mr. Panda: Good morning. Prasad Panda, Calgary-Foothills.

The Chair: Thank you.

Approval of the minutes. Do members have any amendments to the October 31, 2017, minutes? If not, would a member move that the minutes of the October 31, 2017, meeting for the Standing Committee on Public Accounts be approved as distributed? Ms Miller. Any discussion on the motion? All in favour? Any opposed? Thank you. The motion is carried.

I'd like to welcome our guests who are here on behalf of the Ministry of Labour and address the outstanding recommendations from the Auditor General report as well as the ministry's annual report for 2016-2017.

Members should have a research report prepared by research services, the Auditor General briefing document, as well as the status of Auditor General recommendations document completed and submitted by the ministry.

I invite the deputy minister to provide opening remarks not exceeding 10 minutes. Mr. Parr.

Mr. Parr: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's a pleasure to be here today with my colleagues to discuss Labour's 2016-17 annual report and status of the Auditor General's recommendations and to answer your questions.

I'd like to begin by introducing my staff who are with me today. They are Maryann Everett, ADM for workforce strategies; Lenore Neudorf, acting ADM for safe, fair, healthy workplaces; Ross Nairne, executive director, OHS policy program development; Dana Hogemann, senior financial officer; and in the gallery we have Tannis Brown, executive director of the Labour Relations Board; Ted Giraldeau, vice-chair, WCB Appeals Commission; Todd Walsh, executive director, WCB Appeals Commission; Humyra Sabir, executive director, workforce policy, legislation, and program development; Darren Caul, executive director, employment standards policy development; and Rob Feagan, executive director, OHS program delivery. I think that's everyone.

While the province's economy begins to recover, our focus continues to be on supporting the needs of Alberta's workers and employers while ensuring our workplaces are safe and healthy and our labour laws are fair. Looking back, the 2016-17 annual report highlights the major work that was accomplished in the past year.

In 2016-17 the government remained focused on reviewing key labour laws to ensure they were modern and fair. To support this work, the department consulted with Albertans, employers, and industry organizations on minimum wage and Alberta's labour legislation.

Minimum wage consultation focused on the best way to achieve the government's goal of a \$15 per hour minimum wage by 2018

while considering the effects of the previous increases. Government implemented a gradual, phased increase to minimum wage to \$15 per hour over a three-year period to give businesses time to plan and adjust. The first increase took place in October 2016.

Labour legislation consultations included an online survey, written submissions, and in-person engagement sessions with key stakeholders. More than 7,000 written and online submissions were received from employers, labour groups, worker advocates, business associations, and individual Albertans. Further, the department hosted more than 120 stakeholders from various organizations and industries to provide their feedback at round-table sessions. After consultations with workers and employers amendments were proposed in the form of the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act. In June 2017 the Legislature passed the act, which brings Alberta's employment and labour relations standards up to date and aligns them with the rest of Canada. Some of the act changes took effect immediately. Others rolled out in September, and most of the changes will come into effect in 2018.

To reflect the Supreme Court of Canada ruling, the Labour Relations Code and Public Service Employee Relations Act were modernized in 2016-17 through An Act to Implement a Supreme Court Ruling Governing Essential Services. The legislation ensures Albertans have access to vital public services in the event of a labour dispute while protecting public-sector bargaining rights. Essential services legislation is now extended to all continuing care facilities in the province as well as academics working in Alberta's postsecondary institutions.

In 2016-17 the workers' compensation system was also reviewed by an independent panel as part of the government's commitment to review all agencies, boards, and commissions. The review was to ensure the system continued to work for Albertans and provide fair and meaningful rehabilitation to injured workers. A final report was submitted in June 2017 with a list of recommendations the government is currently reviewing before proposing changes.

Under safe, fair, and healthy workplaces, as part of the department's mandate to ensure our workplaces are safe, fair, and healthy, a variety of measures were undertaken in 2016-17. To improve employment standards delivery to Albertans, a comprehensive examination of service delivery models and processes was conducted. The result is a significant reduction in the queue of the employment standards complaint backlog, which was 2,012 in February 2016 and was 1,553 as of March 31, 2017. That's the lowest level in the queue since October 2015.

To improve workplace compliance with OHS legislation, the department focused on identifying trends, education and enforcement activities, undertook initiatives such as focused inspections to protect vulnerable workers, and as a result \$667,400 in funding was distributed to various organizations to improve OHS awareness and knowledge. More than 8,500 proactive OHS inspections were conducted throughout the province. OHS also conducted more than 1,600 inspections in Fort McMurray in response to the wildfire.

8:40

Lastly, the department has completed initiatives in response to the recommendations from the Auditor General's reports. In response to the recommendations the department has done the following things: focused its inspection program by analyzing employer safety data to identify and select and inspect work sites in employers within the high-risk sectors; developed an OHS index to identify employers who require enhanced attention; improved controls over its legislative permit and certificate programs by implementing a new system and policies for ensuring asbestos certificates; improved processes for reviewing and monitoring

external agencies; obtained assurance that certificates of recognition are properly issued and maintained; implemented control over quality of data in its computer system; began issuing fines and tickets to those who continue to break the law; established an occupational disease and injury prevention unit to increase capacity to make evidence-based decision-making in areas of research, surveillance, informatics, and evaluation; and implemented a quality, training, and operations unit to improve training and ensure data use for compliance is complete and accurate.

There are currently two outstanding recommendations: improving on OHS evaluation and reporting, which we will have an opportunity to discuss, and clarifying and documenting compliance. Staff in the Auditor General's office are scheduled to begin a follow-up audit this fall. The follow-up will confirm whether all the recommendations have been addressed to the satisfaction of the OAG.

Turning to skills and training, to help Albertans affected by the downturn, the department delivers programs and supports and skills training to vulnerable and unemployed workers. In 2016-17 nearly 1,900 unique employer applications for over 10,000 trainees were approved through the Canada-Alberta jobs grant. This program supports employers by sharing the cost of training for new and existing employees. The department also expanded programs such as training for work to accommodate more recently laid-off workers. Throughout 2016-17 more than 4,500 Albertans received services through training for work programs such as training for work, aboriginal training to employment, and First Nations training to employment programs.

In addition to supporting vulnerable and unemployed Albertans, the department supports Alberta's future by investing in youth programs such as the summer temporary employment program. This program opened doors for students of all ages to get the experience they need to enter the workforce. In 2016-17 STEP was also available to small businesses for the first time. This expansion provided small businesses with better access to summer students and expanded the range of opportunities available to students across the province to gain work experience. Last year 2,700 positions were funded at approximately 1,100 employers in Alberta.

Overall, our department has worked hard to provide Albertans with programs and services that promote a strong and diversified workforce while ensuring our workplaces remain safe, fair, and healthy. While I have spoken about some of our accomplishments in 2016-17, the annual report provides an in-depth analysis of the work we've done, and I would be happy to answer your questions.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Parr. I appreciate that.

I will now turn it over to the Auditor General for his comments. Mr. Saher, you have five minutes.

Mr. Saher: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to just reiterate the two outstanding recommendations. The deputy minister has told you the work that has been done on those. The history with those recommendations, the two outstanding ones, one with the heading Improve Planning and Reporting and the other with the heading Enforced Compliance: these recommendations were originally made in 2010, and the Auditor General's office repeated them in July 2016. We look forward to doing what I believe will be our final follow-up audit, which will start before the end of this calendar year.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Saher. I'd like to thank the Auditor General for his comments.

We will follow our usual time allotment format for an hour and a half meeting for the questions of the committee members. The first rotation will be 10 minutes each for the Official Opposition and the government members. The second rotation will be an additional 10 minutes each for the Official Opposition and government members, followed by five minutes in total for the independent committee members. We have two independent committee members, so they will get two and a half minutes each during that rotation. The final rotation is five minutes for any Alberta Party, Liberal Party, PC, or independent member in attendance wishing to participate. Any time remaining will be rotated equally among the Official Opposition and government members, with the final few minutes designated for outstanding questions to be read into the record and to consider any other business which may be brought forward. We ask that officials at the table as well as those seated in the gallery provide their name before responding to the question. This is for the benefit of those listening online and for the *Hansard* recording.

I will now open the floor for questions from members. Mr. Hunter.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for coming today and answering some questions. The first question I'd like to ask is as per key strategy 3.1 on page 26, which notes that mandatory WCB coverage started January 1, 2016, for all farms and ranches. I'd like to ask: was there an economic impact study completed in the farm and ranch sector prior to the introduction of Bill 6?

Mr. Parr: Thank you very much. I'm not aware of an economic impact assessment prior to the introduction of the enhanced protection for farm workers legislation.

Mr. Hunter: Okay. Thank you. January 1, 2016: since that time has there been an economic impact study done on this legislation and how it's applied and affecting farms and ranches in Alberta?

Mr. Parr: The answer is no. We have not done specifically an economic impact assessment on this piece of legislation. What we have been doing is consulting with the ag coalition about the rules we put in place for employment standards to make sure they're able to be implemented effectively without an enormous amount of disruption. Similarly, we are now in the process of discussing with them the recommendations we've received regarding occupational health and safety. In this fashion we're intending to put in place the same type of rules that every other workplace has in Alberta in a way that makes sense on farms.

Mr. Hunter: I appreciate that, Mr. Parr. That's one of your mandates. But the other mandate is to find out how this is going to affect them economically as well. Wouldn't you agree?

Mr. Parr: The economics, certainly, we monitor on an ongoing basis through our labour market information operation, so we do sort of track that. We can provide information on sort of what the trend lines are in agriculture. On this particular initiative it was about extending the rights that other farm employees enjoy across the country to a group of workers in Alberta that don't enjoy those rights now.

Mr. Hunter: No one faults you for that, Mr. Parr, but the question still remains: how can you implement any policy without figuring out how that's going to roll out and affect those people who you implement that policy for?

Mr. Parr: I think I've answered that. We do track the economic trends with respect to the agriculture sector. We're also directly engaged in discussions with the ag coalition about what the effects of this are and how it can be put into place. The fact of the matter is that when we brought this into place, picking one of the provisions, the requirement to pay minimum wage, the farm sector was already paying above minimum wage. Really, what we're catching is that group that is not sort of being competitive with the others.

Mr. Hunter: You said you are tracking, but you haven't done an economic impact study. Okay. In terms of the tracking would you be able to share with this committee some of the key findings that you have had in terms of how this Bill 6 farm safety work has affected the farms and ranches?

Mr. Parr: We can provide that information. We don't have it with us today, but we can certainly provide that information about what the trends have been in the agriculture sector from January 2016 forward. Certainly, we would have to sort of look at what the implications of the broader economic factors are, such as the downturn in the economy.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Parr. I appreciate that. I guess maybe a little more specific question, then, would be: how many farms have closed, or how many farm workers have lost jobs? Do you have that information?

Mr. Parr: Off the top of my head I do not, though I believe that the last time I looked at the numbers, actually we were seeing that employment in the agriculture sector has increased.

Mr. Hunter: Okay. Now, since the Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act was proclaimed, have any new labour unions come into being for the sector?

Mr. Parr: There have been none.

Mr. Hunter: No labour unions for the sector?

Mr. Parr: No new unions have been created. There have been no attempts to organize in that sector.

8:50

Mr. Hunter: Okay. Thank you.

Key strategy 3.1, page 26 of the annual report, highlights the importance of incorporating the farm and ranch sector into Alberta's labour laws. How many jobs did farming operations provide in Alberta in the three years prior to the January 1, 2016, implementation?

Mr. Parr: That's information that we will certainly provide in written form.

Mr. Hunter: Okay. How many workers does OH and S have registered as employed in the industry now?

Mr. Parr: Again, we'll provide all of that information. We'll look at the previous three years. We'll look at the current period of time as well and just provide that all to the committee.

Mr. Hunter: Okay. As per the requirement for mandatory WCB coverage on page 26 how many farmers are now paying both WCB coverage and private coverage? Do you have those numbers? The reason why I ask, Mr. Parr, is that when I talk to my constituents, a lot of the farm workers felt like the private benefits that they had were better than the WCB coverage because it was 24/7 versus just

when they're working. Do you have any information about how many are keeping both?

Mr. Parr: We don't have information on how many are keeping both. What we do have is information on the number who have WCB accounts currently. In 2015, before the bill came into effect, there were 1,756 accounts. In 2016 it jumped to 3,629 accounts. I think in there it's important to recognize that, with respect to WCB claims, in 2015 there were 88 time-lost claims. In 2016 there were 327 time-lost claims. So I think that what that shows is that, you know, since the system has been made available, people are making use of it.

With respect to private insurance coverage, as you know, it's not just in agriculture where workplaces will have two types of coverage. Many private-sector operations will have WCB coverage and top that up with private-sector insurance coverage. If a farm chooses to do that, they could certainly do that. The private coverage actually fills in the gaps between the WCB.

Mr. Hunter: Okay. As per page 26 what is the total number of farms and ranches in Alberta that are required to register for WCB coverage?

Mr. Parr: Sorry; we don't have that information available. As I recall, you know, when we began tracking this last year, we were seeing the coverages increase to around about 80 per cent. We can come back and let you know how many, what the global number is that would be required to have it and what the current number is that have coverage. We can bring that back.

Mr. Hunter: Sorry; you said that as of last year it was 80 per cent?

Mr. Parr: We began tracking that in 2016, and by summer of 2016, give or take, fall of 2016, we were seeing, I think, about 80 per cent. But we will bring the exact numbers to the committee.

Mr. Hunter: Okay. Can you tell me how many farms and ranches in Alberta don't have to sign up for WCB coverage because they're a family-run farm or they are exempt?

Mr. Parr: I can tell you that it's most of them. I will bring you the exact number though.

Mr. Hunter: So most of the farms and ranches do not have to sign up because they are exempt or they're family farms.

Mr. Parr: They don't have paid non family members working.

Mr. Hunter: Okay. So when you say that 80 per cent signed up, you're not saying 80 per cent of the farms and ranches; you're saying 80 per cent of those people who actually were under that legislation.

Mr. Parr: That's right.

Mr. Hunter: Do you monitor whether people have to sign up for that? Like, how would you figure that out?

Mr. Parr: We work with the WCB on this. Again, the WCB will track, you know, the number of new accounts that have been set up and do a comparison to the number that they expected should be having the coverage. We quite deliberately took an approach which was to encourage people to comply with it. We're happy with the level of compliance, but we're going to continue to encourage people to comply with it.

Mr. Hunter: Have you had to fine any of the farms and ranches for noncompliance?

Mr. Parr: There have been no fines in the farm and ranch sector.

Mr. Hunter: Is that because there's a grace period for a certain amount of time, or is that because there's not the application of it? Can you tell us the reason why?

Mr. Parr: You're speaking with respect specifically to workers' compensation now?

Mr. Hunter: Correct.

Mr. Parr: Right. WCB coverage is new to the farm sector, so the WCB is quite deliberately taking a gradual approach and encouraging people to do it so that it's not so abrupt. It's not taking an enforcement approach; it's encouraging people to come into compliance. We're happy with the rate at which people are coming into compliance and, really, at this point don't see a need to sort of go out and start fining people for not complying.

Mr. Hunter: Okay. I'm sure that farmers and ranchers appreciate that.

Mr. Parr: I think they might.

Mr. Hunter: One of the questions that I had for the minister when she was thinking about implementing this is: what is the increase in employees for WCB that they're going to have to have?

Mr. Parr: You're asking about the premium?

Mr. Hunter: No, increases in terms of employees.

The Chair: Mr. Hunter, thank you for your questions.

If you could respond back in writing to that question.
Mr. Malkinson.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. My questions today are actually going to be taking a bit of a turn. They're going to be focusing on the summer temporary employment program, also known as the STEP program.

In your annual report, key strategy 5.4 on page 48, you state that the program served 2,700 students and 1,100 employers in 2016. I've actually heard from several employers in my riding, including a bike shop and a crane company that have been taking advantage of the STEP program, and it's been getting quite positive reviews, actually. This seems to be a program that is working to support businesses, communities, and youth, particularly youth that are in school and are eager to get some work experience, and it seems like many employers have taken advantage. My question is: how many employers have participated in the program since it was reinstated?

Mr. Parr: Thank you very much. Since STEP was reinstated in 2015, it has been an incredibly popular program for employers. Eligible employers include small businesses, nonprofit organizations, municipalities, public libraries, Métis settlements and First Nations, school boards, and publicly funded postsecondary institutions. In 2016 there were 1,163 employers that benefited from the program. While we're still finalizing the numbers for 2017, we're estimating approximately 1,300 employers will receive funding through the program this year, and we anticipate achieving similar results for the next year of STEP to be launched in 2018. The first year out was about 1,163, and the second year in we're at 1,300, and we've worked out some kinks in the process.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much. Again, under the same key strategy, you know, you mentioned that the program was expanded to include small businesses who were not previously allowed to apply before. I'm curious about the specific impact this has had on applications. How many applications were received from small businesses, and how many were approved, and what was the impact overall of adding those small businesses to the program?

Mr. Parr: Thank you very much. With the reinstatement of the program, it has been met with a high number of applications. In 2016 we received 2,615 applications from employers in total, totalling \$19.5 million. Ultimately, that created 2,705 positions for students. Of that amount, there were 322 which were allocated to small business, which created 614 positions for students.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much. I take it that for the definition of small business you use the same definition that we use in our tax system as well?

9:00

Mr. Parr: Yes.

Mr. Malkinson: Perfect. Thank you for that.

Now, also going back to your annual report, on page 49 you expect to complete a full program evaluation by December of this year. Given that this program seems to have been, from what I'm hearing from my constituents and from your own admission, a benefit to both students and the employers, I'm hoping your evaluation matrix will include surveying both groups. Can you speak to what metrics you're using in evaluating the STEP program?

Mr. Parr: Yes. We know the program is extremely popular. You're right. We are evaluating the program. The evaluation consists of surveys and focus groups with students and employers who participated in the program in 2016. Interim results of the evaluation show positive effects of the program. STEP students were overwhelmingly satisfied, 91 per cent, with STEP, reporting that they increased their knowledge of career options and improved their skills. The STEP employers were also overwhelmingly satisfied, 94 per cent, with STEP increasing the hiring of students while non-STEP employers, our control group, decreased their hiring of students. This indicates the program had a strong effect on the hiring decisions of employers and supported job creation for students. STEP had its greatest effect on small employers, zero to 19.

Mr. Malkinson: As a follow-up I'm wondering – Mount Royal University is just across the road from my riding. You know, I was actually there last week talking to the Mount Royal University student union. One of the things that they mentioned about STEP was that although it is very effective, it also works best for students who are available to gain work experience during the summer months. Has there been any thought to possibly having the STEP program be available for those students – I'm thinking in particular of those who might be involved in trades, perhaps – to be able to take advantage of the STEP program perhaps outside of the summer months for those whose programs that would make sense for?

Mr. Parr: Thank you for that. At this point we haven't turned our attention to that. We do know, you know, that could be a possibility. Candidly, what we've got right now is a program that is oversubscribed, so when we put it out in the summer, we get a great deal of response. We fully allocate the money just responding to the demand for summer employment for young people. But it's

something that we would certainly look at, or we could look at another mix of programs that could be available to help students sort of transition to trades or those sorts of things.

Mr. Malkinson: Perfect. Thank you very much.

You know, you mentioned some of the other programs and initiatives. Are there other programs and initiatives that are coming through the Ministry of Labour that might help students or families that are being implemented right now?

Mr. Parr: Students or families globally?

Mr. Malkinson: Yeah.

Mr. Parr: There are quite a number, I think. I'll just list some of them. You can let me know if I'm hitting the right points. First off, just with respect to employment standards it certainly would provide benefit to families and students. It resolved more than 5,600 complaints in 2016-17 and recovered more than \$4.6 million in money owed to employees. It completed 679 inspections, which then covered and corrected pay-related issues that affected more than 22,000 employees. Bill 17 created a number of improvements in employment standards protection. I would point you to the improved job protection leave that lines up with employment insurance. It also improved compliance tools that were available.

With respect to employment and training programs in response to the economic downturn we have significantly increased our capacity for training programs across Alberta. In 2016-17 training employment programs were expanded in 17 communities, raising the overall total to 54 communities across the province, so we were extending the reach. The services are helping Albertans reattach to the labour force during the economic recovery.

In addition to our training programs delivered through contracted third-party providers, we also deliver the Canada-Alberta jobs grant program and the summer temporary employment program. We talked about that. The objective of the Canada-Alberta jobs grant is to respond to Alberta's labour challenges and train current and new employees in the skills required to improve performance in new and current roles and help build a foundation for future employment. It's important to support training that directly leads to available jobs or increases workers' ability to be retrained.

STEP has also been a valuable program to students, as we discussed. I'm just getting a note here that the Canada-Alberta jobs grant can also be used to train STEP students, so that could be available to an employer. If they wanted to hire students in summertime, they could make use of the Canada-Alberta jobs grant. Essentially what would happen there is that the province would pick up two-thirds of the cost of training.

Mr. Malkinson: Excellent. Thank you.

Mr. Chair, how much time do I have left?

The Chair: Fifty-five minutes – or 55 seconds.

Mr. Malkinson: I will take 55 minutes.

I'm going to hand it over to Barb for the next question, but I think I'd just ask a quick final point there. You're saying that the Canada jobs grant and STEP work in tandem with each other for training? Is that what I heard, just for clarification, at the end there?

Mr. Parr: Yes. I'm sorry; I think really what I should have said is that you can use the Canada-Alberta jobs grant to train students. Some of those could be eligible for STEP. It's not that they work specifically in tandem, you know, but STEP is available to employers, as is the Canada-Alberta jobs grant. It has more

flexibility, and it can be used throughout the year at any particular time.

Mr. Malkinson: So for the students that I was talking to at Mount Royal that were sort of looking for opportunities outside of the summer period, that would be a program that would potentially be available to them and employers in that scenario?

Mr. Parr: Potentially. It would require an employer to make an application through the Canada-Alberta jobs grant.

Mr. Malkinson: Perfect. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Malkinson.
Mr. Gotfried.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I've just got a couple of quick questions before quite literally my questions go to pot. The first is about minimum wage and any statistics or information you have about employment leakage. I'm talking about some of the conversations we're having with employers where they've actually reduced not only the number of employees but the total revenue and employment revenues that they are using. What is the information you have from employers about employment leakage around the minimum wage increases?

Mr. Parr: Well, thank you very much for that. Individual employers will obviously respond differently to increases in various cost items, minimum wage being one of them. Globally we can tell you that over the last few years we've seen employment and wages improve in industries and occupations that employ the majority of minimum wage workers, so this would be accommodation and food services and retail. Those are the two big sectors that we're talking about. Between August 2016 and 2017 employment grew in the retail sector by .2 per cent, and accommodation and foods by 6.4 per cent. There is some marginal employment growth there. We've seen, obviously, increases in the wages that are paid because of minimum wage. Just, sort of, I think, some of the other things . . .

Mr. Gotfried: I'm just curious. Maybe if you could provide some statistics on that. That's not what we're hearing from some organizations such as the Alberta Hotel & Lodging Association, who've actually shown a decrease in some of their wage bills for various reasons, obviously not just the minimum wage. I'd be interested in receiving some detailed statistics on that if that's possible.

My second question is around the department spending on workforce strategies on page 96 of your annual report and also on page 11, as noted. Your report says that "education and skills training is one of the best investments our government can make to ensure a strong and diversified economy." That's on page 11 of your annual report. Yet there's \$8 million of a budgeted \$133 million unspent investment in workforce strategies. I'm a little confused with this when typically I would think that where you have your best investments, you ensure that those monies are spent to ensure that you get that return on investment, particularly in an environment where we have high unemployment and underemployment amongst our workforce.

Mr. Parr: Thank you for that question. Yes. I mean, you're quite right. We've got significant unemployment here, and we're working hard to make sure that we're spending the funds to get people connected with employment. The primary reason for the lower spending is attributable to a number of things. A portion of the lapses in these programs is related to programs that are funded

through the federal labour market development agreement. It has some very specific criteria that make it difficult just to make it available broadly. It has to be quite targeted programming, so we had some criteria issues that we're dealing with there. One of the things I want to flag as well is that a significant amount of this funding that wasn't spent was for something that's called income support for learners.

9:10

One of the things that happened last year is that there was a realignment of employment and training programs across a number of departments: Advanced Education, Community and Social Services, Labour, and to a certain extent Indigenous Relations. Programs were moved around. We received a fairly big chunk of funds for the income support for learners. A couple of things: with the criteria that were in place, it wasn't readily available for people who may need it. That was one thing that we were dealing with, so there's a criteria issue. The second thing is that it was really a program that belonged more appropriately in Advanced Education, so this year it's been transferred back to Advanced Education so that it will be used more appropriately. That's a big chunk of it right there.

Mr. Gotfried: Okay. You know, again, I think that there are a lot of people out there who are trying to get retrained so that they can become employed in the new economy. I'd encourage you to make sure that we're well aware of those and that we don't have unspent dollars in our best investment.

I'd like to switch to some conversation around the future legalization of cannabis. On page 11 of the annual report it states: "Every worker in Alberta has the right to a safe, fair and healthy workplace from their first shift through to retirement." Clearly, the quickly approaching legalization of cannabis poses considerable issues for Alberta workers. What has this ministry been doing to prepare and adapt OHS to the legalization of cannabis?

Mr. Parr: Thank you for that. Justice and Solicitor General is leading the development of the cannabis framework to outline how Alberta will adapt to federal legalization of cannabis. We are part of that. We did hold consultations in the summer with employers and labour groups to, you know, get their input on how we ought to apply this in the workplace because that's a particular concern that we have. We've had those consultations. We've raised it a number of times at the federal-provincial ministers of labour table as well as at the officials table to try to get our colleagues across the country to work with us to try and find a model that makes sense across the country. I have to say that I'm a bit disappointed that we didn't get the uptake that we had hoped on that, so now I think we're in a position where we've got to find, you know, willing partners from jurisdictions that perhaps are close by to work our way through this.

We do expect into 2018 to begin to do some serious work about: okay; what is this framework going to look like in the workplace? It's work that we're intending to launch early in 2018 and try to provide a framework for an employer so they can deal with this appropriately.

Mr. Gotfried: Sorry to interrupt. When did your ministry start working on this file?

Mr. Parr: I believe we started – Ross.

Mr. Nairne: Ross Nairne. The issue of impairment in the workplace has been something the department has been dealing with with employers and labour groups for quite some time. With

the federal government's commitment to legalize it by the 1st of July, 2018, we've been working with Justice ever since that announcement happened. We've been integrated in their sessions. Jeff has already gone over the work that we've done with industry and labour groups, meeting with them, hearing what their concerns are, and we'll be in a position to move forward shortly in 2018 to make sure that Alberta is ready for that July 1 date.

Mr. Gotfried: If I may ask, how is cannabis treated in the workplace today? They're obviously already dealing with medical marijuana in some instances.

Mr. Parr: It will obviously depend on the workplace. The oil and gas sector is probably the most well developed in terms of how they approach this. They will do drug and alcohol testing when required to do it. As you know, it kind of moves back and forth, and I appreciate that that's the difficulty employers have, that once they think they've got a legal framework to move in, there's a new legal ruling that says: well, that that's no longer appropriate. They will do drug and alcohol testing and, I believe, work very hard to make sure they're aligning with the human rights provisions around that, so they do that. They will take corrective measures when they find people who are impaired in the workplace, so I think you see those kinds of activities.

What we want to strive for is something that gives an employer a bit of clarity about: if you approach it in this particular way, you know, all things being equal, you should be able to expect that it will survive legal challenges. That's what our challenge will be. As you know, once we think we've got it completely figured out, there's a new ruling that shifts the ground a little bit. So that's what we're working . . .

Mr. Gotfried: You know, July 1, 2018 is coming very quickly. I'm sure you're aware of the urgency on that. Is the ministry working on specific proposals for dealing with legalized marijuana – you mention the term “impairment” – on how we're going to measure that and how we're going to actually have employers in a position where they can actually measure the impairment and whether somebody is actually supporting a safe and healthy workplace?

Mr. Parr: Thank you very much. The issue of measurement is a particularly thorny one. As you know, it's fairly straightforward to measure alcohol impairment. That's a pretty straightforward piece. Unfortunately, the technology hasn't developed to the point yet where you've got a reliable measuring instrument that an employer would be able to apply with respect to cannabis.

I think this has worked. It's clearly, you know, not just this department. It'll be much broader. I think you'll also see work developing as a result of sort of traffic safety and those sorts of things. We are very interested in seeing some breakthrough on that front, and we will do whatever we can to support that. But you are absolutely right. There isn't a reliable method now to measure that impairment, and that's one of the difficulties that we're going to have.

Mr. Gotfried: What is the staff compliment that you have dedicated to this issue to ensure that we can meet that July 1, 2018, deadline?

Mr. Nairne: It's within the department's medical unit. There are seven folks. They're not solely dedicated to this issue. This is one issue that they're dealing with amongst others.

Mr. Gotfried: This is going to be a big, multibillion-dollar issue going forward. We're moving from medical marijuana to recreational marijuana and, obviously, some significant distribution

everywhere in the province. Do you feel that that's a strong enough complement?

The Chair: If you could respond to that in writing, I'd appreciate it.

Ms Miller.

Ms Miller: Thank you, Chair. In April 2010 the Auditor General recommended that the department improve its planning and reporting systems for occupational health and safety by evaluating and reporting on whether key OH and S programs and initiatives achieved the desired results. Your annual report mentions on page 4 that OH and S conducted 12,000 workplace inspections. Can you speak to the progress you've made on that recommendation and how your department is evaluating the success of those workplace inspections?

Mr. Parr: Thank you very much. Let me start with the evaluation piece first and then come back to inspections. With respect to the OH and S evaluation, a good deal of work has happened since 2016 just to get clarity about what exactly the programs are that we're measuring. I acknowledge that previously, you know, there were a number of things and they were not specifically focused on prevention activities, things related to employee engagement, just as an example.

We've identified our programs as being strategic program, inspection program, general inspections, investigations, industry and employer measurement, performance metrics, surveillance tools, OH and S futures, which funds research funding programs, innovation engagement, grant programs, OH and S information resources, partnerships, and injury reduction. Those are our programs, and we have now aligned and either created or put in place performance measures and performance indicators to sort of track all of those through. Globally, that's the work that we've done since last year to improve on our evaluation and measurement process.

With respect to inspections, really I think what we're – I'll have to do this off the top of my head. When we do our proactive inspections, we look at a few things like: what was the injury rate for that employer before we began our intervention? What is it after? It's an indication primarily, because we influence what they're doing; we don't direct what they're doing. We look at sort of before and after with respect to the proactive inspections. We would look at the number and percentage of employers that move from the strategic inspection stream by year of program, and we would look at year-over-year changes in injury rates. We look globally at the number of people that end up in that strategic stream. Those are the ones that we are most targeting. Are they moving out, or are they not moving out? That's number one. What are they doing with their injury rates preintervention and postintervention? Globally, that's the approach we would take on that.

A number of other types of inspections we do. You know, when we go and we do an inspection, it's not specifically part of the strategic inspection initiative. We go in and inspect an employer, and then we move on to another employer. We're not there for a long period of time, so we're not able to sort of track what goes on at that individual workplace. For those ones, we need to look more globally at indicators related to: what's the injury rate in the province? What's the disability injury rate? Those are the types of things we would be looking at there.

9:20

Ms Miller: Thank you.

What other strategies are you using to ensure that workplaces are compliant with the law to ensure safe and healthy workplaces?

Mr. Parr: We use a combination of proactive and reactive inspections to ensure that workplaces are safe for Alberta workers. I talked about the strategic proactive inspection program. That focuses on about 680 employers that are, you know, frankly, most challenged, so we spend our time with them.

We also, as I said, do general inspections. We receive complaints of imminent danger, and we respond to those immediately. The officers use a variety of tools, including stop-work orders, stop-use orders, tickets, administrative penalties, compliance orders, and director's orders to ensure that dangerous work ceases and sites are brought back into compliance. Where noncompliance is of the most serious nature, like serious injuries and fatalities, charges may be laid and financial penalties. Corporate probation and jail time are also considered. These are instruments that we have available to use.

The proactive inspections are used to focus OHS resources where they are most needed. I mentioned that we have a combination of statistical information in the form of a weighted index in ongoing noncompliant behaviour, that's used to identify the industry sector and the 680 employers that are most in need of additional assistance, if I could characterize it that way.

Further, emerging trends are identified for focusing inspections of a shorter duration. So we target certain industries. You may recall that we did inspections of fuel and convenience stores. That was a specific initiative that we took.

We did an initiative around vulnerable workers, looking at the sectors where the most vulnerable workers are. That's one that after, you know, doing our focused inspection initiative, we moved into our ongoing activity. We just know that it's an ongoing need that we're going to have.

We also recently did an initiative with respect to workers in the care sector, the social care sector. You will recall that there were horrible injuries that were recently reported. We've gone and we've done inspections in that sector, and we're following up with them to essentially help them bring up their game on that front.

That's the approach that we take.

Ms Miller: Thank you.

My understanding is that the Auditor General has been recommending for a long time that the Department of Labour clarify and enforce its procedures to approve giving employers extra time to fix work-site health and safety problems. This recommendation was issued in April 2010 and then repeated again in 2012 and 2016. What has the Department of Labour done now to respond to this recommendation?

Mr. Parr: We believe we have successfully addressed the recommendation to clarify and enforce. You're right. It was initially made in 2010, it was repeated, and it was repeated again. Most recently what we've done is OHS procedures for giving employers extra time to fix workplace standards. Essentially, we had instances where managers were not signing off as stipulated in our policies and procedures. We've addressed that through training, improvements in our IT systems so that, you know, we can't possibly extend it without have a manager do that.

We updated our procedures such as issuing and documenting extensions. We made it very clear that when a stop-work order is issued, it's there until the problem is fixed. We had an officer or two who went and wrote that they were extending the stop-work order. Really, that was a meaningless initiative they took. A stop-work order stays in place until the matter is resolved and it's dealt with. We've been very clear about that.

As I mentioned, we've improved the IT system. We've done training sessions. We've done quality assurance checks across our

department to make sure that they're all complying with that. So I think we've done an awful lot to ensure that our staff understand how this needs to function, and we've built in checks and balances on that.

I think one of the things that has happened is that our officers are put in a difficult spot in that, you know, the way that they ensure that compliance has been followed up on is that they have to go out and reinspect. Other jurisdictions, for example, require the employer to provide a progress report. It's something that we, when we were doing our consultations around the OH and S system review, were looking at. When an employer gets an order, there's a time frame in which to provide that. There's a time frame in which compliance should be provided, should be met. The employer should provide a progress report. Then the officer has at least something to look at and say: "Okay. Where are we at? What kind of follow-up is required?" So we'll be looking at ways in which we can make it more efficient than it currently is.

Ms Miller: Thank you.

I'm going to pass my remaining time to MLA Nielsen.

The Chair: Mr. Nielsen, you have one minute.

Mr. Nielsen: One whole minute. That might be a little hard to get through the question that I'm planning to ask here, so maybe in terms of getting things moving along, we can just move to next session, and I'll try to ask my question the next time around.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Nielsen.

Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thanks for attending today and for all the work that you do. The question I want to ask is really around the Workers' Compensation Board. You likely heard that they're holding money rather than refunding money to independent employers, small business, and the musing around that or what we've heard – and can you answer this? – is that perhaps they're holding onto that money because there may be a directive to provide more services and longer terms of people being off that are injured and that sort of thing. Is that the case?

Mr. Parr: Thank you for that. The surplus that's generated by the WCB: it's not actually excess money paid by employers; it's a result of their investment activities. As it happens, they're very good at their investments. That's what happens. Employers pay in, and the board has very detailed sort of mechanisms essentially to ensure that current employers are paying the cost of current injuries so that it doesn't shift the burden to future. That's that piece.

When the WCB review panel issued its report, one of the recommendations was that if there's a surplus generated for this year, the WCB use that surplus to defray any additional costs that may be incurred as a result of the WCB review. That's what the board has decided to do, to hold that so they can apply it against any additional costs that may be applied so employers don't see a big bump in their premiums this year. So that's what's been taking place.

Mr. Fraser: Fair enough. What we're hearing from business owners, though, is that they're not going to get the refund that they normally would get for being responsible business owners providing that safety, typically what they would get back, you know, receiving back some of the premiums that they pay. Again, why is there a shift in that tradition, that habit or practice to refund that money, that now it's not happening?

Mr. Parr: The rebates that are associated with better health and safety behaviour are sort of picked up through COR, the certificate of recognition. When an employer has a certificate of recognition and they sort of do good health and safety practices, they get a 20 per cent rebate on their WCB premium. So that's where, essentially, the performance incentive is built into the system. The surplus distribution in the past has really been as a result of investment activities of the WCB. It's had nothing to do with the behaviour and performance of employers.

The Chair: Sorry, Mr. Fraser.
Mr. Fildebrandt.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you. My questions are very much in the same vein. WCB is supposed to keep an asset-to-liability funding ratio of between 114 per cent and 128 per cent. It is now 133.8 per cent. Now, you say that's because investments have performed well, but in that case, if you're doing well in investments, then you are still overcharging employers in premiums for this. My question is: if it's overfunded, is there any plan to refund this to employers? No refund was provided this year, which is not usual, if I understand how things have worked historically. I'd like to know why that has not been refunded to employers for this year. What is the plan for that money? This ratio is overfunded. I get why you say that there are more funds in there, but clearly there is not as much of a need, then, to be charging employers premiums at this rate if investments are doing better than they have.

Mr. Parr: Thank you for that. The board's investment returns are quite good for an institutional investor. Most recently they were telling me they were getting returns of 9 per cent. I'd like to give them my RSPs if they would get returns like that. As I mentioned, because of the recommendations from the review committee that if there's an existing surplus for this year, it be applied to any potential increases associated with the WCB review panel recommendations. That was a decision that the board took. So it's holding the surplus. You're right.

9:30

Mr. Fildebrandt: But what is the reasoning for that? It's significantly over the ratio that WCB has established that they should hold; 114 to 128 per cent is pretty healthy to begin with, and you're at almost at 134 per cent right now. What is the reasoning for holding on to that?

Mr. Parr: The reason for holding on to that is to allow for a transition to what the board expects will be new rules and new benefits that will come as a result of the WCB review panel. That's what they're doing. They're holding that. They're waiting for government to, you know, implement what changes they're intending to from the WCB review panel so that they're able to cushion the effect of any adjustments going forward. That's what they're doing.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Okay. Mr. Hunter asked earlier if there were fines related to noncompliance for . . .

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fildebrandt.

Mr. Panda, you have five minutes. Then we'll have a government rotation of five minutes, and then we'll go into questions read into the record for three minutes. Mr. Panda.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for cutting my time to five. I'll try to get quick responses here. Thank you.

Line item 3.2 on page 6 of the background research document provided by research services for this committee notes that "the

WCB's funded position remained strong with a year-end funded ratio of 133.8 per cent," yet "despite the positive funded position . . . the WCB 'has deferred a decision on payment of a surplus distribution in 2017'." Surpluses are usually issued in late January or early February. Is that right?

Mr. Parr: As I understand, the notification usually goes out in the summer, I believe. Last year I believe it came in June or July.

Mr. Panda: Okay. How did the WCB know that this recommendation to retain surpluses would be likely to be contained in the review panel's report?

Mr. Parr: The board didn't know until the panel report was actually issued. The report was issued in June, so subsequent to that clearly the board looked at this and made a determination that they would hold any existing surplus to defray the costs of adjustments that may be required as a result of their panel's recommendations.

Mr. Panda: Thank you.

Did anyone in your department direct WCB to delay issuing the rebates?

Mr. Parr: Did the department?

Mr. Panda: Yeah.

Mr. Parr: No. The department is not in a position to issue any directives to the WCB. They're completely independent. Our relationship with them has to be collaborative. We're not in a position to provide any direction.

Mr. Panda: Okay. Thank you.

The WCB review panel contains 60 recommendations, many to change the way things are currently done. Is there anything else the WCB did not do because a review was ongoing?

Mr. Parr: I mean, I'm not quite sure how to answer that. I think, you know, this was a particular recommendation directed to the board. They looked at that and said: okay; we'll make the adjustments from there. Other than that, I assume that they've just been business as usual. As we've been working our way through the recommendations, we have been in dialogue with them, but I think that, really, what we're seeing there is business as usual at the WCB.

Mr. Panda: Thank you.

The financial statement on page 111 of the ministry's annual report shows 10 and a half billion dollars in assets and \$7.87 billion in liabilities. Is it the goal of the WCB to grow the fund to the point that it becomes self-sustaining such that employers will no longer be required to make contributions in the future?

Mr. Parr: No. That's not the intention of the board. We'll get you more detailed information about how the board does its funding policies, but generally their approach is that when they assess a premium on employers, they want to make sure that the premium reflects what the expected costs will be for that year and that they don't shift the costs to future employers. That's how they do it. In that scenario you won't see a situation where there are zero premiums. There will have to be premiums. They have to set funds aside for future liabilities associated with injuries. You'll get injuries where, you know, they'll be paying for quite a long time. They also have to prepare for occupational illnesses where you may have an exposure one year and 25 or 30 years later the illness will appear. Those are the reasons for maintaining that level of asset base.

Mr. Panda: Thank you. Does the WCB intend for its accident fund to surpass the Alberta heritage trust fund?

Mr. Parr: I don't have an answer to that. I don't know what their intention is. I think their assets, really, are intended to fund their business. They're not intending to grow it just for the sake of growing it. It's intended to fund their obligations.

Mr. Panda: Thank you.

Now, page 110 of the ministry's annual report is an actuarial statement of opinion on the valuation of the claim benefit liabilities of the WCB. It finds appropriate provisions for all personal injury compensation obligations. Has there been any discussion about increasing employer premiums?

Mr. Parr: By the WCB itself? I'm not aware of any discussions they've had.

Mr. Panda: Have you had any concerns that as it currently stands, the WCB is unsustainable?

Mr. Parr: No. No. We don't have concerns. It's a well-funded board.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Panda.
Mr. Nielsen.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and through you to our guests. My questions are around employment standards and labour standards, which is probably no surprise, coming from me.

On page 13 of your annual report your department identified that the Employment Standards Code and Labour Relations Code had not been significantly updated since 1988 and that they "require increased clarity and modernization to ensure regulations balance the protection of workers' rights and the needs of employers." It's astounding to me that these codes have not been updated in almost 30 years. I think I was coming out of college back in 1988. I'm just wondering what the Ministry of Labour has done or maybe is doing right now to address this.

Mr. Parr: Well, thank you very much. As you know, the Fair and Family-friendly Workplaces Act was passed in June, so a lot of work went into preparing the recommendations and legislation that led to that decision. I think that was, frankly, the biggest piece that we did. Subsequent to that we've been engaging in consultations with employers and labour groups with respect to, you know, the necessary regulations that will be attached to that. An example would be the rules around youth employment. We've similarly been engaged in discussions with the farm and ranch sector about the regulations that would apply in that sector, so we've been doing that.

We're also preparing a number of sort of public education instruments, I guess, that people could use, including webinars and those sorts of things so that when the new rules come into effect, we're able to provide information to people about what they need to do to be in compliance. One of the ones that I was shown that I was quite impressed with was a self-assessment tool that an employer could use to ensure that they are actually complying with the act because, you know, my view is that oftentimes when employers aren't complying, it's not because they are deliberately setting out not to comply. It's because they just don't know what the requirements are, and they've got a lot of other things on their plate. We want to make sure that we're providing them the information and the education and the assistance to bring themselves into compliance.

With respect to employment standards, that's, you know, what we've been doing.

Mr. Nielsen: I'll pass it over to MLA Littlewood.

The Chair: Please.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you very much. Outcome 5 talks about Alberta needing the skills in its labour force for a diversified market and economy, so I'm just wondering. So far as the Minister of Labour has emphasized the importance of investing in workers and employers with training needs and the need to be eligible to be able to work at different types of jobs. As far as the supports that you're offering, I see in your annual report that you have reintroduced workplace training to 25 communities. I was wondering, first of all, what rural communities have benefited from this reinvestment in workplace training as well as what investment you have made in Women Building Futures and how you mentioned that it's been refocused to ensure that the content is relevant to indigenous and rural women. Could you speak to both of those points, please?

9:40

Mr. Parr: Okay. Thank you. That's kind of a triple-barrelled question. You're right. We've expanded our offerings to more rural communities. There's a range of them here, so I'll just sort of tell you some of the types of training and where we're seeing new offerings. Self-employment training: we're seeing it in Grande Prairie and Fort McMurray as well as Calgary. Training to employment: Red Deer. Workplace training: Lloydminster, Wainwright, and Vermilion would be some of the communities. First Nations training to employment: the Louis Bull First Nation, Saddle Lake Cree First Nation. Aboriginal training to employment: Saamis Employment & Training Association and Cold Lake Native Friendship Centre. Those are some of the First Nations and aboriginal communities as well as some of the rural communities that we've responded to.

With respect to Women Building Futures, I believe the allocation that we provided to them was about \$2 million, \$2.4 million, right? I'm getting a nod. That's right.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you. How did you work on having that content be specific to rural and indigenous women?

Mr. Parr: Specific to rural and indigenous women? I think we didn't specifically target that as a group. What we did was that we were looking at sort of labour market indicators, where we need to provide assistance with respect to rural communities, so we looked at that. Also, we know that we need to provide assistance to women.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you, Mrs. Littlewood.

Now we have three minutes for reading questions into the record.
Mr. Panda.

Mr. Panda: Thank you. Page 44 of the annual report discusses performance measure 4(a), the percentage of appeal decisions not challenged or, if challenged, reinforced or supported. A 98.2 per cent result seems to be impressive. How does Alberta compare to the other provinces on this measure? If so, can you confirm that in your view the appeal process has been working well?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Panda.

Mrs. Littlewood: Under outcome 5 you talk about 10,000 Albertans being trained through the federally funded Canada job

program. I know that in Fort Saskatchewan they utilized \$221,000 worth in '16-17, so I'm just wondering how you are evaluating the program and feedback that you get from participants and employers.

The Chair: Mr. Barnes.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you. The Ministry of Labour's desired outcome 5 relating to workforce skills, your performance measure 2, percentage of clients reporting they are either employed or in further education after leaving a skills training program: your target was 75 per cent, but you've only hit 62 per cent. I'd like to hear what your corrective actions are going to be for that and why you think you missed by that number.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Piquette.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you. I'll mention the employer liaison service program, which is under key strategy 5.2 on page 46. I'd like you to speak to how the program works and how you evaluate its effectiveness going forward.

Mr. Gotfried: With work-site safety in mind as per page 11 I'm wondering if the department has made any recommendations about public versus private retailing of cannabis.

The Chair: Were there any government questions? No.

Opposition, any other further questions? Okay.

Well, thank you very much. I would like to thank the officials from the Ministry of Labour and from the Alberta Workers' Compensation Board and the Labour Relations Board for attending today and responding to committee member questions. We ask that the responses for outstanding questions from today's meeting be provided in writing and forwarded to the committee clerk within 30 days.

Are there any other items for discussion under other business today?

If not, the committee meets next Tuesday, November 14, 2017, to hear from the Ministry of Municipal Affairs. The committee meeting is scheduled from 8:30 a.m. to 10 a.m., and the premeeting briefing is at 8 a.m.

Would a member move that the meeting be adjourned? Mr. Nielsen. All in favour? Any opposed? Carried.

Thank you very much. This meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 9:44 a.m.]

