



STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE ECONOMY

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE ECONOMY

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Lloydminster

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Saskatoon University

Mr. Ryan Domotor
Cut Knife-Turtleford

Mr. Ken Francis
Kindersley

Mr. Delbert Kirsch
Batoche

Ms. Alana Ross
Prince Albert Northcote

Mr. Doug Steele
Cypress Hills

[The committee met at 15:30.]

The Chair: — Welcome, everyone, to the Standing Committee on the Economy. I'm Colleen Young and I'll be chairing the meetings this afternoon. Sitting in on committee is Aleana Young for Jennifer Bowes; Ryan Domotor; Ken Francis; Travis Keisig in for Delbert Kirsch; Alana Ross; and Doug Steele.

**General Revenue Fund
Immigration and Career Training
Vote 89**

Subvote (IC01)

The Chair: — Today the committee will be considering the estimates for the Ministry of Immigration and Career Training and the Ministry of Trade and Export Development. We will begin with vote 89, Immigration and Career Training, central management services, subvote (IC01).

Minister Harrison is here with his officials. I would ask that all officials state their names and their titles the first time speaking into the microphone, and Hansard will run the microphones for you when you need to speak. So you can just raise your hand if need be. Minister, you can begin by introducing your officials, and opening remarks that you may have.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Great. Well, thanks very much, Madam Chair, appreciate it. Appreciate members of the committee being here as well today. And I am pleased to be here today to discuss the budget presentation for the Ministry of Immigration and Career Training.

And I am joined by my officials as you alluded to, Madam Chair. On my right, deputy minister, Clint Repski. We have on Clint's right our acting assistant deputy minister, Ken Dueck. We have assistant deputy minister, Darcy Smycniuk, behind, and some other officials who will be introducing themselves if they are speaking into the mike.

And I'd like to begin, actually, by saying thank you to the gentleman on my right. This is Clint's . . . Well it's not technically his last day. His last day was last week as deputy minister of Immigration and Career Training. Clint's going to be going over to be the deputy minister at the Ministry of Education, and I just want to publicly say thank you to Clint for the great work that he has done at ICT [Immigration and Career Training] over the course of the last couple of years. And we've had a chance to get to know each other well and work together closely, and Clint has just done a remarkable job. So I want to say thank you very much, sir. I just genuinely appreciate it.

So into the remarks. So the ministry's mission is to recruit, train, and retain the workforce the province's employers need to help fuel Saskatchewan's ongoing growth. As the province deals with a tight labour market, this work is more important than ever, which is why I'm here today.

Through the 2023-24 budget, the ministry will continue to provide a variety of programs and services that are designed to meet not only our current labour market needs but our future needs as well because as a government and a public service, we

need to look to the future. The province is working towards growth plan goals that aim to make Saskatchewan the best place to live, work, and raise a family in Canada.

As a ministry we're focused on two of those goals: increasing the province's population to 1.4 million people and adding 100,000 new jobs by 2030. By taking steps to achieve these, we're creating a better quality of life for Saskatchewan people.

And we're already seeing this work pay off. In March the province saw record highs for employment, full-time employment, and off-reserve Indigenous employment. And in 2022 the province's population grew by 29,000 people — the biggest jump in 108 years — bringing our provincial population to over 1.2 million.

These are important milestones that show we're on the right track. But there is more to be done, which is exactly what this budget does. The ministry is making a series of targeted investments into programs and services that prepare the underemployed and unemployed labour force, create and support training opportunities, advance labour mobility, and attract people through interprovincial and international immigration.

This includes investing \$5.4 million to expand immigration in the province. This investment increases the ministry's capacity to process immigration applications through the Saskatchewan immigrant nominee program, support the recent influx of displaced Ukrainians who have landed in Saskatchewan, and provide more funding to community-based organizations for settlement services.

This investment is timely because for 2023 the province asked for and received an increase in our nominations, granting us a total of 7,250 nominations for the year, by far the highest allocation in the program's history. By 2025 we will have a total of 8,500 nominations, which represents a full 42 per cent increase over our 2022 SINP [Saskatchewan immigrant nominee program] target.

We also received more decision-making authority over assessing applications. These were welcome changes and grant Saskatchewan significantly more autonomy over immigration. And I look forward to speaking in more detail about that during this meeting. The additional nominations are expected to bring approximately 18,000 newcomers to Saskatchewan between nominees and their families.

The additional funds in this year's budget support these welcome and expanded responsibilities. By increasing our processing capacity and program nominations, we're able to bring in more of the skilled labour our province needs. And through increased settlement support, we're better able to assist immigrants and their families as they build their new lives in our province.

Another ministry priority addressed in the 2023-24 budget is health human resources. We know the province is facing critical needs when it comes to health care workers. The health human resources action plan lays out a path to recruit, train, incentivize, and retain medical and health care professionals we need. The 2023-24 budget includes \$5.2 million to support this work.

This investment includes \$2.4 million to support the expansion of certain health care-related post-secondary training seats available to Saskatchewan students. This funding will address future needs in the health care sector by adding 235 seats in the continuing care aide, Indigenous care aide, licensed practical nursing, and primary care paramedic programs.

And of course there are current vacancies in our health care system that need to be addressed. The ministry is addressing this through a multi-pronged approach, part of which is international recruitment. This year's budget includes support for recruitment activities in the Philippines to bring internationally educated nurses to the province.

In addition the budget also includes funding for initiatives to fill current vacancies by supporting internationally educated health care workers already living in Saskatchewan to obtain licensure in the province through the international credential recognition grant, which provides support for certain expenses related to becoming licensed in a regulated health care occupation. The grant pays up to \$6,000 per applicant for costs such as tuition, language courses, and exam fees. There is also additional funding available specifically for nurses as we look to address that critical sector of the health care field.

Together these initiatives will help ensure Saskatchewan people have access to the health care services they need next month, next year, and into the next decade.

Another priority area addressed in the budget is skills training. The 2023-24 budget includes an increase of \$4 million to expand skilled trades in the province. This investment supports the incremental purchase of 250 apprenticeship training seats, bringing the total to 4,450 seats in 2023-24. To complement this lift in apprenticeship, up to 400 training seats will be offered by post-secondary training institutions in construction-related skilled trades programs.

Without skilled tradespeople in the province, growth would not be possible. They're responsible for our infrastructure, our roads, our homes, our businesses, big and small. For every significant capital investment made in Saskatchewan, by the province or otherwise, we need to ensure we have a skilled labour force available to bring these plans into reality, which is why, in addition to the new training seats, the province is also investing \$1.2 million to increase the apprenticeship training allowance.

Apprenticeship training is unique, as it can require students to relocate or take on a second residence in order to complete their training. Our government understands the financial strain this can place on students. This budget raises program support up to \$250 per week depending on where in the province students need to obtain a secondary residence. By removing some of the financial barriers faced by apprenticeship students, we're helping more people get into the workforce in this critical sector.

Another priority addressed in the 2023-24 budget is labour mobility. As the province looks to attract workers from across Canada and beyond, it's essential that those arriving to work in regulated professions are able to get their credentials recognized. This budget builds on the ministry's recent work to address challenges faced by those in regulated professions.

In 2022 the labour mobility and fair registration Act and regulations came into effect, reducing the red tape associated with workers in regulated fields coming to work in Saskatchewan. This legislation put in place maximum timelines for assessment and registration decisions, which means workers from other jurisdictions get their credentials recognized faster here than anywhere else in Canada. By ensuring qualified workers can enter the workforce faster, we increase the province's ability to attract the hard-to-recruit workers and skilled labour that Saskatchewan needs.

In this budget, the ministry is investing an additional \$300,000 for additional FTEs [full-time equivalent] to support the Labour Mobility and Fair Registration Practices Office. The office will ensure regulators are complying with the legislation and will provide navigation support directly to clients. The office will also work with regulators in priority occupations to ensure that pathways to licensure are clear, remove barriers, and improve timelines to get qualified people working faster.

In addition to the key priorities I've outlined, the 2023-24 budget supports the ministry's ongoing core lines of business, ensuring Saskatchewan has the workforce it needs as we grow the economy. This includes support under the SaskJobs lines of services. For employers, this includes services to help them attract, develop, and retain their employees, including assistance navigating through provincial and federal programs and labour market intelligence. For job seekers, the ministry provides services such as job matching, career planning, and job training.

The ministry has 10 local offices across the province that help connect people with meaningful employment that allows them to support themselves, their families, and their communities. And for both job seekers and employers, the saskjobs.ca job board is available free of charge to connect employers with the skilled labour they need. Together these initiatives support Saskatchewan's growth plan goals and ensure that we achieve growth that works for everyone.

Thank you to the committee, and look forward to responding to questions.

The Chair: — Thank you. Thank you, Minister. I'll open the floor to questions from committee members now, and I'll recognize Ms. Young.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, Minister and officials, for all the work that went into preparing for tonight. And a special thank you to Clint for all his work over the past several years. And I speak for all of us when I say I look forward to what you're going to bring to Education and the expertise that you're going to return back to that ministry. So thank you for your service.

Perhaps to begin, Minister, what's the current status of the Workforce Development and the Can-Sask Labour Market Development agreements? And do you anticipate any changes?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Perhaps I'll ask officials to go into a bit more depth on that.

There, you know, has been a long history to the labour market agreements that we have with the Government of Canada, going

back to their transference to the provincial governments' areas of jurisdiction in the mid-'90s. I think the '95 budget was the federal budget that transferred labour market programming — which had previously been a joint area of jurisdiction delivered separately by the federal and provincial governments — exclusively to the provincial governments for delivery, and basically transferring resources that were federally allocated through different labour market development agreements.

I'm sure people have actually written Ph.D. [Doctor of Philosophy] dissertations on the development of these agreements, but they basically turned into, at one point, four separate agreements that were the labour market agreement, well just the LMA; the labour market agreement for persons with disabilities; labour market transfer agreement; and the Targeted Initiative for Older Workers which was a small one, I believe, was the fourth one.

We've long advocated — and I think as members know, I've been very fortunate to have been labour market minister for quite some time now — and we have been advocating at the FPT [federal-provincial-territorial] tables and bilaterally with now two national governments for the rationalization of labour market funding into a broader, and I would say, more efficient framework in which provinces can deliver labour market programming.

[15:45]

The way that this historically has developed is that there has been significant strings that have been attached to different portfolios or different streams of labour market funding. We have long advocated that having more flexibility in the hands of the provinces who know their labour markets better is going to lead to better outcomes, which really is what everybody is seeking. I would say that we've made significant advances in that regard over the last decade.

The labour market agreements are now in three different agreements, not four: LMDA, PDLMDA . . . Sorry, labour market development agreement; labour market development agreement for persons with disabilities; and the labour market agreement, just the LMA, I think, is the other one.

So again kind of a confusing area of policy to a degree, but for practitioners involved in this space every day, it's not entirely . . . There is a certain rationale to it, although I think we would still be better off having one agreement. We'll get there eventually.

But I'll maybe ask though if Clint and Ken want to maybe speak a little more about the specific streams. Those are the streams that we jointly cost-share a lot of the job and skills training programs that we deliver through our partners, almost entirely through our partners who do the delivery. So take it away.

Mr. Repski: — So you were asking about the status of the agreements. A number of years ago, there was a one-time commitment from the federal government of about \$17 million. And I think it was very, very close to the end of March, maybe even early April, where they committed to extending that for us moving forward. So the quick answer on this is, it's a status quo.

You'll see in our budget this year, there is a \$1.4 million

reduction. And we talked about this last year as well. There was a one-time for one-time projects initiative, and there's a reduction of \$1.4 million. But for the standard agreements that the minister was referring to, it's a status quo this year. There's been an outreach of the federal government for us to start negotiating what those agreements look like on a go-forward basis, so very, very status quo.

Ms. A. Young: — Thanks, Deputy Minister. And when you speak to a go-forward basis, can you be more specific?

Mr. Repski: — It's a state right now where we did have, I believe it was a three-year agreement for the top-up. As we get into what the specifics are for, again as the minister indicated, these are all meant for job seekers, for the workforce moving forward. We're obviously going to try to get as much as we can for the province to try to fill that labour gap, as the minister indicated in the introductory comments. As we look to support the economy of the province, it is about getting people here, but it's also about getting people into the workforce. That's what these transfers are here to do, and we'll be negotiating and having some back-and-forth discussions with the federal government over the next year or so to see what that agreement is going to look like.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. Recognizing the important work of the ministry in helping Saskatchewan residents connect to build meaningful connections to employment, you know, including the design of targeted initiatives for job seekers, especially from under-represented groups, has the ministry increased the number of staff to better respond to the needs of some of these people? You know, you've spoken, obviously, about the positive increase and the number of newcomers to Saskatchewan, and clients in receipt of provincial income support I'd also note are increasing.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah. Thanks, Madam Chair. With regard to FTE allocations, Clint can kind of maybe speak to it, but there is a significant increase in FTEs allocated, particularly to the provincial nominee program.

And you know, I think the reason is relatively self-evident in that, you know, we have been successful in having our allocation increased to our PNP [provincial nominee program] from 6,000 to 7,250 this year, 500 more the year following, and 500 more the year after that. Ultimately we're going to be at 8,500 after three years.

This was really the result of provinces and territories having taken a pretty clear position across the country. And you know, again, having been fortunate enough to have been Immigration minister for over a decade now or close to a decade, being able to work with colleagues across the country to put together a position that was united, that the Government of Canada would have a difficult time, if not impossible time, ignoring.

Because even with the increasing levels . . . And you know, we've seen announcements on levels that are aggressive at the national level, which is fine. I think we're quite unique in the Western democratic countries in having a bipartisan consensus in favour of significant and high levels of international immigration. It's really quite a unique thing out of any of the Western countries. But that bipartisan consensus exists now. And I've been encouraging the federal government to . . . You know,

I think that that's not a foregone conclusion forever going forward. I'll maybe talk about that a bit later.

But that being said, the federal government could have allocated their increased levels purely to federal streams. There was no guarantee that they were going to increase PNPs across the country, or you know, specific allocations or higher allocations of PNPs or of newcomers to different provincial nominee programs. But I think, you know, the case was made in a compelling way that again provinces know their labour markets better than does the federal government. Provinces know and are better able to manage a lot of the granular details of newcomer applications than are the Government of Canada.

You know, I've talked about this before at estimates, and I think ultimately we are going to get to a point where selection is almost entirely in the hands of provincial governments. The federal government is going to continue to do admissions, as they are constitutionally obligated to. But the fact that we were able to secure a significantly higher number on the PNP side spoke to the success that we have had in making that case around our Saskatchewan immigration accord. This was a big part of it.

So we did allocate additional resources into the PNP, nine additional FTEs, which I presume we're going through the process of advertising and hiring. Well Ken can speak to that.

We added three additional FTEs as well in the labour mobility realm and that has to do with our Labour Mobility and Fair Registration Practices Office, which I'm going to speak to in some degree of detail — not right now but maybe in a latter question — which really is a unique institution of any province in the entire country. And I think we're going to see some really exciting and remarkable things that come out of this office in the long term as we create capacity, build capacity, and meet a mandate that I think is achievable in a go-forward way.

But I'm not sure, Clint, Ken, if you want to speak to maybe some of the details around that FTE allocation?

Mr. Repski: — As the minister indicated for the additional FTEs this past year, for the increased capacity of the ministry, we've added three FTEs for the labour mobility office as that office gets up and running to do the work that it needs to do. And to make sure that we're hitting our immigration targets for the SINP, we've added nine FTEs in that unit to try and manage some of the pressures that's been increasing with the increased volume.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. And that's the full increase in FTE staffing at the ministry, those 12? Thank you.

Looking at the Saskatchewan plan for growth and the target for the 1.4 million people by 2030 — I believe the number that was used, referenced earlier today — was a projection of about 18,000 people coming to the province this year. Is my recollection of that figure correct before I go on?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — It's a bit of a moving target because the ratio has been relatively constant per nomination over the . . . It's about 2.1, 2.2, in there, but there's a little variation to it. I mean there's no guarantee that that's what the number is at any given point. And I think that 18,000, is that based on our 6,000 number? That's based on our 6,000?

Mr. Repski: — It is in the pandemic backup.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Okay, yes, yes. So we'll likely end up with a higher rate of international in-migration this year, but you know, that's a relatively ballpark figure. But we won't know until we're through the entire year.

The other part that makes it a little bit of a challenge to kind of come up with a number — and we try and be kind of conservative on these numbers actually — is that at the end of every fiscal year, there is a reallocation of existing PNP spots that are outstanding. So there was a significant increase in allocations to a number of jurisdictions in their PNP programs.

You know, we wish provinces the best in managing and meeting their number that they get to, but every year, historically, there have PNP spots that have been reallocated, meaning, you know, fill in whatever province it is, they didn't actually nominate their entire quota or allocation under their provincial nominee program. The federal government then reallocates the PNP spots to jurisdictions that have capacity applications that have been processed, submitted, and we have almost always had additional spots allocated because of that process. So we actually work to move through our applications as quickly as we can with the understanding that we may be in a position at the end of the fiscal year to have additional provincial nominee spots allocated from other jurisdictions.

I would suspect that even though we have an allocation of 7,250 this year, there will be a number of provinces that are not just short a little bit; there are going to be provinces that are going to be significantly short of meeting their increased PNP allocations. So I have encouraged Clint and Ken and our officials to make sure that if and when that happens, we are in a position to petition the federal government for the reallocation of unused PNP spots, which would mean that we would likely have additional nominations made, which would have an impact potentially in a significant way on the overall projection of a population target.

The other element that is a challenging one to account for this year is . . . Kind of an example of it is around Ukraine. You know, we've been very clear that we have an open door to those fleeing the war. There's been, you know, nearly 10 million displaced Ukrainians, internally displaced, externally displaced because of the Russian invasion. We have been, you know . . . Obviously last year we instituted what amounted to an international airlift with partners in bringing Ukrainian refugees.

And I use that word specifically, "refugees," because these are folks who have, by almost every definition are refugees other than the definition that the federal government will admit to, because if they were to call them refugees they would then have fiscal obligations that they refuse to take on.

And it's very frustrating I must say, Madam Chair, that the federal government are completely unwilling to . . . You will never hear — listen carefully — you will never hear from the Prime Minister and cabinet ministers on down calling Ukrainians who have come to Canada refugees. They will never use the word even though they are. They will never use the word because they want to download all of the costs onto the provinces for those folks who are coming.

Which we are fine. We have allocated significant resources, you know, tens of millions of dollars across the entire system in order to accommodate . . . well maybe not quite that much, but around probably 7 to \$10 million through the entire system for newcomers, which we are happy to do. It's the right thing to do. But there are nearly 4,000, or around 4,000 I think, Ukrainian refugees who have resettled here in Saskatchewan, you know, a good chunk of them through our international airlift with our partners, Solidaire and Open Arms.

So we really don't know what that number is going to be next year, but I mean that obviously would have a bearing on what that number is as well. So all that to say that we're not entirely sure what the overall number at the end of the year is going to be, but you know, we took a ballpark — I would say quite conservative ballpark — estimate.

[16:00]

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you, Minister. So hearing that 18,000 is a conservative ballpark, and also I believe what I'm hearing is the 7,250, the ministry anticipates filling all of those spots quite easily. Is there a number, an estimate, or a target that the ministry is using potentially for some of those spots should they be reallocated from other provinces? Essentially what I'm looking for is a better understanding of how the ministry estimates and projects going forward the population increases that it's targeting, the people it's trying to bring to Saskatchewan, and what some of those figures look like.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Well I mean, I think I kind of went through some of that with regard to how we allocate and calculate the provincial nominee numbers. We use a multiplier per spot. We, you know, obviously intend on filling the 7,250 nominations and you know, as I've said as well, that I've given direction, and Clint and Ken are implementing that direction to be in a position to accept additional PNP spots if other provinces aren't able to meet their allocations.

And we just don't know, I mean, at this point in the year where provinces are going to land on that. But you know, we do have a suspicion that there are going to be spots that are going to be reallocated in fairly large numbers by the end of the year. But we don't know so we're not going to pencil in a number that we're not sure about.

You know, in addition to that we have a growing PNP program over the next number of years. In addition to that, there are federal streams under which newcomers arrive in the province. I think it's about 20 per cent or maybe a bit higher come through federal streams. So that 18 is based on our PNP number. You have additional federal stream settlements. I think it's just over 80 per cent . . . 30 per cent federal. Okay. So that's not insubstantial as well.

And I mean like I said, on the Ukrainian front we're not entirely sure at this point either. I mean, I'm not really sure we've allocated any. I mean, that's just because we don't know. So there are a number of variables in how all of this is calculated but, you know, officials do the best we can given the information we have. And we try and be conservative on the numbers and, you know, we'll see where we land.

Ms. A. Young: — And when are those spots reallocated?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — These spots are allocated at the end of Q4 [fourth quarter].

A Member: — They're calendar-based.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Oh, they're calendar . . . Okay. Actually Ken, do you want to speak to that?

Mr. Dueck: — Sure. They usually come in around late October or early November, is when the reallocation happens. So this past year we were reallocated 40 positions.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — But that was prior to the significant levels increase that we had this year.

Mr. Dueck: — That's right, yeah.

Ms. A. Young: — And that significant level increase, what is that in terms of a figure?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — So when we talk about levels, it's a federal term that they use basically to indicate the level of immigration that would be open through all streams into Canada. So that would be through federal streams, that would be through allocations to provincial nominee programs, that would be through . . . I'm not sure if refugees are included in the levels planning as well or whether those are over and above.

That was another element I should have actually mentioned as far as the population targets, is that we actually don't know what the refugee resettlement numbers are because the federal government don't tell us, which is another area that I have concerns with them about. We actually don't find out about refugee resettlements until after they happen. They don't even give us advance notice of refugee resettlements.

So that is in addition. So the level this year that the federal government set, I think it was . . . I'm not sure if it was this year for 500,000, but their level that they are seeking to get to in the next couple of years is 500,000, which is a lot considering that only last year or the year before — pre-COVID anyway — it was about 350 was the levels number. And I think in, kind of back to the mid-2010s it was 250 or thereabouts. I think it was fairly stable at 250 for a number of years.

So over a decade period we'll have basically doubled the levels of annual in-migration from outside of Canada into the country.

Ms. A. Young: — And so not to belabour the point, I didn't hear specific a figure. So am I to understand there isn't one that the ministry is anticipating or working with in planning going forward?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — No, I said that the levels was 500,000 is the federal number, and of that our PNP allocation 7,250 this year. And it increases to 8,500 over the next two years.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. And the factor that the ministry applies to that number, is it basically a multiplier of, you know, like two and a half? Looking at the 7,250 number and the conservative ballpark of 18,000.

Mr. Repski: — Yes, as the minister indicated, it's not an exact science. Depending on who gets nominated, the variables in play are largely family size, composition — do you have a spouse, do you not — and so it is a variable. It's around 2.2-ish, but that can fluctuate depending on the circumstances that we have.

Ms. A. Young: — Thanks, Deputy Minister. I think what I'm trying to get at with these questions is basically as the ministry plans and looks to target and increase the number of people choosing to call Saskatchewan home, what those targets are going forward, in which I assume the easiest way for the ministry to do that is using numbers. And so if that is available for the next year, what the ministry is working towards, even on an annualized basis going forward, it would be great to have that information.

Mr. Repski: — So when we're looking at the allocations for SINP, it is done in conjunction obviously with the federal government. And so it is an allotment. We can make a request. Sometimes it's met; sometimes it's not. And so for this upcoming year it is 7,250 that we've been allotted. Over the next couple years, we are going to be getting up to 8,500. And then after that, we're not sure what that's going to look like yet. And of course you can apply a different multiplier effect to what that's going to look like.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah, and I would maybe just add as well to Clint's comments. We've been long advocating for an increase to our PNP numbers. So it had been 6,000 for a number of years — probably five, six years — where we had been consistently advocating for an increase in our allocation. For whatever reason, the federal government hadn't made any significant increases, you know, across PNPs if you look in the aggregate across the country.

What they had been doing with their gradual levels increase was allocating to federal streams, so Express Entry, and I mean different federal classifications and streams. And I think they've had fluctuations that have been fairly significant, but on refugee numbers as well have been an element that has been not insignificant over that period of time as well although that has fluctuated in different fiscal years for different reasons.

So you know, having the increase that we had from 6,000 to 7,250 this year is really, you know, something that I think we can take a degree of pride in, in that we have really been working and making the case as to why we were in a position to be able to manage, administrate, and successfully settle an increased number. And you know, really this is up to the federal government as to the numbers and allocation that they want to provide to each province and through each PNP.

So the fact that we have one of the largest provincial nominee programs in the entire country despite the fact, you know, we have a . . . I would just say this. Our PNP program is, in proportion of the national allocation, far in excess of our population. And it's a reflection of the fact that we have a program that has demonstrated the ability to process successfully large numbers of applications that has done so competently, that has done so with the objective of having very high program integrity standards, which is something we take very seriously as well. All of that has led to officials at the federal immigration department and making, you know, recommendation ultimately

to their minister, which was accepted, that we have an increase in our PNP number.

But I mean I think where the member's going is seeking kind of a global estimate as to annual population. It's a challenging thing to do because I mean we have our PNP numbers. We have slight variations in the multiplier that we have on our PNP allocations per nomination. We have a variable as far as the number of additional PNP nominations we will be allocated at the end of any given year. We have varying streams of federal immigration programming that we are not always aware of what that levels are going to be.

I would say that if we're looking at a kind of 30 per cent proportion of federal settlement being . . . or federal migration settling here in the province of our 100 per cent total, that will mean that we'll see a proportionate increase there as well. And then you have refugee elements to that which we don't know. We find out, you know, after the fact on refugee resettlements. Feds have been doing, you know, not insignificant amounts of that as well. And then, you know, you have kind of the variable too, with the number of Ukrainians who would be settling under CUAET [Canada-Ukraine authorization for emergency travel] visas in the jurisdiction also.

So there's a lot of variables in all of this, but the trend has been, you know, very clear. I mean we've been seeing record levels of population increase quarter to quarter for the last year. So you know, will that continue? I suspect that we're going to continue with significant population increases though going forward. And you know, we fully expect to hit our 1.4 million target.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you, Minister. And yeah, that's an accurate assessment of kind of the angle of my questions, is establishing a sense of, you know, the numbers that the ministry uses in planning and what those look like on a year to year going forward and how that informs the planning work that you do do specifically in regards to career and employment services.

What is the number of refugees who were settled here last year, both those recognized by the federal government as well as the number of Ukrainian refugees?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah, well as I kind of said earlier, the number of Ukrainians we estimated about 4,100. We'll see if we can find the federal numbers here.

So it's a good question. There's been significant fluctuation on . . . [inaudible] . . . So I'm not going to go through every year but I would say between 2007 and 2015, it'd be fair to say there are about 550 what we call GARs. But what it means is government-assisted refugees, and about 175 privately sponsored.

So this is a federal program but, just for those who are watching, the government-assisted refugees are refugees who are generally brought to Canada through the efforts of a number of different federal departments, but are brought to Canada in that regard or enter the country as government refugees. What that means is that the Government of Canada is responsible for providing settlement support services and funding for the first year of settlement for those refugees who arrive as government-assisted refugees. So that means — I mean we have a number of different ways that we fiscally manage this with the federal

government — but basically they pay for year one.

There have been instances where they have paid for two years in doing this as well and that was a part of some of the argument that provinces had made with regard to federal initiatives to hit targets as far as refugee evacuations at different points. The Syrians being one example where provinces said, okay, well it's fine, I mean, we're prepared to play our role and provide settlement supports and that. But I mean, federal government, you have made a policy decision to increase the number of refugee arrivals by a significant amount above what had been historical numbers, so therefore you need to help us for two years, not one.

[16:15]

And a lot of these settlement supports are fairly intensive for government-assisted refugees. And the reason being is that, unlike in economic migration streams, the selection process doesn't include determinants of settlement success, so that would be language, training, education, those sort of things which we look at, provinces and federal government look at when going through economic migration streams.

So GARs generally have a much more difficult time attaching to the labour market and finding settlement success because it takes longer for them to be able to meet some of the threshold requirements for attachment to the labour market. So that's the policy reason why the Government of Canada provide the first year and in some cases have provided up to two years of settlement support funding.

The other stream of refugees are privately sponsored refugees. And what that basically means is that individuals, groups of individuals, organizations will say, hey, you know, we see a need based on — you know, Syria might have been an example of that too — where we want to be a part of this; therefore we have put together or collected donations, but we believe we can support 1 or 5 or 10 newcomers or a family from a country in significant strife where people are forced to flee, and therefore we will sponsor them coming to Canada.

So they would be not government-assisted refugees in that circumstance. They would be refugees, but they would be privately sponsored, meaning whatever group, organization, or individual sponsored them would be required to provide that same degree of settlement support that the government would be if they were GARs. So just kind of by way of background.

So it had been a fairly stable number. In 2015-2016 those were the years that the federal government had made the commitment on 25,000 Syrian refugees being resettled in Canada. Of that, you know, we could break down the number of Syrians, but we had a very, very significant number, proportion of refugee settlements being Syrian in those years.

Nearly 2,000 GAR settlements in Saskatchewan over '15-16, and like I said, between . . . Historically it had been, you know, 400 to 500 in any given year, so very, very large numbers. PSRs [privately sponsored refugee] held steady, you know, around 200 per year thereabouts. And then from '17 to '21 the numbers basically returned to what the historical number had been, so you know, probably on average 4 to 500 GARs per year in

Saskatchewan.

We had a couple of years where the number of privately sponsored refugees really spiked higher — over 500. So that was in 2018 and '19. And there were a variety of reasons for that, but there were a significantly higher number of privately sponsored. And then in 2022, so last year, there were over 1,200 that were government-assisted refugees. And that, I think, was a reflection of the Afghan evacuation and resettlement of government-assisted refugees of which again, happy to do it, but Saskatchewan was, you know, significantly overrepresented as far as the proportion on GAR resettlements.

PSRs were very high as well, near 700 last year, and I'm not sure if there might have been PSR Ukrainian sponsors. There are kind of dynamics in that that are a little different. So last year was actually the highest year that we have ever had for refugee resettlement though, nearly 2,000. And that does not include the 4,100 Ukrainians as well. So far and away the largest number of refugees that we've had resettled were last year.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you and sorry, that specific number from last year was?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — 1,906.

Ms. A. Young: — 1,906. Thank you. So moving on perhaps to job placements. How many clients in receipt of provincial income support were actively placed in jobs this past year?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah, so with regard to, you know, how people in our programs are tracked, we do keep data on that. With regard to the question though, that would be best put to Social Services. They have responsibility for that particular program.

As far as our programs, we have, you know, all of the data as far as labour market attachment through apprenticeship training for example or the number of partners that we have that deliver a lot of the programming that we do. But I'm sure, Ken, if you want to maybe speak to it a bit more.

Mr. Dueck: — Sure. I can speak to the number of referrals that we get. So last year we had 6,532 referrals from the Ministry of Social Services. We do keep track of employment statistics but it's by program. So it would be depending on what employment program that individual was referred to, and then we could kind of provide some employment outcomes from them participating in the program.

Sometimes the program is simply to get them closer to the workforce and not necessarily directly into a job right away but perhaps improving some of their skills so they're closer to the work environment. So by program, we could provide some statistics on their outcomes but overall, not so much.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. And just to make sure I'm understanding, the ministry tracks the total number of referrals and would've done so year over year. But in terms of actually following the individual, that is specific to the programs . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Perfect. I would love to have those figures, certainly for this past year and even, if they're available, for the last five years for comparison's sake.

Does the ministry track how many of these were SAID [Saskatchewan assured income for disability] recipients specifically?

Mr. Dueck: — We don't get into the specific social services streams that get referred to us. It's simply they're referred to us from Social Services and we keep track of that.

Ms. A. Young: — Interesting. Okay, so I suppose the reason for my question is noting that there wasn't a change in this budget for the employment assistance programs for persons with disabilities. But the number of individuals in receipt of SAID in this province has increased dramatically.

Are there other things that the ministry is doing to assist in moving individuals with disabilities into employment?

Mr. Dueck: — So the ministry provides employment assistance for persons with disabilities, programs and services which are designed to address the impact of disability on participation in education, training, and/or employment. The program received significant support, with approximately \$9.9 million in '23-24. This program had a significant impact on persons with disabilities in the province. As of February 28th, 2023, 2,420 participants exited programming with over 1,000 completing, 762 finding employment, and 249 going on to further education or training.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. And is that information that the ministry as well tracks year over year and, as such, would be available?

Mr. Dueck: — Yes, we would track that year over year.

Ms. A. Young: — So looking at other groups that the ministry specifically focuses on in terms of connecting to meaningful employment, does the ministry track how many immigrants would have been placed in jobs or connected to jobs on a year-to-year basis?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Clint and Ken can maybe speak to that a bit. I mean part of the provincial nominee program through a number of the different streams, a requirement is actually having a job offer as a part of the application. It's not through the entire program. There's human capital applications that are considered as well. But that is a requirement, and it's a requirement in a lot of the federal economic streams as well.

So labour market attachment generally is very, very high amongst PNP nominees and federal economic stream migrants. And you know, reasons for it is that, you know, you're selected largely through the economic migration streams for your ability, in addition to other factors, but your ability to settle successfully based on labour market attachment is a significant consideration. So that's one element.

One of the things we have, you know, really worked on very hard, and I'll take the opportunity to talk about it here, is around credential and foreign qualification recognition. This is an area where, you know, you hear it talked about all the time in provinces and nationally. We are really leading the country on this. And the ministry has put a tremendous amount of work into finding practical solutions that are going to work for newcomers

with qualifications and credentials that were obtained internationally.

And you know, it's often talked about in the context of, well why can't we just recognize them? I mean I would just say this is what many areas of public policy . . . If these things were easy, they would have been solved a long time ago. And they're not easy, and the reason they're not easy is because you have 160 or 70 regulatory bodies that have rules and qualifications and requirements for having a credential recognized, which are valid. The reason that regulators have provisions in place is to make sure that there is a standard of work that those who are accredited members of the organization are going to be able to reach. And that has rationale from public safety to, you know, integrity of infrastructure components. I mean there are valid reasons why, very valid reasons why regulators have provisions in place that limit who can be an accredited member of the organization.

And in large measure, domestic training programs, so those within a province or even nationally, are geared towards making it possible for their graduates to be accredited for whatever profession or skill that they are being trained in. Makes sense. The challenge is when you obtain education in a trade or qualification outside of Canada, the training and education you receive in another country is geared towards being accredited and recognized in that country which may be to a different standard — again, for good reason in that country — that is different than here.

So how do you get to the point where you can have that foreign-obtained qualification that was trained differently — the education system set up differently, perhaps a different scope of practice, a different reason for which training was undertaken — how do you get to the point where you can have folks who are trained getting their qualification recognized? And how can you make it clear what the path for that recognition is?

So two years ago we passed the enabling statute that would allow us . . . And that was the foreign qualification and labour mobility fair practices Act. Something like that. I forget the exact name. I'd say Clint named it, so it was very bureaucratic.

Mr. Repski: — I think it was Ken actually.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — But I mean, the objective is that we would have a legislative legal framework that would enable us to work with regulators to get to that point where we wanted to get to. And I would say that the vast majority, overwhelming majority of regulators want to get there too. But this really gave us the authority as a ministry to get to that place where we could have those discussions.

So based on months of work, I mean we did probably 6 or 8 months of consultation after the statute was passed in the development of the regulations, working with regulators, all of them, in what would be an appropriate service standard, number one.

[16:30]

And by service standard, I mean if you are a newcomer, you have a qualification you obtained in the Philippines or you obtained in Ukraine. You submit that application, but you would have a

service standard in which you would get an answer. You would be guaranteed to get an answer.

So we did that and we worked with regulators about what was possible, what was reasonable. You know, I think we got to a place where, you know — not necessarily everybody was able to reach that point right away but we're going to get there because it's now the law — that if you are making an application from within Canada, credentially obtained in Canada, you have 20 days you are guaranteed to get an answer. If you were trained outside of Canada, you are guaranteed to get an answer within 50 days. And we gave more time simply because there is more work that goes into assessing an international credential, but we were the first province in Canada that had a universal standard for having a credential adjudicated by a regulator.

In addition to that, we went further. A regulator, if the answer is not positive — meaning they say we're not able to accredit you — the regulator is required under our regulation to provide a detailed rationale as to the reason the application was not successful, and in addition to that is required to provide a recommendation for a remediation path. So if the answer is no, here's why and here's what you need to do to have that credential recognized.

We went even further than that. So in the health care field we have provided — we just announced it about a month ago — a fund, up to \$6,000 of funding for those in the health care field that we will support their training to have their credential recognized. So you get an answer. You know what the timeframe is. If the answer is no, you have a path to get it fixed, and we will as government support you in getting that fixed.

We are the only jurisdiction by far that has this system in place. A number of provinces are directly copying us right now, which is great. I mean, you know, imitation is a sincere form of flattery. But a number of provinces are directly copying what we did in this regard. But I mean, we did the work on this and we really blazed the trail on this.

So in addition to that, what we're going to see through our fair registration practices office, and this is where I've, you know, really kind of been excited for the next number of years here, is we're going to be getting almost a real-time view of applications that are going into regulators, and applications that are either successful or not successful and the reasons that they're not successful. So we'll get a very clear picture over the next couple of years as to where applications are being rejected and why. That will allow us to really develop programming, whether it be micro-credentialing programming, working with Sask Poly, working with regional colleges in putting together courses or other training opportunities, or directing training opportunities for newcomers that will really be streamlined.

The other part of what this office is going to do is work as a navigation and pathfinding service directly with . . . We will know whose applications aren't successful, we'll know why, and we'll be able to work directly with those individuals to get credentials recognized and help them pathfind perhaps where there might be other opportunities, you know, whether that be in the health care field or other places where their credential would fit well. So you know, that's going to be a bit of a build-out as to how the office goes, but that's where I want to see the office go

over the next number of years.

But again this is an area where really nobody else is doing what we're doing and, you know, where we're being directly copied. I mean, ministers at our FPTs have just been kind of taking notes of what we're doing. And they actually have copied our legislation word for word in other provinces, which is fine.

But that's kind of the answer as far as newcomer credential recognition.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. Thank you, Minister. That's a great initiative and one that I know we all look forward to following as it assists in people moving into the jobs for which they are well suited and educated. But the question was around how many immigrants were actively placed in jobs this past year. So I guess, does the ministry track how many immigrants were actively placed in jobs this past year as compared to five years ago?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah, I mean Clint will have the number here. But I just kind of want to clarify again. I mean, I said it at the beginning of that response, but through almost all of the economic migration streams, there is a job as a part of the application. So we see very high levels and rates of labour market attachment.

Some of the areas actually where we have challenges are around the federal human capital streams, where it goes to some of the challenges with the federal government and how they do adjudication on economic resettlement success efforts in that they don't understand how the actual human capital lines up with either labour market demand or with regulatory requirements in certain areas. So that's actually been the area where we've found some of the most challenge.

But, Clint, do you want to speak to kind of the specific here?

Mr. Repski: — Sure. So when we look at placed, I would just change the language a little bit and just say, how many are employed. And so we do it on a five-year basis. So if you've been in Canada for under five years, that's how we track the employment rate for people who have been here for under five years. And the employment rate in Saskatchewan through all streams of immigration is 79.2 per cent.

Ms. A. Young: — And that's for this past year?

Mr. Repski: — '22.

Ms. A. Young: — '22. And that information is available going back five years as well?

Mr. Repski: — I believe so, yes.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. How many EI [employment insurance] clients were actively placed . . . were employed in jobs this past year as compared to five years ago?

Mr. Repski: — That would have to be directed to Social Services. As Ken indicated earlier, we look at it in a bulk stream. We wouldn't look at it from that level of specificity.

Ms. A. Young: — And the Ministry of Social Services, to your knowledge, would have that information?

Mr. Repski: — I don't know.

Ms. A. Young: — Circling back to our last two . . . Oh, I'm sorry.

Mr. Repski: — That's okay. I'm not sure. We would have to seek clarification.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. Circling back to the reference on labour market planning, could the minister please describe how labour market planning is undertaken right now in the province?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah. I mean, again our officials can kind of speak to some of the projections and the look-aheads. I mean the short answer though, I mean I think Clint and Ken would say the same thing. I mean, the short answer is that we really do have shortages in the labour market right across almost all employment categories or occupation codes. So it's kind of a challenge right across the entire board. What I've said is, you know, how are we going to work with employers in addressing some of the challenges that we have?

And it really has to be an all-of-the-above approach, and that means making available training for more of our own folks here at home. And you know, I think we saw in this budget, a significant increase in seats — 400 more in the trades alone. We continued, you know, record funding for labour market programming delivered through third-party partners. I think today we announced our funding for, you know, Regina and Saskatoon skills and trades for example. That's, you know, one of our partners in program delivery.

But I mean, the short answer is that we're going to have and we do have shortages right across the board. And you know, we use some of the tools that we have at our disposal, for example through our PNP program design that is focused on some of the areas where we've had, you know, probably the most significant and acute challenges, a lot of which have been in what we call hard-to-fill skills. So that has been, you know, a not insignificant program redesign in our PNP as far as the allocation to our hard-to-fill skills stream. Under SINP I think, you know, nearly 2,000 I think we've allocated to hard-to-fill skills under that program, which we work closely with our partners in the private sector in identifying the challenges we have in different parts.

But I mean, the reality is that we're facing labour market challenges basically across the board. I think we have, you know . . . I didn't look in the last little while, but we've had, you know, 20,000 postings on SaskJobs.

Mr. Repski: — I think it's 16,000.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Is it 16,000? Yeah. You know, it's been over 15,000 for a long time, postings on SaskJobs which, you know, is a reflection of the fact that there are employers who are seeking employees and, you know, very large numbers of applications through our SINP program. You know, these are good challenges to have. I would say that.

Having labour market shortages are better than the opposite which, you know, has been unfortunately the case through much

of the province's history. So having the challenges we've had in the last, you know, 15, 16 years, it's a pretty good one.

But that being said, we continue to be focused on it. We work with partners in identifying where there are challenges. But I'm not sure if the deputy minister and assistant deputy minister want to say anything as well.

Mr. Repski: — So it's a really large question when you look at the overall labour market of the province. Obviously we've got a lot of employers looking for a lot of employees across the province right now, and the way that we're trying to address it as a ministry is we're taking a bit of an all-hands-on-deck approach to this. And we're doing it through a number of different ways.

So we talked about what the numbers are. Obviously we get a lot of statistical information from Stats Canada and other sources just to identify where are the gaps, where are the pressures that we have moving forward. And then we try to marry that with a lot of the story. So we work very closely with a lot of employers across the province through our employer services work that we do, and then we try to fill that gap as best we can. Because it does fluctuate. I'd love to see it be a straight line, but that's not always the case.

A perfect example of that was as the minister indicated, when we were really coming out of the pandemic, there was a huge need, through our statistical information, around a lot of the hospitality and lower skilled worker positions. Previous to that there wasn't a stream to bring immigrant talent in to help fill that gap, so we created one. That's the hard-to-fill skills gap, which has been just wildly popular with a lot of employers across the province because that is the in-demand professions that we have.

But then we also look at a number of different streams as well. So based on that data, we will look at our skills training. And so you'll see in this budget that we will have allocated dollars for our skills training programs, including apprenticeship and our regional colleges across the province.

And then, as the minister indicated, we also look at things like labour mobility. So we have some people who need their credentials recognized, so how do we source them and how do we get their skills recognized so that they can enter the job force? And we continue to monitor the labour market information on a very regular basis and then try to adapt our programming as the market changes.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you, Deputy Minister. And at the more local level, how is that local and regional information incorporated into labour market planning?

Mr. Smycniuk: — Darcy Smycniuk, assistant deputy minister. Thank you for the question. We have a labour market intelligence information function within the ministry that really works to do a lot of analytics and analysis of labour market data, whether at the national level, provincial level. We try to incorporate that with local information collected through industry or through employer associations. Post-secondary institutions are a major source of information for us in terms of what's happening in their local delivery areas, along with other delivery partners in the systems.

So all that information is collated and collected and analyzed, observed on, insights are provided, and we share that back with all of those organizations.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you, sir. Could you speak perhaps in a little bit more detail about that local piece? Is it just individual employers who are engaging perhaps through their BIDs [business improvement district] or their chambers of commerce as well as the post-secondary piece?

Mr. Smycniuk: — Yeah, there's a number of ways to engage with that. We have pretty regular engagement with the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce, Regina chamber. There has been a northern labour market committee which has industry representation, post-secondary institution representation, representation from all levels of government and local communities.

And all of that information from those partners, whether it's collectively or individually if we're working with a specific employer on their specific needs . . . When you think about the private sector investment happening in the province right now, part of our work is engaging with those employers and understanding exactly what their labour force needs are going to be over what period of time, sequencing some of the information that we have in terms of when are they going to need a particular type of labour or skill set or occupation, and making sure that we have the different streams that we have available — whether that's training or international recruitment or credential recognition — available for them.

[16:45]

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you very much. There's a reference to the SaskJobs website numbers. I can't remember, 15 or 16,000 jobs posted on there. Help me understand. Is each job posted only once on SaskJobs? Or is it potentially posted in multiple locations, specifically if it's, you know, for example, a remote working position?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah, I can answer that. A pretty straightforward answer. They're all unique jobs.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. So by way of example, if there's an adjuster for SGI [Saskatchewan Government Insurance] posted in North Battleford and one posted in Meadow Lake and one posted in Regina and one posted in Saskatoon, and the job posting indicates that the individual can work from any location, those are all unique job postings, each job on SaskJobs?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yes.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay.

Mr. Smycniuk: — Yeah, they're all unique job postings but they could be for multiple positions.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. How many basic education seats will be funded through the regional colleges, Indigenous institutions, and Sask Poly this year as compared to five years ago?

It goes without saying if this information isn't at the tips of your

fingertips, readily available, I'm happy to receive it in writing at a later date.

Mr. Smycniuk: — Sorry, I don't have a five-year comparison on those numbers. Yeah, this year . . . I have the budget amounts for those institutions. And you were looking just for the Indigenous institutions, DTI [Dumont Technical Institute] and SIIT [Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies]?

Ms. A. Young: — And regional colleges and Sask Poly as well.

Mr. Smycniuk: — For regional colleges? Yeah, the budget for each of those institutions is the same as last year. There was no increase to them. It was a status quo budget overall. So the college totals is about 11,200,000. Sask Poly is just a little bit under 8 million; DTI is 2.2 million; SIIT, 2.65 million. And then there's a little bit of money for GED [general equivalency diploma] programming in the province as well.

Ms. A. Young: — Perfect. Thank you. And those budget amounts all quoted were for basic ed?

Mr. Smycniuk: — That's correct.

Ms. A. Young: — Does the ministry track the number of seats?

Mr. Smycniuk: — We do, yes.

Ms. A. Young: — You do. And is that information available for this year compared to five years ago?

Mr. Smycniuk: — We would have enrolment numbers for '21-22. We don't have for the current fiscal year because that fiscal year is not closed yet, or the academic year is not finished yet.

Ms. A. Young: — But that number is tracked by the ministry and is available?

Mr. Smycniuk: — Yes.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. And how many clients in receipt of provincial income support were enrolled in basic education this most recent year that you have data for, as compared to five years ago?

Mr. Smycniuk: — For the essential skills or ABE [adult basic education] programs, we do not have specific information with respect to the number of people in receipt of the new education and training incentive which was administered by Social Services this year.

Ms. A. Young: — And sorry, you're referencing the former PTA [provincial training allowance]?

Mr. Smycniuk: — That's correct.

Ms. A. Young: — And am I to understand your ministry doesn't have those numbers retrospectively for the past five years, or just that they don't have them going forward?

Mr. Smycniuk: — We would have the number of individuals who were in receipt of PTA in the training programs up to '21-22.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. If that information could be made available, that would be great. Does the ministry have information as to how many of those would be SAID recipients, again also today to five years ago.

Mr. Smycniuk: — We would not have access to that type of information.

Ms. A. Young: — Would the ministry have that information in regards to how many EI clients were enrolled in basic education?

Mr. Smycniuk: — We don't have that information as well.

Ms. A. Young: — Does the ministry track how many immigrants or newcomers would be placed in basic education year over year?

Mr. Smycniuk: — We know that the program is available to them. Historically the ABE program has been, I would say, oversubscribed by our Indigenous or First Nations population around the province, those looking to obtain essential skills or acquire their grade 12. We haven't seen a lot of newcomers into the program to this point in time.

Ms. A. Young: — Is that information that the ministry tracks? Like is there like a self-declaration box to help the ministry gather kind of more demographic background on the people?

Mr. Smycniuk: — It's not an indicator that we have used because historically, as I say, the program has been aimed at our Indigenous population.

Ms. A. Young: — Does the ministry track what the completion rates are for clients that attend the basic education programs?

Mr. Smycniuk: — Yes, we do track completion rates.

Ms. A. Young: — Would that information be available for the most recent year tracked as well as going back five years?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah, I'll maybe address this one. So you know, we've had a degree of variation in enrolments over time, and obviously during the COVID time period, we saw a decrease in the number of enrolments into the ABE programming. I would say that, you know, we've seen some variation in completion rates as well, but it's around 64, 65 per cent on average. And last year it was 63 per cent so, you know, basically right on what that average had been.

And I mean, we track kind of the further education rate too. So there are those who will go through an adult basic education program and use that as a springboard to obtain further training whether that be through, you know, one of our institutions or, you know, different elements of training, which generally is very high, which is very positive. I mean that's really what we are seeking and hoping, that those learners who go through ABE will be prepared to do.

So last year the further education rate was 70 per cent, so it's very, very substantial. So what we are seeking to do through ABE is providing the foundational skills for those who go through the program to be able to access further programming and ultimately enduring stable, long-term labour market attachment, which, you know, has been traditionally I think quite successful.

The other thing I would say around adult basic education has been that we have delivered this programming in what has been, by national standards, quite a unique way. I think we are the first province in Canada that actually delivered provincial adult basic education on First Nations. And at this point, a substantial proportion of our adult basic education resources and programming are delivered on-reserve. I think it's over 20 per cent actually, something . . . yeah, that are delivered on-reserve.

And we gave this direction, you know, relatively, quite early on, and the reason being that there are very real challenges for a lot of folks — I mean I know from northwest Saskatchewan — to relocating. I mean there just, there really are. And that's why we took the programming to where people live, and you know, with the intention that we can provide foundational skills and tools for those who are wanting to improve their educational position and ultimately, because of that, improve the quality of their life and the life of their family.

And those foundational skills again, we designed this such that the conditions would exist for those who go through that foundational programming to obtain skills that are further and in excess of what would be delivered in an ABE program. And I said 70 per cent last year for further education, which is not out of line. I think historically it's probably been in the high 60s, but 70 per cent last year is something we're really quite encouraged by.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. And with that 70 per cent going on to further education, is there a matching measure that you track for those who pursue employment?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Well I mean there are an element that pursue employment right out of the ABE element too, so we do track it. So those who complete the program — and this is within 60 days is how we kind of calculate it; I think it's within 60 days how we calculate this — just under 20 per cent went into employment. Well this year it was 17. But it's been, you know, it's usually around 19, 20 or thereabouts that go directly into the labour market within 60 days of completing ABE, 70 per cent going on to further education.

So you know, those who are going through the program are, you know, by and large, the vast majority are going on from there into either the workforce or further training. So that's how we track it, though.

Ms. A. Young: — Perfect. So am I right in understanding that between the 70 per cent and the 19 or 20 per cent, about 90 per cent of individuals completing this are going on to either further education or employment?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah.

Ms. A. Young: — Oh, that's fantastic. Circling back, I think my first question kind of under the category of basic education was around how many seats are being funded this year. And I understood it's consistent year to year. Has there been a change in enrolment numbers that your ministry would track? I'm specifically thinking of some of the changes to the PTA.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Well, I mean there have been some fluctuations in enrolment. I mean, we saw a decrease in

enrolments during COVID. I mean, that was one of the challenges that we had. So you know, 2021 which was kind of that period of time, enrolments were just under 5,000. Last year, they were 6,000. And we don't know yet the data for this year. In 2007-08 for example, they were 5,700.

So you know, it's gone a little bit, year to year, up and down but we don't know the numbers this year. There was a very large increase last year over the COVID year, which had seen a decline though from the year before by about 1,500. So you know, there's been fluctuation that has to do with, you know, factors that are kind of common to all of us, I guess.

Ms. A. Young: — Perfect. But that tracking year to year of the enrolment numbers is something that the ministry does have?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Oh yeah, we track the enrolment numbers. I suspect it's on our website.

Ms. A. Young: — How many training seats will be funded through the regional colleges and Sask Poly this year as compared to five years ago?

[17:00]

Mr. Smycniuk: — You know, with respect to the seats, it's a bit of a difficult comparison year over year because the makeup of the programs can change based on what industry requires in those delivery areas. So those programs and the seat allocations to them are approved on an annual basis through the multi-year business planning process with the colleges.

Ms. A. Young: — And does that planning process then report outwards? Like instead of asking you for all those numbers, are those reports publicly available then?

Mr. Smycniuk: — They would be available on the regional college annual reports, yes.

Ms. A. Young: — All right, so individually through each regional college?

Mr. Smycniuk: — That's correct.

Ms. A. Young: — And again, perhaps to save us some time then, would it be comparable to some of the past areas we've discussed in which EI clients would not be tracked individually by this ministry? Those in receipt of provincial income support again would not be tracked? SAID would not be tracked? Okay.

So perhaps looking at the provincial training allowance, obviously there's been changes in terms of how it's administered and where the responsibilities lie. Could you describe these changes and how they've concluded this past year?

Mr. Repski: — So for the PTA program, as we had mentioned earlier, Immigration and Career Training transferred that program officially over to Social Services in July. So that was a process that took a little time to transfer over.

There's a bit of history behind why that is. We took a look at what was the easiest for the client, as a lot of the clients who were using the program were flipping between training and not.

Instead of enrolling them and re-enrolling them and transferring back and forth between ministries and systems, we felt it was best to house it within Social Services. Already a lot of consistent client base, and making sure there's no interruption in payment and service, it would have been just easier.

So that was some of the genesis behind why we made that transfer over. So that was officially done in July. So when we were looking at, you know, how did it perform, as we were tracking, similar to enrolments there is usually a pretty good correlation between the two things. In terms of this current fiscal year, because the year isn't quite done yet, it's hard to say what impact the change from PTA to ETI [education and training incentive] has had yet. We're working with Social Services to do the analysis, but it's a little early to say impacts yet.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you, Deputy Minister. And I'm hearing that your ministry is working on analyzing this transition?

Mr. Repski: — Yes, we're in conversations with Social Services to keep on top of what that transition looks like.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. What impact has this had on clients thus far?

Mr. Repski: — In terms of the impact, it's really hard to say at this point in time. Like I said, we are doing some of the analysis. It is a little bit early to say. What we looked at as the program was being designed was, are our benefit levels comparable? And they are. Some aspects of the program have seen a bit of lift. But in terms of impact of client, honestly we would have to defer to Social Services.

Ms. A. Young: — Thanks. In terms of some of those benefit levels or rate changes, were there winners and losers? And if so, you know, who benefited the most and who would have been negatively impacted?

Mr. Repski: — As I indicated, when we were going through the program design of the ETI program, which took over for PTA, the level of funding was the same or slightly increased with this year's budget. So in terms of enhancements it would, without getting into any specific cases, that would have been an increase across the board if not the same level of funding. You shouldn't have seen decreases.

Ms. A. Young: — So getting into those specific cases, then there would be an increase in each of them?

Mr. Repski: — That would have to be a question for Social Services.

Ms. A. Young: — I guess then, how does the provincial training allowance in terms of administration and benefits compare to SIS [Saskatchewan income support]?

Mr. Repski: — The PTA program was always designed to be a bit of an enhancement over regular social services programming. It was designed with an intent to give a bit of an encouragement, a little bit of an enhancement for people who are going into training. So there is a, I'm going to say, a moderate enhancement over regular benefits.

As I said, we ceased delivering that program in July. Is that going to continue? Again, I would have to defer to our sister ministry.

Ms. A. Young: — And are there any changes or impact anticipated for the apprenticeship training allowance?

Mr. Smycniuk: — The question was around the \$1.2 million increase to apprenticeship training allowance this year. That is really meant to support the increased number of apprentices that are going to be going through the system this year. And it accommodated a rate increase of \$75 a week for apprentices who are needing to have a second residence while they live away from home or while they participate in training programs.

Ms. A. Young: — Perfect. Then forgive me, there's no impact on that for recipients in terms . . . There wasn't a relationship between the PTA and the apprenticeship program?

Mr. Smycniuk: — No. Two separate programs.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. Does the ministry have a case management system?

Mr. Repski: — Can you be a little more specific?

Ms. A. Young: — So looking at people who would be, I suppose, considered clients of the ministry, job seekers perhaps would be a place to start. Does the ministry have a case management system?

Mr. Repski: — I think the gist of your question is, do we have sort of a centralized database of all the clients that we come into contact with? The answer would be no, we don't have one big large system. Within our branch structure within the ministry, within our skills and our SaskJobs offices, immigration, they all run separate systems.

So as we were indicating earlier in our conversation tonight, as we were talking about earlier, we do keep track of it at a local level by varying degrees. So there isn't one comprehensive system that everybody within the ministry uses to identify and track and follow. It's broken up by service line.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. Given kind of the relationship between your ministry and the Ministry of Social Services, is there any system or IT [information technology] solution, I guess, that the ministry uses to track referrals from the Ministry of Social Services and follow up with those clients?

Mr. Repski: — So we obviously get referrals from Social Services. Some of them enter our programming and some don't. And as we had talked about before, we have varying degrees of how we track it. I wouldn't suggest it's comprehensive. We do share information back and forth, but it's not as a robust IT system that I think you're asking about. It's just more of a shared piece of information.

Ms. A. Young: — So there's no like formalized structure or anything that the ministries use to communicate back and forth?

Mr. Repski: — No. No, for EI recipients, they're automatically referred to our offices. Sometimes we will do some of the reach-out to those clients to get them the services that we provide —

résumé-writing skills, job placements. Other times the clients will seek us out as they're prone to do.

Ms. A. Young: — Thanks, Deputy Minister. So then how does the ministry track success in terms of moving people from provincial income support to employment? How does the ministry measure those outcomes?

Mr. Dueck: — Ken Dueck, acting assistant deputy minister. So similar to the answer previously, we track these things by program area. And so you know, for example, we consider somebody going on to further education to be a successful interaction with one of these folks. We have been working with the Ministry of Social Services over the last couple of years on interacting with clients that are closer to the workforce than perhaps have more stability challenges or other challenges that maybe wouldn't make them quite ready for the labour market yet.

We're still in the early days of seeing results from some of that work, but certainly that's something that we're working closely with them on. But again our success rates are really, you know, did they enter into what programs, what action plans did they undertake, and what does success look like for each of those applicants based on those programs.

Ms. A. Young: — And at the program level, that is tracked at the individual basis, like client by client.

Mr. Dueck: — Yes.

Ms. A. Young: — And so then again, just to make sure I'm understanding in terms of when we look at people moving off of income support into some form of employment, that's not necessarily tracked on an individualized level or in a formal way through this ministry.

Mr. Dueck: — Yeah, not in an individualized way like that. Sometimes people drop out of an action plan but that doesn't mean that they didn't find employment. That just means they stopped talking to us about it. So we can lose track of them in that way.

[17:15]

Ms. A. Young: — What funding change was provided for CBOs [community-based organization] this year?

Mr. Repski: — So within the ministry's budget this past year, we don't have a blanket CBO lift that you'd see in some other ministries. Instead we have targeted enhancements that we do, and we do that through our procurement process. So as an example, we had a \$4.8 million increase around our settlement services this year, so to deal with volume. So we do give lifts, as it were, for volume across the different groups, but our increases are done through procurement practices. So we would identify what the need is, we would tender that out, and they would bid on it. So it's not an inflationary enhancement as such. It would be done on a contract-by-contract basis.

Ms. A. Young: — If the CBO is funded by the ministry then year over year and that there's been no tendering out, then they would hypothetically at best receive the same funding as year previous?

Mr. Repski: — Yes, that's right. Unless there was a volume increase, they'll be under the terms and conditions of the previous agreement. And then when we tender it out, we would expect that any sort of financial pressures they're experiencing would be reflected in their bids.

Ms. A. Young: — And forgive me, Deputy Minister. When you talk about tendering it out, it's tendered through like a formal process that's posted?

Mr. Repski: — Yes. It's an official program, yes.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. So then specifically to the money provided to CBOs that provide immigrant support, is it possible to describe the amount that was provided comparatively by the Government of Canada versus the Government of Saskatchewan? And again, you know, if available I'd ask for it over each of the past five years, specific to what the feds fund versus the province.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah. No, I'll maybe take that question. So with regard to settlement funding, this has been one of the areas of the immigration accord that we proposed to the Government of Canada where I would say that, you know, we've had significant support from other provinces as well, and where I really do believe that ultimately the federal government are going to — as they did with workforce development agreements, labour market agreements — transfer the funding that they put into the space to provinces to deliver services through third party and partners.

Feds right now put about \$40 million into . . . Well they partner with third parties to deliver services in the province. We increased our settlement resource funding by about five . . . four and a half million dollars this year. Yeah, nearly \$5 million this year, so we're at about just under 15. So in total, between the federal and provincial governments, there's about a 55 . . . \$54.8 million allocation. I'm not sure. We don't actually always know exactly what the federal government is putting in either, but it's around 40.

So you know, what we have seen on occasion is that there is a challenge in coordinating some of the services that partner organizations deliver as far as program design between federal and provincial governments. You just see overlap. That's what you ended up seeing in labour market programming as well, which was really what was the trigger for the federal government to just kind of say, okay, provinces, again, you know your labour market better; you know your local circumstances better; we're transferring you those resources and you deliver the programming. And there would be reporting requirements and those sort of things that went along with the labour market agreements. That is where we want to see the settlement funding end up as well.

This is exactly what is done in the province of Quebec, where as a part of the Quebec immigration accord, the federal government allocates settlement funding to the Government of Quebec, who then partner for delivery of settlement services with partners that do the actual delivery of the programming. It's worked well. I think the Government of Quebec would say that it has been a model that was successful.

It has been done that way actually as well with other provinces historically. British Columbia and Manitoba both had bilateral agreements with the Government of Canada, where the federal government would transfer settlement funding resources to the provinces to deliver the programming. That changed some while ago and the federal government took back authority over settlement allocation of funding, which I think was a mistake. And I've said publicly that I thought it was a mistake for them to do that.

Where we want to land, and again a part of the immigration accord that Quebec has, is authority over that settlement funding to be delivered through the Government of Saskatchewan. And I would say as well, as far as the per capita allocation of settlement funding per newcomer that the Government of Quebec received, it's far in excess what other provinces actually get. And by far in excess, like orders of multiples over what other . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Yeah, how much? . . . Six hundred and eighty million that the Government of Quebec gets from the federal government for settlement services.

So you know, even on a per capita number, per population of province and number of newcomers, it's probably five or six times what we would get for federal settlement funding. I don't have the numbers in front of me exactly but something like that.

A Member: — We get about 40 million from the feds.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah. Yeah, but I mean the kind of apples-to-apples comparison. So anyway what I'm getting at is that we want control of settlement funding. Other provinces, it'd be fair to say, are in that same place as far as having control over settlement funding.

And what this really is about, I mean the reason why provinces are seeking control over this is looking at the Quebec model. And Quebec will be the first ones to say, we have had better settlement outcomes. We have had better outcomes for newcomers, which is what this is all about. It's about making sure that people have the best chance of success who are relocating to a new jurisdiction in Canada.

We just know our labour market better. We know our regulatory agencies. We know our processes. We just are closer to it. We know it better. And that's why really immigration ministers from across the country are on the same page.

I think the federal government . . . I'm not going to speak for them, but I think that there is legitimate consideration being given to this request. And it's going to be something I can assure the Chamber we will be pursuing. As the Co-Chair of the Immigration ministers' FMRI, Forum of Ministers Responsible for Immigration, we are the Co-Chair this year. And this will be a priority item as far as what we pursue because we think it makes sense, and ultimately who it needs to make sense for are newcomers. And we need to get the best outcomes we possibly can, and we believe that this is the way to do it.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you, Minister. That's very interesting. You mentioned the 5.4 million number, so with respect to the money provided to the CBOs in Saskatchewan for immigrant support, is the amount available that's provided by the federal government and the Government of Saskatchewan for each of the

past five years?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — I mean the short answer is that, I mean you'd have to review the federal public accounts. I mean they don't report to us what they are allocating. I mean I think it's been around \$40 million over the course of the last number of years. We'd have to . . . It's their number, so they would have to report that out through their public accounts.

But our number, you know, it'd be fair to say has been increasing. I mean we've had contracts and relationships with the providers on this for a long time. With this substantial increase this year . . . And again really a reflection of the fact that we're going to be having, you know, a significant increase in our PNP. And that we have had, you know, significant increases in the both refugee and also on the Ukrainian front as well. That is really a big part of the reason why we have done the additional allocation of resources.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. And our hearing the federal numbers are not available, are the Saskatchewan numbers specifically available?

Also happy to receive them at later date.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — The short answer is, we don't have the five years. I mean, again, they're available publicly. I think we have it on our website. I'd look it up right now or officials would, but we only have a few minutes left here.

You know, we try and match this to the number of arrivals. And you know, substantial increase in this year's allocation. So I would speculate, with the proviso that I may be corrected when we look at the numbers, but you know, it was nine last year, went to 14 or nearly 15 this year and . . . Or was nearly 10 last year, went to nearly 15 this year, and I suspect it would be around that same number . . . Eight and a half, yeah. Okay. Around that number.

Ms. A. Young: — Thanks, Minister, and really, really saving this question for last, inappropriately. But in terms of new immigration agreement that you pursued with the federal government, is there anything in particular that you think the committee should be aware of as it relates to this year's budget or priorities and strategies?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah. No, I could take quite a while on this one, but seeing as I only have a couple of minutes . . . We have spent a lot of time working on this, and I want to give a great deal of credit and public recognition to our officials who did some really, really good work on this.

I had it here somewhere. But I mean it's a very detailed document that we worked on, Ministry of Justice officials, lawyers worked on as well. We have made very significant progress, and I think the federal government have been reluctant in acknowledging the specific reason for which they have made changes, but stunningly they are very in line with the core provisions of the immigration accord.

You know, the numbers that have been increased are not quite to where we wanted but are getting very close over the three years for our PNP number. On the control, on the selection front, significant strides have been made in that regard. They have

really moved out of the field on the adjudication on the economic grounds of success selection criteria, which really is kind of central to the whole thing. They've kind of deferred to the province on making that determination, which hopefully will speed up their admission processing times as well. It remains to be seen. They have been horrendously slow on that, which I could talk about at length too but I won't. So they have really given a lot of that authority on selection on the economic front to us.

On the settlement funding we just talked about, I think we've made some very real ground on that or at least the discussion has been advanced significantly, and I intend on advancing it more significantly over the next year as well.

[17:30]

And on the other element which was our desire to have control over the family class criteria as well, I think that one they are less prepared to move on. But I think ultimately they likely will move there too. That one's going to be a longer term process though. There are some challenges there. But just being very clear that that is a federal government decision to not give the province control over that particular element.

But I do see that we're past time here. So maybe I'll just say my thank yous very quickly then, Madam Chair, with your indulgence to say thank you to you, Madam Chair, to committee members. Thank you very much to our officials who are just great, do a wonderful job. I can't tell you how much I appreciate the work they do. Special thanks to Clint who I'm going to miss, I can tell you that. But with that, over to you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: — Ms. Young, if you have any closing remarks you'd like to make.

Ms. A. Young: — Just thanks very much to the officials for their care and professionalism in preparing tonight, those present as well as all those working behind the scenes. And again, Clint, have fun. Thanks for all your service.

Mr. Repski: — Thank you.

The Chair: — So having reached our agreed-upon time for these estimates, we will now adjourn consideration of the estimates for the Ministry of Immigration and Career Training. We will recess until 5:45.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

General Revenue Fund Trade and Export Development Vote 90

Subvote (TE01)

The Chair: — Welcome back, committee members. We will now consider the estimates for the Ministry of Trade and Export Development. We will begin with vote 90, Trade and Export Development, central management and services, subvote (TE01). Minister Harrison is once again here with his officials.

I would ask that officials please state their name before speaking

at the microphone, and their titles. And if you just raise your hand, Hansard will turn on your microphone when you're about to speak.

Minister, you can begin by introducing your officials and provide any opening remarks you may have.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Great. Well thanks very much, Madam Chair, and thanks committee members for being here this evening for the 2023-24 budget for the Ministry of Trade and Export Development.

Seated to my right, Deputy Minister Jodi Banks; and I'll introduce Richelle last — and there'll be a reason for that — but assistant deputy minister of international engagement; Kevin France, behind; assistant deputy minister of economic development, Tyler Lynch; acting assistant deputy minister of strategic policy and competitiveness, Rob Swallow; executive director of marketing and communications, Jay Teneycke; and exec director and CEO [chief executive officer] of the Saskatchewan Indigenous Investment Finance Corporation, Matt Smith.

And today we have with us the former now, assistant deputy minister of international engagement, Richelle Bourgoin, who I think committee members well know. Richelle, actually it's her first day as deputy minister at Immigration and Career Training, so we figured that this would be an appropriate send-off is to do estimates on Monday evening.

But I really, really look forward to having Richelle serve in the role as deputy minister at ICT, but I can tell you that I am going to deeply miss Richelle as ADM [assistant deputy minister] at TED [Trade and Export Development], and I think I speak for all of us in the ministry in saying how much we're going to miss Richelle, but how much we have appreciated the tremendous contribution that she has made as ADM.

And there are just . . . I could go through the whole list, and we're going to have a bit of an opportunity to do that tonight. But Richelle really has been central to the development of this ministry. So I want to just thank Richelle, and I know she's going to do great at ICT. So I lose here, but you know, as Minister of ICT, gain in that role as well.

Ministry of Trade and Export Development is proud to advance economic growth to generate wealth and opportunity in Saskatchewan. TED, which is the acronym for Trade and Export Development, facilitates a cross-government approach to attract investment and grow export markets which ensure the province remains competitive on a global scale.

We foster and support a competitive business environment, facilitate trade, and strengthen Saskatchewan's international relations. The past year was significant for us in terms of positive outcomes both here in the province and internationally, which in turn means great opportunity for the people of this province in the years ahead.

Through our ministry's work we have seen incredible growth when it comes to key economic indicators. This past year we broke our export record following a record year in 2021. We thought 2021 was a great year, and it was, with \$37 billion worth

of exports. And our excitement was even greater when we saw over 41 per cent growth in 2022 for a total value of \$52 billion in exports.

Saskatchewan is once again leading the nation in one of Canada's key growth indicators and just today we got more great news. Our economy grew by 5.7 per cent last year and that's real GDP [gross domestic product]. The nominal GDP growth was tremendous as well, but the real GDP growth, 5.7, largest GDP growth in the country.

That growth is thanks to the hard-working people of this province. Agri-value exports are a major component of that \$52 billion. And for the third consecutive year, we're seeing record agri-value exports, valued at \$18.4 billion, thanks to the hard work of Saskatchewan's producers and processors.

When it comes to more jobs and more opportunities for the people of this province, those numbers speak volumes. This year we're already leading the nation in many key economic indicators. According to Statistics Canada most recent releases, we're number one in the nation in year-over-year merchandise exports and housing-starts growth for the first three months of 2023, second in the nation in wholesale trade growth for February compared to over the course of the last year, lead in manufacturing sales and investment in building construction. We also have the third-lowest unemployment rate in the country and we're seeing record population growth in the province to over 1.2 million people. These outcomes show we're on the right path.

This economic success shows we're making great progress when it comes to our goals outlined in the Saskatchewan growth plan. Through the hard work and dedication of the province's businesses, entrepreneurs, and workers, we're on track to meet and even exceed many of our ambitious goals by 2030. These include creating 100,000 new jobs, increasing the value of our exports by 50 per cent, growing Saskatchewan's agri-food exports to \$20 billion, expanding private capital investment in Saskatchewan to \$16 billion, increasing the number of international markets to which we export more than \$1 billion, and crushing 75 per cent of the canola that we produce here in this province.

What these numbers show us is that our strategies are working — like I mentioned previously, our economy grew by 5.7 per cent last year — specifically, our international engagement strategy as we continue sharing Saskatchewan's story with the world. Our international presence continues to attract significant interest from our global partners to this province. Last year, Saskatchewan supported over 100 incoming international delegations focused on exploring increased investment, trade, immigration, and partnership opportunities.

In the 2023-24 budget, TED announced an increase of \$1.6 million focused on international relations. 1.4 million of this increased funding was approved mid-year and used toward the operation and maintenance of the Germany office, which was opened for business on April 1st of this year.

Germany is an important market for us because it's the economic and manufacturing heart of Europe. It also has the fourth-largest economy in the world, representing incredible opportunity within Germany as well as access to the European community. Recent

world events, including the war in Ukraine, have highlighted the global need for secure and stable food and energy products, particularly in the European Union.

Germany is a key member of the EU [European Union] and hosts many of Europe's major trade fairs and exhibitions. Setting up this office will provide exporters and investors with increased support to further navigate business opportunities and increase trade. With the addition of this office in Germany to our network, Saskatchewan now has a total of nine international offices. Other offices include China, India, Japan, Mexico, Singapore, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, and Vietnam.

The remaining \$205,000 of this year's increase to the international relations budget is provided to strengthen and explore new opportunities for trade with our single largest trading partner and closest neighbour, the United States. In 2022, exports to the US [United States] exceeded \$29 billion, yet another new record for us in Saskatchewan. So to say Saskatchewan's relationship with the US is an important one would be an understatement. That's why this increase in funding will go toward the establishment of a dedicated unit within the ministry focused on US relations. More specifically, the unit will focus on agriculture, energy security, and critical minerals.

Most recently the Premier attended the SAFE [Securing America's Future Energy] Summit in Washington where he took part in a panel on critical minerals and mineral processing, two areas where Saskatchewan has a lot of expertise to offer. These types of events are essential in allowing us to share our story with potential investors and business leaders. They're imperative to highlighting the great Saskatchewan products and plentiful, high-quality natural resources we have.

Speaking of our natural resource sector, the Government of Saskatchewan recently announced Saskatchewan's critical mineral strategy. This strategy is important now more than ever before. As the world grows and technology advances, it's important to appreciate and understand what we need to drive that change. Critical minerals are essential for a growing population, national security, and energy security across the globe.

Within that strategy, the province is committing to four goals that inform our priorities over the coming years. These goals include increasing Saskatchewan's share of Canadian mineral exploration spending to 15 per cent by 2030; doubling the number of critical minerals produced in Saskatchewan by 2030; growing Saskatchewan's production of potash, uranium, and helium; and establishing Saskatchewan as a rare earth element or REE hub.

Where this strategy touches on work being done by Trade and Export Development is on that fourth goal. We're taking a three-track approach to establishing the province as a North American and global rare earth element hub. First, we'll leverage the Saskatchewan Research Council's position as a leader in rare earth processing. Next, we'll prioritize private sector development in all phases of sustainable rare earth element production and processing. And finally, we'll continue pursuing opportunities and partnerships as governments seek to secure supplies of rare earths.

I'm happy to report that these are all things we're already doing in Saskatchewan, and we look forward to doing even more. We're committed to fostering a competitive business environment and offer a suite of incentives and tax credits making our province one of the best places in the world to do business.

To continue to support economic growth in the province, this year's budget provides up to \$2.2 million through a minimum revenue guarantee through the Saskatoon Airport Authority to support a US direct flight. WestJet and the Saskatoon Airport Authority announced this new direct flight from Saskatoon to Minneapolis in February of this year. It's exciting news for our province, especially for the tourism sector and our economy, because we understand the need to support opportunities that will strengthen our economy and benefit all Saskatchewan citizens. This direct flight is a breakthrough that will position Saskatchewan to regain important US hunting, angling, and outfitting markets as well.

The province understands the importance of tourism as a strong revenue generator. With over 1.2 million people in our province, that's more people than ever before, needing connection, connection to good jobs, services, opportunities, and of course travel. So that's why our government is pleased to work with the airport authority to offer this minimum revenue guarantee.

Trade and Export Development also recently announced \$450,000 in funding to Economic Development Regina and Saskatoon Regional Economic Development Authority. The funding will be used by the organizations to develop sustainable growth initiatives and implement engagement strategies to grow the provincial economy.

[18:00]

CEO of Economic Development Regina, Chris Lane, said:

This initiative is about being proactive with the opportunities for our city and province. For the first time we have economic development agencies and the province working in lockstep to identify, qualify, and bring investment and growth to everyone.

This investment allows us to leverage the expertise of the province's two largest regional economic development agencies. By working with our partners, we can better support economic development initiatives and support capacity building province-wide. That allows us to ensure provincial economic growth that works for everyone.

In other good news for Saskatchewan, Louis Dreyfus Company recently announced an expansion for their canola crush facility in Yorkton. This expansion will more than double the facility's current capacity to 2 million metric tons. This investment shows their confidence in the province's producers and the world-class canola we grow here. And it means more jobs for the Yorkton area and Saskatchewan farmers.

This announcement in conjunction with the other canola crushing projects announced in 2021 puts us on track not just to meet but to exceed our goal of crushing 75 per cent of the canola produced in the province. That means we're on track to exceed this growth

plan goal seven years early.

In terms of investment interactions, 2022 was a big year for us in Saskatchewan. We facilitated 29 new investments into the province which will add thousands of jobs here at home. Some to note include investment from Nutrien to increase production capacity in the province, Cenovus Energy's commitment to a steam-assisted gravity drainage oil extraction project, upgrades and improvements associated with the restart of Cameco's McArthur River mine and Key Lake mill, Dunkley Lumber's commitment to increase production and expand their Carrot River saw mill, and many more.

This is what we call growth and success for the people of this province. And it's all due to the investors seeing Saskatchewan's great potential and acknowledging that we're one of the best places in the world to do business.

Our budget also provides continued support to advanced economic reconciliation through the Saskatchewan Indigenous Investment Finance Corporation. The SIIFC launched in 2022 offers up to \$75 million in loan guarantees to support Indigenous equity ownership of major projects in mining, energy, oil and gas, forestry, and value-added agriculture.

To further economic reconciliation in Saskatchewan, Trade and Export Development's Indigenous economic development branch hosted the second annual Indigenous Business Gathering in February of this year. More than 500 people from Indigenous and non-Indigenous businesses, municipalities, Crown corporations, and government ministries gathered for this event. All of them with one thing in common — they are all looking to develop supply-chain procurement and partnership opportunities.

Enbridge's vice-president, Colin Gruending, who provided the event's keynote address, had this to say about the SIIFC:

We applaud the Government of Saskatchewan for its vision in creating a new organization to steward Indigenous investments in the energy and agricultural sectors of the province.

Participants at the event also spoke highly of the opportunities the event provided. Tina Rasmussen, chief business officer for Meadow Lake Tribal Council industrial investments was in attendance, and said, quote:

How often do you get to talk to an Enbridge or get to talk to a BHP? You don't just pick their numbers out of the telephone book. You've got to be able to meet them somehow face to face, and this just provides that opportunity perfectly.

So when you look at Trade and Export Development's initiatives as a whole, it's clear that while we're focused on the economy, we're also focused on people. We're prioritizing connections and building relationships. And we're growing our economy at a nation-leading pace, whether that's internationally through our network of offices, or right here at home. What we're doing is connecting business leaders and Saskatchewan companies with the people they need to ensure our economy can thrive.

And we're already seeing our hard work pay off. Because of that, Saskatchewan continues to see record exports, increased recruitment and education opportunities, countless trade and investment partnerships, and even more funding for research and development.

What does that do for us in turn? It creates more success for the great people that call this province home. More exports and more investment means more jobs for our citizens and economic growth for the province. This budget allows us to build on previous successes as we engage existing partners and new innovators to see Saskatchewan's potential. This work will lead to more people, more jobs, and more opportunity. And that's growth that works for everyone.

Thank you, Madam Chair. My officials and I would be pleased to answer any questions from members of the committee. Thank you.

The Chair: — Thank you, Minister, I'll open the floor now to committee members. And I'll recognize Ms. Young.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you, Madam Chair. So the Saskatchewan economic growth strategy announced in November 2019 set out a jobs target of 100,000 jobs for the coming decade. Just to clarify and confirm, this target applies to the period from January 1st, 2020 to December 31st, 2029?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah, so basically the data that we used in the growth plan — we put it together and released it in 2019 — was based on the data that we had had from the previous calendar year. So 2018 was the year generally that is the base for which we used in the plan for growth.

Ms. A. Young: — Thanks, Minister. So to clarify, it goes from then January 1, 2018 to December 31, 2028?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Madam Chair, I don't have it right in front of me, so we can review and provide the specific details.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you so much. So recently there's been discussion, both in the legislature and online, specifically around merchandise exports. Noting in Saskatchewan specifically, they've increased for January, February year over year. Is that correct?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — All right. So, Madam Chair, apologies for the delay. Usually we can . . . [inaudible] . . . into the nuances of month-to-month or whatever numbers. So we have the merchandise export numbers here, annualized. Then we have kind of our top export destinations and commodities that comprise those exports.

So the most recent number has us up 32 per cent in February '23 compared to February 2022. So you have, from February 2022 to February 2023, Saskatchewan ranked second or first nine times amongst the provinces for year-over-year growth in merchandise exports; 2021-2022 merchandise exports, 41.5 per cent increase, second amongst the provinces; 2012-22, merchandise exports increased 65 per cent overall.

So you know, our top 10 countries we export to: US, China, Brazil, Indonesia, India, Japan, Bangladesh, Mexico, Malaysia,

Italy. So those are the top 10. Top 10 products: potash, crude oil, wheat, canola oil, canola seeds, lentils, peas, canola meal, agricultural machinery, and barley. So yeah, we've had . . . The export numbers have been relatively steady. From '16, 26.5 billion; '17, 28.7; 2018, 30.7; 2019, 29.7; 2020, 29.8; 2021, 37.1; and 2022, 52.5. So those are the export numbers.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. And in the messages being shared, do those reflect an increase in export volumes, or an increase in the value of exports from Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah, it would be really a combination of prices that have been strong in some commodities, but we've seen significant volume increases as well. So ag commodities, for example, there have been very, you know, very significant increases in the volumes of our ag commodities that we have been exporting from Saskatchewan over the last number of years, you know.

And I think you kind of have to look at these things over time to get a good picture of kind of the increase in volume. You know, we probably have that here, but anyway it's been a combination there. You know, we've seen a steadily increasing increase in the quantity of export of potash from the province as well, which is reflected in the fact that we've seen, you know, significant increases in production here. New mine at K+S coming on stream, and then very, very large capital expansions that have been undertaken on a brownfield basis as well.

We've been seeing relatively strong prices in the potash space, but you know, not by any stretch record in that space which there have been, you know, fluctuations in regard to that. Yeah, I actually I have it. There was about a 100 000 tonne increase in production as far as potash year over year last year. There was about a million barrels extra of oil production. Salt production increased. Looks like an increase in uranium production as well. Very large quantity of increase in wheat exports by, you know, went from 8.8 million tonnes to 14.7 million tonnes.

And then lentils, a very large increase as well, 27.9 to 38.6. Canola, just seed, went from 6.7 million tonnes to 9.5, so very large. To barley, 2.4 to 3.5. So you know, in ag commodities it's fair to say that there have been very, very large increases in volume, slightly less so probably in oil and potash but still increases in volume. But price has been healthy in that regard as well.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. So when these are being discussed and put out publicly by the Government of Saskatchewan, is it consistent then whether the ministry is reporting those in either export volumes or the value of the exports?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Well I mean the data is published by Stats Canada, so the ministry doesn't publish the data. You know, we may amplify the data, but Stats Canada is the collector and publisher of the data.

[18:15]

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. So for our primary exports, our top 10 I believe is what you were reading from. What percentage or portion of the increase in value of exports was a result of price

increases? And what percentage was a result of volume increase?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Well we have to do some serious mathematics here on the spot. I mean it's StatsCan data. So I mean, like I said, it's a combination of the two. Just kind of looking at it right here — and I read out some of the numbers — very, very large volume increases in ag commodities which has led because of the volume increase. There have been higher receipts as well in that regard. Increase in volume on crude oil and also on potash resulting in, you know, increases as well on that value because of both a bit of . . . I mean there was price, but it was volume-based as well.

So you know, it's hard to kind of break it all out, and we could. The data exists online on Stats Canada's website. So folks could break it down, but we really don't have that broken out here right in front of us.

Ms. A. Young: — So and then in setting up the goals for 2030, did the government consistently choose the value of specific commodities or the volume?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — So I mean it's a bit of a complicated answer because it's kind of based on both, right. So the growth plan goal as far as value of the exports, I mean we talk about the value of the exports. So that is, you know, the wording, but that's really predicated though on an increase in production. I mean you can say that, well we're going to increase the value. You don't expect to do that just on price. I mean that's, you know, really not how things work.

So I mean there might have been . . . and especially global commodities that are traded in the way that ag commodities are or oil or energy products. I mean these things go up and down, so really I mean it's both. But baked in is an increase in the volume of production. I think we talked about some elements too on the production targets for growth. And we don't have it all right in front of us right now, but short answer is that there's really both elements included as a part of what we're striving to achieve.

Ms. A. Young: — So having heard that, but certainly looking at Saskatchewan's exports and some of the changes that have taken place even in the past year, which have certainly been unexpected — I mean, the price of potash has doubled; the price of oil is another that I would note — what impact is this having on the ministry's reporting out of these? Is the ministry looking at an increase of volume or an increase in value?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Madam Chair, I think I've addressed that. I mean, it's a bit of both, right. I mean, the value which is what we do talk about as far as the target, specific target on export growth is the value, but that really takes as an underlying assumption the condition precedent, if you will, that there's going to be an increase in volume of production as well.

So you know, as far as kind of the price of commodities, I mean, we've seen significant fluctuation in that space, even in the last year. I mean, the commodities obviously increased significantly, not entirely across the board but through most, in the aftermath of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. You know, we saw that on spot markets. We saw that in the energy sector. I would say, though, that we have seen a stabilization, at least as far as the

volatility in a lot of those sectors. You know, in ag commodities, for example, I'd say that there's been a stabilization.

The energy space. I think Brent's under \$80 today on oil. WTI [West Texas Intermediate] is probably in the 75, 76. I didn't look in the last little while today. I look regularly, but I think it was about 75, 76 on WTI today. WCS [Western Canadian Select] which is really the wellhead price we get for a lot of what we produce here would be in the mid-50s if it was 75. The differential's running about 20 right now.

You know, that's not 200. A lot of analysts were predicting Brent to 200 in the immediate aftermath of February of '22, and obviously it didn't go there. And, I mean, there's a lot of reasons for that, but you know, in potash production there was significant production that was initially taken offline. And there still seems to be production that is offline in Belarus, although we don't really know. I mean, part of the challenge in that space especially is that there's a highly opaque way that potash is produced in Belarus and Russia as far as quantity.

But it is still, even with markets closed to Belarusian and/or Russian potash, there still is a number of markets to which those countries can export production. And I think it'd be fair to say they are. China, for example, would be buying Russian potash in very large quantity. These are all very opaque sort of business transactions. So we don't actually know a lot of what's going on there, and you know, there are reasons for that.

But the market as well, I mean, is going to be filled. So you know, we would be selling our potash that we're selling right now. It moves around, and you know, Canpotex does a great job of marketing internationally. So kind of to the question, it's a combination, and there are a lot of complexities and a lot of variables that go into a lot of these things.

Ms. A. Young: — So when setting up the goals and actions looking forward from the Saskatchewan economic growth strategy, is there an underlying expectation or assumption for inflation that was built in for the coming decade?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — I would say, I mean, talking about kind of inflationary elements built in, I mean the Bank of Canada has a target inflation rate. They've had the same target for a very long time. Obviously that target was substantially . . . The reality of where inflation was and is running right now is substantially over where that two-point target was.

I think all of the indicators are showing that the inflationary pressures that were existent are mitigating, and I think there's reasons for that. The clearest one though is kind of interest rate policy, which the bank has been aggressive in increasing rates, and you know, have been I think very forthright in telegraphing to the market their intention to bring inflation back down into the target band.

You know, I think last month core inflation was running just over three. I think you're going to see headline inflation rates come down over the next two months pretty significantly. And there are kind of actuarial reasons why you're going to see that, which I won't bore people with, but there are likely to be a significant headline rate-of-inflation reduction in the next two months.

So you know, how does that manifest itself as far as our growth plan targets? I mean will there be . . . Rates, I mean, being increased have a tangential impact on investment decisions, time cost of money, kind of, putting into these things. So there are impacts. It's difficult to kind of really measure in a deeply specific way though when you are not . . . And nobody has the crystal ball as to know where that number's going to be in three months or six months or three years.

So I mean what we predicate planning on is target rate, target band. You know, it's the same process that every other government in Canada would use with regard to that, you know, federal government included who have, you know, a great deal of the responsibility for why we are seeing inflation running at where it has over the last year.

And you know, there's been some discussion in this House actually about inflation. I think there's a bit of a misconception about what inflation actually is. I mean the reality is, is that inflation occurs when the supply of money in the economy exceeds the rate of growth of services and goods produced by the economy. That means basically in layman's language, it's more money chasing the same stuff, which means it costs more. That's what happens.

The creation of money is something that no provincial government has any role in influencing. It's entirely a function of central bank decisions which are highly influenced by fiscal policy of the Government of Canada. So what that has meant in practice is QE programs, quantitative easing programs, which were really flooding the system with liquidity — meaning making money — prior to COVID, which was designed to prevent what I think some felt were potential deflationary pressures in the system.

But when you couple that with very, very significant fiscal expenditures from the period 2020 to, well, continuing by the Government of Canada . . . They claim Minister Freeland has been, you know, I think she's been trying to telegraph a tightening on expenditure from the GOC's [Government of Canada] perspective. And the reason for that is basically to manage expectation on the inflationary part of the ledger and their fiscal policy part of the ledger. Bank of Canada have been using their monetary policy, which is interest rate increases, to manage on their side, on the money supply end of it.

So you know, all that to say that we don't really know where inflation is going. But I think the indicators are, and I think analysts would concur, largely that the BoC's [Bank of Canada] target of returning to a 3, and then eventually to a 2 rate band is likely reasonable. But I mean, there are still things that could happen.

Ms. A. Young: — Interesting. So going back to when these goals and actions were set, was there a specific number, an expectation or assumption that was set that was used for inflation as you looked forward?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Well no, like I had said, Madam Chair, you know, we take the Bank of Canada's target rate as being the expectation for inflationary increase. Every government in Canada does.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay, so going back to that date — we'll figure out whether it was 2018 or 2020 — it would simply be that rate for that date then?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — So the Bank of Canada has a target rate for inflation. They've had the same target rate for a long time. I don't know what . . . It'd be two or three decades. I mean, the target rate for inflation has been 2 per cent. They then use their monetary tools as a central bank, often working in conjunction with other central banks, to use the levers that exist, that central banks have, to maintain a 2 per cent target inflation rate.

So they will work together on these things and coordinate response. You saw that probably most apparently during the global financial crisis where central bank heads and ministries of finance represented by national ministers of finance were in almost constant communication about coordinating response from the central banks and federal finance departments to, at that point, avert a global evaporation of liquidity in the financial system.

[18:30]

That kind of happened during COVID as well actually. There's going to be some really interesting academic work that comes out of this. There's been a lot that came out of the global financial crisis, which I think really informed the response of central banks and federal finance departments during that first March-April period of COVID where there was very, very real concern of an evaporation of liquidity in the system leading to the complete seizing of supply chains, which nearly happened during COVID actually.

What happened though is the central banks and finance departments basically flooded liquidity into the system — primarily central banks did. The US Fed put more liquidity into the financial system in the third week of March of 2020 than they did in the entire year of the global financial crisis. Nobody's actually written or recognized this; I'm not sure why. It was a remarkable response, but it really saved the system from falling apart at that point.

So anyway, question, you know, what's the core inflation rate . . . or sorry, the target inflation rate is 2 and that's what central banks use.

Ms. A. Young: — Thanks. A real master class on monetary policy and public financing for the thousands of people watching at home, and I think some great suggestions for doctoral theses.

Moving on perhaps to the airports. The initial media reporting indicated that the province provided a revenue guarantee to WestJet as part of an agreement to establish that regular flight between Saskatoon and Minneapolis. However my understanding is that there are two agreements: one between the Saskatoon Airport Authority and WestJet — which contains the revenue guarantee — and a second between the government and the Saskatoon Airport Authority providing grant funding. Is that accurate?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yes, I think I kind of went through this too when we first announced it. But our agreement is with

the Saskatoon Airport Authority. So what this is basically is a guarantee ultimately for the airline. That's the agreement between the SAA [Saskatoon Airport Authority] and WestJet that they would, you know, be guaranteed a certain amount of revenue on the flight to Minneapolis from Saskatoon. The maximum value of that is up to \$2.2 million. You know, the reality is it could be anywhere between zero and 2.2 though. We really don't know. I mean that's going to be dependent on passenger loads and a whole host of other factors, but primarily on passenger loads on the flight between Saskatoon and Minneapolis.

Question, and I've said this publicly on the record as well, that the same quantum of the MRG [minimum revenue guarantee] provided to the Saskatoon Airport Authority is and has been made available to the Regina Airport Authority, who we continue to work closely with. And I would say the RAA [Regina Airport Authority] has been very, very assertive in exploring opportunities for a connection to a US hub from the city of Regina. You know, I think that there has been some very real and significant progress made. Saskatoon Airport Authority though was first, I guess, in the space of being able to solidify and secure an agreement with an airline to a US hub, in this case, Minneapolis.

So you know, we've moved into the space. I mean the reality is that this is something that other airports and other governments have done as well in order to secure air access for their communities. And you know, I realize that not everybody viewed it as being the ideal solution, but we really felt it was necessary to secure access from our major cities to US hub cities for a host of reasons, you know, not least of which was economic but also lifestyle reasons.

You know, we heard a lot of folks who were questioning as to why this . . . or advocating for this to happen. We worked with the airport authorities to do this, and you know, we'd been working with them for some period of time to make sure that we had a reasonable path forward. And we think we do. And you know, we're going to continue to work with the Regina Airport Authority on this as well.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. And apologies if I misheard. Minister, did you say that the same money had been allocated to the Regina Airport Authority?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah, that's right. We made available the same funds to the Regina Airport Authority — are they, were they, when they do secure an agreement to access a US hub city.

Ms. A. Young: — And sorry, which subvote is that in?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — No, that is not allocated because it hasn't been spent. But we will obviously return to the House if we have a need to allocate those resources in-year. It'll be through a supplementary appropriation.

Ms. A. Young: — And the amount was an amount not to exceed \$2.2 million over a three-year term, correct?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — No, it's 2.2. Yeah, annually.

Ms. A. Young: — 2.2 annually for three years. Can you advise

how the minimum revenue guarantee was determined and how your ministry assessed the requested guarantee in terms of value for money?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah, I mean we had been working with both airport authorities for some period of time. And so we were very aware of some of the discussions that were under way that the Saskatoon Airport Authority was having. You know, the discussions that we had had with the CEO, you know, we kind of indicated what we felt would be reasonable from a Government of Saskatchewan perspective. And what they ended up coming back with, as far as the deal that they had reached with WestJet, was within the parameters of what we had felt would be a reasonable investment from the Government of Saskatchewan.

So you know, really we had no kind of direct negotiation with WestJet or anything like that. We had worked with the airport authority on the process. And you know, they were very, very good, as have the RAA been. Regina Airport Authority has been very, very good about keeping us updated about discussions and options.

And you know, I would just say, by way of background, it's a tough market out there to attract flights. And there are a bunch of reasons for that, and a lot of them have to do with, I think, declining numbers of pilots, staff shortages that have really impacted the industry across North America for sure. Changes in kind of some of the FAA [Federal Aviation Administration] regulations have been problematic for some of the airlines as far as maximizing their return for staff time. It's not that they wouldn't have been necessarily successful on certain routes; it's that they were more successful on other routes, and they had limited resources because of staff and equipment allocation issues to make the decisions that they did.

To the question though, we had been working with Saskatoon Airport Authority. We continue to work with RAA about what might be possible.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. And the minister referenced, I think, the process . . . essentially going that the ministry had come up with like a ballpark figure for what would be feasible for supporting the airport, and then the Saskatoon Airport Authority came back with a figure that fit within those parameters.

Are you able to provide what those parameters were? Just in terms of getting back to that question of, you know, how did the ministry go about deciding value for money?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah, no. I would say it was kind of more organic as far as a conversation about different potential options that airport authorities were looking at and what numbers might look like as far as different options. You know, we kind of had felt that the area where we landed was a reasonable place to land.

And you know, I communicated that to the CEO. But that was kind of at the conclusion of the process. Tyler really had been working, doing a lot of the groundwork with some of the officials at the Saskatoon Airport Authority as well. And this was not kind of an overnight thing; I mean this played itself out over a significant period of time.

You know, when the SAA was able to secure the arrangement with WestJet, I mean they knew that we were prepared, given what that outline of that agreement looked like, to be in support of that. And I'm not even entirely sure whether WestJet was aware of that or not. But yeah, we weren't kind of directly involved with WestJet on it. So anyway, that was kind of a bit of a more organic process than just a proposal.

Ms. A. Young: — And when was that agreement reached between the airport authority and WestJet?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Okay, so we're not actually entirely sure of the date that the Saskatoon Airport Authority reached their agreement in principle with WestJet. I mean, that was kind of their agreement. But you know, it would've been late January, somewhere around there, and we're, you know, understanding that discussion. And the other part of this to remember, too, I mean the Saskatoon Airport Authority had skin in the game on this as well in that they waived all of the landing and terminal fees for this flight as well. So you know, there were a number of elements to all of this.

I'd spoken to Mayor Clark about this as well on a couple of occasions prior, so the city of Saskatoon were highly aware of, you know, all that was going on as far as discussion. But I don't know the exact date that WestJet and the airport authority kind of came to their formal agreement, but they told us in that kind of period, late January or early February. We, you know, concurred and confirmed that we were going to be there as we had discussed, and I think we did the announcement on February 17th.

Ms. A. Young: — And when did the ministry begin working with the Saskatoon Airport Authority on this? I think you referenced it being like the work of months.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Oh, I mean it's like working on the particular arrangement that came to fruition or working on kind of the overall challenge. I mean we've been working with the Saskatoon and Regina airport authorities on the overall challenge for a year, well probably two or three years we've been working with them. And they've been keeping us up to date on different options and elements to all of this.

I'd say the municipal governments have been kept apprised as well as far as those same discussions. So it's like I alluded to earlier; this was not a kind of overnight sort of thing. This was a lengthy process, but you know, we're not doing the negotiation with airlines. I mean, that's the expertise and really what the airport authorities do and are very adept at doing so. You know, this was the one though that the airport authority felt was the right fit for them and for the city of Saskatoon and the airport.

[18:45]

Ms. A. Young: — Does that agreement between WestJet and the Saskatoon Airport Authority have any verification mechanisms or audit requirements?

Mr. Lynch: — Tyler Lynch, assistant deputy minister for the economic development division. So the agreement is subject to some confidentiality between the airport authority and WestJet, but we do have with our agreement with the airport authority

some regular reporting mechanisms built into it — so funds, if the revenue guarantee is triggered around a six-month reporting period — but they will be providing regular updates on the overall performance of the flight on a regular basis.

Ms. A. Young: — Can you detail those a little bit more in terms of regular reporting on the flights? I'm unfamiliar.

Mr. Lynch: — Monthly with the airport authority.

Ms. A. Young: — So with this agreement between the ministry and the Saskatoon Airport Authority, can the SAA use that funding for any other purpose than the WestJet flight from Saskatoon to Minneapolis?

Mr. Lynch: — No, it's specific to that flight.

Ms. A. Young: — And can you confirm for me, Minister, which subvote contains the funding for the SAA agreement with WestJet?

Mr. Lynch: — It would be the economic development division's subvote.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. So now moving back to the structure of the agreement between WestJet and the SAA, are there, hearing what you've said about confidentiality, but are there any mechanisms built into it that would create, say an incentive for WestJet to minimize the use of the minimum revenue guarantee such as, you know, advertising to attract customers?

Mr. Lynch: — So I think both the airport authority and WestJet are working very closely together to make certain that that flight is successful. They're coordinating on some marketing activities and looking at some other elements where they can work together. So I think some of that work is happening.

Ms. A. Young: — And is any of that, are you aware, any of that contained within the agreement, or are there any specific mechanisms built in?

Mr. Lynch: — As part of the agreements between the SAA and WestJet? I'm not certain.

Ms. A. Young: — Does the structure of the agreement between WestJet and the SAA adjust the amount of the guarantee should the flights not occur, you know, for example in the case of inclement weather, mechanical failures, or say something such as like ongoing labour unrest or strikes?

Mr. Lynch: — So again the details of that agreement between those two parties are confidential. But I think again both WestJet and the airport authority are committed to the success of the flight, as we are as well. And there's efforts being made to make sure that each and every flight is successful, notwithstanding unforeseen circumstances of course.

Ms. A. Young: — So hearing that that is confidential. And you know, this was an area that I believe there was some agreement between government and opposition in terms of the need to act to support our airports.

Can I have a five-minute recess, Madam Chair?

The Chair: — We will have a five-minute recess at this point in time.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

The Chair: — Committee members, we will resume our estimates. I now look to Ms. Young.

Ms. A. Young: — Madam Chair. So I guess recognizing the specific structures of the agreement are confidential, as indicated by the official, is there confidence, like does the minister have confidence that these provisions, specifically around the ability of the airport authority to adjust the amount of the guarantee if the flights do not occur and ensuring that the agreement is built in a way that incentivizes WestJet to actually minimize the use of the minimum revenue guarantee, were built into the agreement?

Mr. Lynch: — Yes, we're confident in that agreement. And it's important to note as well it's based on passenger volume. So passenger uptake, which we expect to be fairly strong, will dictate any amount if the revenue guarantee is triggered at all.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. I also note that in the agreement between the Government of Saskatchewan and the SAA I believe there's a provision for the minimum revenue guarantee being applicable for retaining existing US daily direct flights as well if necessary. Is that something that's anticipated?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — I would just say that I don't think the government is particularly interested in having another MRG funded for the same airport. You know, you never say never I guess, but I don't think that I would be particularly interested.

[19:00]

I'd hear the Saskatoon Airport Authority out if they felt that they had an arrangement that was particularly advantageous, but I think our policy objective in this really was to secure a connection to a US hub city that, you know, would be a good option for those either coming to Saskatchewan for economic reasons, tourist reasons, or those going from Saskatchewan to the US and having only a one-stop requirement or one plane-change requirement at a US hub.

So you know, I'd be pretty close to ruling it out entirely, but we would hear out I guess the airport authority if there were other options. But you know, I think where government is at is that we are prepared to work with SAA on this flight which we announced, and we would be prepared to work with RAA on one as well.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you, Minister. Moving on perhaps to critical mineral development as an economic objective for the province, has the government conducted an economic analysis of the significant economic opportunities associated with the development of a critical minerals industry in Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Well just by way of being kind of

precise in language, you know, the government has a very, very significant critical minerals industry right now. Uranium is a critical mineral. We have a very large industry. Some very good news today as well actually on NexGen announcing their confirmation of securing financing for their Rook project — good news.

Potash as well, critical mineral, I believe excluded from the federal government's list of critical minerals — I'm not sure — but included in a lot of other lists as a critical mineral. So we have, you know, a very significant critical minerals industry right now, copper being another. And that's Foran's project.

But you know, I think I know what the member is talking about, which is rare earths more specifically, which is one of the subspecies of critical minerals. And you know, kind of even under rare earths, there's 17 additional elements that make up that rare earth universe.

You know, there is a very, very substantial opportunity in this space. And you know, Trade and Export hasn't done the . . . SRC [Saskatchewan Research Council] is the organization that has done really the analysis around all of this and the business work. I had estimates at SRC a few weeks ago, and you know, we had a very good discussion with the member for Saskatoon Centre. So I'd encourage any members of the committee who wish to review that discussion, but that's where really a lot of that really detailed discussion happened at committee a few weeks ago. And SRC really is the lead agency in that regard.

You know, what I would say TED's role is on that rare earth space is working with SRC and leveraging our international office network for the purpose of continuing forward with the project at SRC. So you know, happy to kind of speak to the international office part of all of this, which has been really a remarkable thing. And I'm going to ask actually our officials too to just speak to just really some of the incredibly high-quality folks that we have been able to attract to work for us in our international offices, and doing just remarkable work. But I'm not sure, Kevin, do you kind of want to add anything on this? And then maybe we'll ask Richelle to . . .

Mr. France: — Yeah. Thanks, Minister. Kevin France, assistant deputy minister for international engagement. Just on the critical minerals front, as the minister outlined, we have 23 of 31 critical minerals in this province. And we're very fortunate to work with industry that are, you know, processing, mining those minerals. And we work really closely with the Ministry of Energy and Resources to understand the value proposition. I mean we understand uranium and potash quite well. We see helium and the opportunities of increasing production of helium and the value that would provide.

Lithium is another great example, and as the minister touched on, rare earth elements. And we see SRC's leadership in this space. They're really leading the way in North America in terms of processing abilities and then realizing the potential for that investment, both from SRC — you know, further processing — but also from the private sector and the investment that may come in from essentially taking the metal to a magnet end state. And we're actively working internationally with partners to explore what that could look like in that space.

And again, you know, Jodi can also speak to . . . But we've been active with the US as well and talking about the critical mineral space and the importance of, you know, the reliance and the working relationship where we have . . . And we have a tremendous resource in this province and the ability to work with securing some of that supply chain in North America, and again how we work together with whether it's the department of defence or other places to ensure that we realize that potential.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah, maybe Richelle can talk about how SRC has worked with the international offices, but also how we have really worked to build that international office program, too.

Ms. Bourgoin: — Thank you, Richelle Bourgoin. I am the assistant deputy minister of international engagement. I guess I was — sorry — for the year in question. So to the minister's point, we've been really fortunate with the degree of engagement that we've had between the Saskatchewan Research Council and our offices in the networks around the world where we have a strategic interest in not only sharing information and technology transfer but in looking at the procurement of inputs in the appropriate offtake agreements that would come out of the work that's being done at SRC.

And in fact, in particular, in the offices in Japan, Singapore, and India we've worked very closely with our managing directors. The managing directors that we have in those positions have come with a really unique and interesting background, in particular with some experience in some of the work that's occurring at the Saskatchewan Research Council. And so they've been instrumental in connecting into a number of partners, including the regional governments where we are doing that work. In fact, Minister had the opportunity to engage with the Saskatchewan Research Council and Saskatchewan-Japan office partners when he was recently in Japan in February and in South Korea as well for that regional work.

And so what we were really trying to target specifically when we were recruiting candidates that really had that background that would be not only effective from an economic development perspective but in advancing some of our other priorities — trade, post-secondary partnerships, research and development — really resulted in us having candidates that were current Saskatchewan public servants or equivalent positions in other provincial governments, the Government of Canada, the foreign service, business and industry, which allowed us to really capitalize on those expertise and experiences to drive those key outcomes, including our partnerships in rare earth processing and critical mineral development.

I think the other thing that is important to consider is the investment that has been made to establish a more proactive approach to US engagement by establishing positions here in the Ministry of Trade and Export Development to support US engagement. And I think specifically to the Premier's March 2023 mission to Washington, DC, [District of Columbia] where he was a keynote speaker at the Securing America's Future Energy Summit, a very prominent, well-attended event where he was able to really advocate for Saskatchewan's strategic position when it comes to not only North American energy security during energy transition but worldwide with our partners and our priority interests that we've identified through that office

network.

And, Jodi, I don't know if you want to speak a little bit more about the work in the US, but I can keep going.

We also had the opportunity for the Premier to speak in DC in December of 2022 very specifically to the critical mineral value proposition that Saskatchewan can bring from a North American security perspective and specifically with rare earth element processing and the opportunities that exist for Saskatchewan under not only the *Defence Production Act* but also the *Inflation Reduction Act*. And then again, just recently to be able to really narrow in on subsequent conversations that have evolved from that time.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. I appreciate the in-depth overview. To circle back to the question, was there any kind of development undertaken by TED — or I suppose the Government of Saskatchewan, if I'm hearing perhaps it was through SRC — looking at an economic analysis of the opportunities associated with the development of the industry in Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah. No, as I kind of said in my initial response to the question, there was. SRC did it, and we talked about it in committee a few weeks ago.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. Has Saskatchewan joined the regional energy and resource tables that have been set up between provinces, the federal government, and municipalities?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — No.

Ms. A. Young: — Could the minister expand on helping the committee understand why not? I understand they've been set up, and I'm not overly familiar with them, but I do understand nine other provinces have joined.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah. The Ministry of Energy and Resources are the lead government ministry on that, so that would be a question to put to Minister Reiter.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay. Thank you. I'll pass that on to tomorrow night then. In terms of some of the space that TED does occupy, am I correct in understanding that TED did play a role in developing the critical mineral strategy for the province?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah. No, I appreciate the question. TED really kind of played a supporting role in the strategy development, and what we did was around the international engagement piece and a little bit around the rare earth piece, although SRC really was kind of the lead in that element. So the lead ministry on that document though was Energy and Resources.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay. Forgive me. For some reason I thought that Trade and Export had contributed some funding too. Perhaps it was a report with the First Nations Natural Resource Centre of Excellence, but perhaps I'm mistaken on that.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah, well I mean with regard to the First Nations resource centre of excellence, I mean we've had a relationship with the organization. Sorry, I get my "we's" kind of

confused sometimes. But SRC — sort of my role as Minister Responsible for SRC — you know, has a long-standing relationship with the centre, who really helped deliver the accelerated site-closure program. But again we canvassed that in SRC estimates, so I'll probably just leave that one there as well.

Ms. A. Young: — Thanks, Minister. Looking at one of the key actions identified by the Ministry of Trade and Export Development under the strategy of connecting investors with opportunities, I'm curious about the concierge-style service for investors, specifically as it relates to providing services to expedite investment projects by coordinating with Crown utility services and connecting investors with sources of funding, customers, and markets. Can you speak to the work that goes on coordinating with Crown utility services and private investment?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah, I'll maybe give a high-level answer and then move to either Jodi or Tyler who can speak in a more granular way as our ec dev branch really spearhead a lot of that work.

You know, what we try and do at TED, and I think what we have done, you know, really very successfully, and I think some companies who are investing literally hundreds of millions of dollars if not more would attest to it is that, you know, we are available at the senior official level, at the ministerial level. And we are prepared to work with them and work through challenges and really function within government as an organization that can, you know, talk to — whether it be Crown utilities, whether it be to other ministries within government — and coordinate responses, provide answers in timely fashions, you know, really is what a lot of companies are looking for.

And it's almost surprising to me sometimes in other jurisdictions the stories that companies relate about how, you know, they can't get a senior official on the phone, they can't . . . And primarily this is, you know, to ask for answers or clarifications on different things. It's not, you know, asking for anything earth-shattering. It's asking for, you know, responses. And they have a challenging time getting them in a lot of other places. So we really endeavour to work closely with companies, get them answers that they're seeking in a timely way.

But maybe, Tyler, you want to talk a bit more about that because you really handle a lot of it.

Mr. Lynch: — Sure. Our team in the economic development division and the investment attraction branch works really closely, probably more so now than ever, with our partners at Crown corporations, as well as treasury board Crown agencies, and other ministries across government on the investment attraction efforts.

[19:15]

As the minister said we work very hard to provide that front-line concierge service where typically a TED employee would be that first point of contact, but then would be very able to very quickly get those answers for a company or potential investor through a Crown working group or through our connections with other ministries. And it really is a strength in Saskatchewan where we're able to provide that information in a timely manner, because oftentimes in decision making on some of these projects

the timeliness of and the nimbleness of government is a very important factor, as well as with the Crown sector too.

So we've established some working groups that stay up to date on where certain projects are at that are able to do some of that diligence that goes into assisting a company with the, you know, utilities they may need, with the other process and steps they go through in the investment journey, so that really they don't have to call around to TED to get information about a program and then call over to another ministry about a different program and then call over to three or four different Crown utility providers as well. We're very coordinated and it will be very efficient.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. Does the ministry participate in negotiating power purchase agreements with new projects launching in Saskatchewan? I'm thinking specifically of . . . Anyways, I'll stop there.

Mr. Lynch: — So ultimately that's a decision between SaskPower and the company. What our role is, is to make sure that the lines of communication are open and that we're facilitating that conversation.

Ms. A. Young: — So the ministry does facilitate the conversation. I hear that the final decision is SaskPower's of course.

Mr. Lynch: — I think our role again, just as in terms of helping to expedite projects and make sure that those lines of communication are open, is to just help to . . . Like I say, with all utility providers and other partners and other ministries as well is to make sure that those responses are timely as they can be. But yeah, ultimately it's SaskPower working with the company.

Ms. A. Young: — Does the ministry help in negotiating with some of these private companies using perhaps differing utility rates to incentivize investment in the province of Saskatchewan?

Mr. Lynch: — No, I'd say the utility rates are pretty standard and we don't weigh in on that.

Ms. A. Young: — So the ministry doesn't play any role in . . .

Mr. Lynch: — Again, our role is to make the connections and make sure the appropriate levels at the utilities are having those conversations with the company and to get them answers.

Ms. A. Young: — Moving back perhaps in the international trade offices, Minister, could you advise how much of vote 90, subvote (TE04) is budgeted for the actual international trade offices versus how much is for oversight of the trade offices in Saskatchewan? You know, essentially how much of the 19-odd million is being spent in other countries, versus what's being spent here in Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah, I'll ask Richelle to address it. I think the short answer is that . . . But Richelle can kind of speak to that and maybe how the offices are structured as well and the folks we have working in them.

Ms. Bourgoin: — Certainly. Thank you for the question. So right now about 13.7 million of the budget is allocated for one of two things, either the direct payment to Canada that covers the costs

of our locally engaged employees, as well as what we call common services costs . . . well, the MOU [memorandum of understanding] with Canada calls common services costs. And so that would be access to IT support, security, some of the amenities that are provided as essentially the landlord in the cases of the high commissions and the embassies where we are co-located.

Of that, there is an allocation as well for the costs of the Saskatchewan-based support that's provided. And that's specifically around 2 million in 2023-24. That doesn't include the salary costs of the managing directors. So those are Saskatchewan-based employees. They're employees of the Saskatchewan public service who have been hired into the public service coming from a number of varying backgrounds. Many of them have come to us from other programs, so we've been able to realize some of the expertise that they bring, whether it is Alberta, Ontario, British Columbia. We've also been very fortunate in recruiting internally to do that work as well.

The locally engaged employees that are hired are hired through Canada's collective bargaining agreement. And so while they are employees of the Saskatchewan office, they are in fact on a collective bargaining agreement with Canada. And that allows us to overcome the challenges that we would have in becoming experts at labour relations and some of the workplace priorities for nine international offices around the world.

We also have, because we've scaled in the opening of these offices in the last 24 months essentially, been very strategic and purposeful in how we've identified the investments that we've made, whether it is in, you know, a very rigorous onboarding process that we have, both for the locally engaged employees that exist in those offices, and as well for our managing directors because they are bringing a diverse set of skills and some of them have in-market experience. Others of them have very technical expertise in those areas.

And so particularly in the first two years when we didn't realize the full program budget because of some of the restrictions that we had with the COVID-19 pandemic, we've been able to reallocate some of that effort to make sure that our Canadian-based employees as well as our locally engaged employees had all of the tools that they needed to successfully establish what is our first really broad-scale investment in an international trade and investment network.

And as of April 1st we're officially open in all nine of the offices. We are in the process of adding our second locally engaged employee in Germany. And we also are recruiting a second employee in one of our offices because we had an internal promotion, so there was a bit of a turnover.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah, and maybe if I could just add to that. You know, I really want to thank Richelle and Jodi, Richelle being the ADM responsible though for the work in setting this all up. This was an incredible undertaking. You know, basically we've set up nine offices around the world where we have not had this sort of footprint in countries that we were setting up in prior. And you know, Richelle really managed all that, with Jodi obviously as deputy minister.

But you know, there had been some suggestion that this was

going to be a political process and a bunch of hacks were going to be hired and this sort of thing. I want to be very clear — and I think Jodi and Richelle would confirm this — there has been no involvement from the minister or the minister's office. I have full confidence in our officials and they have done a remarkable job in hiring very, very good people who are of the highest calibre, working and representing our province internationally. So I just want to say thanks.

Ms. Bourgoin: — Thank you, Minister. I will just add too that we are now fully staffed with our Canadian-based employees and so we too are very proud of the work that they have accomplished and of the model that Saskatchewan has pursued.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. So can you advise how many government staff total and how many contractors work in each of the international trade offices?

Ms. Bourgoin: — So we have three employees in each of the offices. We have no contractors. And so we are all internal hires with the notable exception that those locally engaged employees, while they are on Saskatchewan's org chart, for reasons of safety, security, and international law, are in fact on paper, employees of Canada with a dotted line to Saskatchewan. So we don't pay them directly. We pay Canada directly which also protects us against currency fluctuation, a number of concerns that we may have.

All nine of our managing directors are currently active in their markets. We have 18 locally engaged staff positions in total at this point, 16 of them are filled. The recruitment for the Germany assistant position is under way, and the assistant role in London is also under recruitment.

In Germany we have David Anderson, who is our Canadian-based employee who has moved from our office in Japan. In India we have Scott Matthies, who joined Trade and Export Development from the Saskatchewan Health Authority. We have two locally engaged employees. In Japan we have Claire Citeau, who comes from both a trade background and an ag trade advocacy background. In Mexico, Horacio Cuevas, who is from the Government of Alberta. In Singapore, Greg Eidsness, who joined us from the Government of British Columbia, but is also originally from Swift Current. I can't miss a chance to say Swift Current.

The United Arab Emirates, Kyle Procyshyn, who came internally from the Ministry of Trade and Export Development. In the United Kingdom, Ranissah Samah, who joined us from Ontario's public service. In Vietnam we have Ha Nguyen, and Ha came from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. He was posted in Beijing where he was a very important and instrumental partner to Saskatchewan on some of the trade barriers. And in China, Winston Kan, who came to us from the Government of Alberta.

Ms. A. Young: — Thanks. Is there any anticipation of opening further international government trade offices in '23-24? Or are there any . . . Do you anticipate investigating any further locations for the future, for '24-25?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah, I wouldn't rule out in the long term there being examination of options. This year there is not going to be any new trade and investment office though.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. In terms of how these offices then go about and function, is there, like, an overview of key exports from Saskatchewan that each trade office is focusing on or investment attraction, perhaps?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — I'll maybe give the high-level answer and then Richelle can maybe speak to some of the further details. I would say that there were a combination of factors that we examined at Trade and Export when making our priority list of markets in which to locate offices. Obviously existing trade relationships were, you know, a significant part of that consideration. Potential trade markets I think were a part of that consideration as well.

There were geographic considerations, for example, having an office in the European Union was, you know, a part of the deliberation in having a office open in Germany last year. There were a number of factors that, you know, holistically considered, led to recommendation from Trade and Export, and that was really what we predicated our decision on as to where we would roll out.

Remember this has kind of happened over the course of a number of years as well. So part of it was building capacity. We weren't going to just open, you know, everything all at once. I mean we didn't have the capacity to be able to do that. So we've been building that capacity, and you know, that has been kind of why this has been more evolutionary than anything as far as, you know, how this has all rolled out. But you know, there were a number of different elements that went into the consideration. So I'm not sure if Richelle or Kevin want to speak to that.

Ms. Bourgoin: — I can add some of the background just in terms of the rationale. And you know, I think to the minister's point, the outcomes and the priorities are not consistent across the nine offices. And so the team that are working on the ground, supported by not only Trade and Export Development but our partners like ER [Energy and Resources], the Ministry of Agriculture in Saskatchewan, really focus on the work that's very specific to their work plan.

And so when it comes to Germany, it's not surprising that really we expect that that office will promote our interests in Europe more broadly, particularly with the EU. We're very well-positioned to contribute to not only the food security but the energy security requirements of Europe. And we think that office can be really meaningful in advancing our interests under the Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, particularly market access opportunities in Germany, because the agreement's really I think not been fully realized by some of our partners, and we feel that we can play an important role in that.

You know, even when we look at Germany, in particular in 2022, over \$110 million in exports from Saskatchewan went into Germany — uranium, canola seed, and lentils in particular. Saskatchewan exports to the EU though more broadly was 2.6 billion focused on potash, wheat, and uranium.

Of course it's no surprise that K+S is the largest German investment in Saskatchewan. And after Premier Moe's mission to Germany about this time last year, I think the 30th of March, K+S announced their intention to expand, doubling the footprint.

When it comes to some of the diplomatic relations or the opportunities that we see with Germany and Saskatchewan, I think what we've observed from our time in the market already is the outcomes related to some of Saskatchewan's response to Ukraine that were precipitated by initial conversations that occurred with Ukrainian refugees in Germany in March and April of last year.

[19:30]

And now that we have that office open and fully functioning, we're really confident that we will continue to drive some of those priority outcomes. When it comes to India, India is, you know, one of the fastest growing and largest economies in the world. And so with a population of over 1.4 billion people, there are considerable opportunities for growth and partnership. And then we have, you know, a long-standing and significant trade relationship with India. Our priorities there are heavily focused on agri-food products.

The country's nuclear power program also presents a really significant opportunity for Saskatchewan, in particular the relationship that's existed with Cameco. India has 22 nuclear reactors in operation, seven under construction, and an additional 14 planned and 28 proposed. What we heard loud and clear, not only on our parliamentary exchange in India last month, but with both Premier Moe and Minister Marit's missions in 2023 is the very clear direction from Modi's government on the role that nuclear will play in energy transition, but also energy equity.

So we have had, you know, of course an important relationship, too, with the Indo-Canadian diaspora and the growing population of Indo-Canadians in Saskatchewan. And so in that office — which would be different than some — immigration is a priority, and labour recruitment as well.

And then when we have Japan . . . We have an interesting and unique relationship with Japan. You'll be aware of the MOU that the minister signed last week with the . . . Kevin? Japan overseas investment . . .

Mr. France: — Overseas investment infrastructure.

Ms. Bourgoin: — Thank you. We say the acronym so often that sometimes I don't remember to say them all out loud. And then with the CPTPP [Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership] agreement as well that's eliminating tariffs on almost all of Saskatchewan's key exports . . . And so, when we look at the opportunities in Japan last year alone, a 19 per cent increase in the volume of exports that left Saskatchewan for Japan. And Japan's really looking at a shifting demographic and Saskatchewan is a strong partner.

Mexico. Again huge opportunities for us under the new free trade agreement, as well as the opportunities that exist with the merger of KC [Kansas City] Rail. Five countries concentrate 80 per cent of the exports to Latin America. Mexico's at the top of them. And we've seen a growing trade relationship with Mexico and so for the first time exceeding \$1 billion.

In Singapore. Singapore really is access for us to the South Asian population of more than 650 million people. And we've seen growth in that market as well. Recently as this week we've been

able to celebrate some of those successes, but what is interesting in Singapore is the convergence of South Asian investors that have very specific interests in Saskatchewan. We have a number of Singapore-based companies that are not only operating in Saskatchewan, but are looking at growth in Saskatchewan.

And the Singapore office also supported the health care recruitment mission. And so in the Singapore office we see some priorities around labour recruitment, as well education partnerships and opportunities for us to look at research and development particularly related to plant protein.

In the UAE [United Arab Emirates] we have an incredible relationship with all ready investors and buyers of Saskatchewan product through the port of Dubai which gives us access to a number of countries in the region.

Saskatchewan is also really looking at future energy solutions, carbon capture, hydrogen production, SMRs [small modular reactor], and looking to provide expertise in uranium supply. So three of four reactors in the south of the UAE have come online with the fourth still to come.

The UK [United Kingdom] is very focused on investment attraction but as well opportunities with critical mineral development and rare earth processing.

And last but not least, Vietnam. And so we have a strong trading relationship with Vietnam primarily focused on potash. We've seen an increase of 70 per cent in exports to Vietnam from Saskatchewan. But Vietnam is also very aggressively pursuing the relationship with Saskatchewan as it relates to labour market development and education exchange. And so this one would be more focused on students than some of the other research and development partnerships that our education partners have pursued in some of the other markets. That's a bit of an overview.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah, and maybe I'm going to add just a touch. Richelle did a really, really good job of going over kind of the focus for the offices. We have a bit of a different one for each, as Richelle well laid out, and priorities are slightly different in each market.

You know, in Singapore what we . . . Kind of an interesting stream of what we are going to be doing with a couple of our international offices and more as we go forward, and Singapore really pioneered this in a lot of ways, is around that labour market piece where the Singapore office had been highly supportive of our engagement efforts in the Philippines, for example. And that was supported out of the Singapore office which is, you know, resulting in hundreds of health care workers who are going to be relocating to Saskatchewan, and you know, hundreds more into the future.

So that was kind of one unique element that will likely be an evolving role for some of the international offices. Vietnam is going to be playing that role to a degree as well, I think, where we're going to have some opportunity on the labour market front. When we were there we had the opportunity to meet with the Minister of Labour, vice- . . . but one of their very senior officials and that are . . . very good discussion around some of those options and what they might look like.

Vietnam as well, kind of as an example, illustrate of the value of having a presence on the ground in a long-term context. We, you know, historically have been averaging \$200-plus million of wheat exports a year to Vietnam, which really evaporated in the last couple of years. And there was a kind of a phytosanitary issue that had to do with content of wheat in a particular item. And I mean these things pop up from time to time and they're generally dealt with by embassy officials on the ground to kind of work through some of the challenges. We aren't privy to those generally. I mean they handle it.

What we found out was that the reason why the item wasn't being resolved in a priority fashion by the Government of Canada is it was really a political decision taken by the federal government to leverage access for another agricultural product grown in very small quantities in Eastern Canada. Was being used as leverage in order to try and, well get access in order because the Vietnamese were seeking to diversify wheat imports because of their reliance almost to a 100 per cent degree on Russian exports.

So they were seeking to buy again from Saskatchewan, but wanted to get this phytosanitary issue dealt with. Government of Canada said, not unless you allow us to import an Eastern Canadian agricultural product not grown out here to the tune of \$150,000 a year. So we had \$200 million of Saskatchewan wheat exports being held for ransom for \$150,000 of priority from the Government of Canada.

We would never have known that but for the fact that we were on the ground and met directly with the Minister of Agriculture and the Minister of Trade. And I think I was very clear with them about what the priorities were. So it is what it is. But we would never have known that but for the fact that we were on the ground.

So UK, you know, there's a continuing bilateral negotiation with the UK and Canada on a free trade agreement. Got to say I'm a bit concerned about where Canada is going on some of this. I'm worried that our interests are not going to be the top of the list necessarily in what Canada is interested in. So you know, we're probably going to have to have a bit of discussion about how we engage on that front. But again, we wouldn't be able to do that but for the fact that we have a long-term, well-known presence on the ground in market.

So yeah, we could probably add a lot of kind of other examples of all of these. India would be another one. But we'll leave it there for now.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. What a truly remarkable narrative. To my question, are there regular reports like such as quarterly reports prepared for use by the minister or senior officials by the trade offices?

Ms. Bourgoin: — Yes, so we use a CRM [customer relations management] system. We receive monthly updates from our office. Anecdotally we receive them weekly just in terms of excellent opportunities to celebrate successes or help remove barriers. And so we provide that guidance from our office in Regina as well as Saskatoon for the Ministry of Trade and Export Development. But we receive monthly updates, we provide quarterly reports and then we have biennial . . . twice a year we submit our metrics for review, essentially.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. And are any of these reports made public?

Ms. Bourgoin: — We haven't made them public at this point but I think it's part of the discussion is really around developing a dashboard that can use good baseline data. And because we have only had four of our offices fully operational for a year we're using that opportunity to get sort of a strong baseline to understand what is a reasonable output, for example, for the number of new clients that we meet in a quarter, to be able to have some of those targets that we can develop internally.

Ms. A. Young: — And does the ministry anticipate doing some outward-facing reporting on these?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Well I mean I would kind of defer to recommendations from officials on something like that. I mean there are commercial sensitivities to some of the discussions that we have which obviously we would not want to, you know, put some of our partners into a difficult position with. But you know, as far as a lot of the items it's standard government work, and you know, I suspect that we wouldn't have much of an issue. We're going to kick it around though internally here and see where we land and what the recommendation is.

Ms. Bourgoin: — And what we have done to date is be able to identify some of those significant successes that have been recognized with the partners through the international office network. We've done, I think, twice a year if not quarterly news release just giving some general updates on where we are at in the process as well of some of the outcomes that we've recognized with our partners both in Saskatchewan and abroad.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. When it comes to some of the support offered by the ministry as well as by the trade offices to some of these missions undertaken by the government, are operational budgets of any of the offices within the ministry being used to support these mission costs?

Ms. Bourgoin: — So we have the budgets for the costs of missions that are undertaken by ministers or by the Premier, for example, are held in the Ministry of Trade and Export Development in Regina. And so the international relations branch is responsible for that work. Those missions are supported by the team in the international offices, but the expense and the cost is housed within the budget of the international relations branch. Or a subsequent ministry, for example, if it's the Ministry of Agriculture.

Ms. A. Young: — So sorry, can you just clarify that for me? I'm not sure I understood. If it's say, officials from the Ministry of Agriculture providing support for the mission, that cost is housed within the Ministry of Agriculture?

Ms. Bourgoin: — Sorry. If it's the Minister of Agriculture and perhaps he's going to India and the UAE, which he did in February, our office is very involved in helping arrange the meetings, in tracking the outcomes, in doing some of the follow-up on the ground, but the Ministry of Agriculture is responsible for the cost of that mission. Likewise if it's Minister Harrison, we have a different budget allocation for the costs of those missions, even if they are occurring in a place where we have an office.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. And then on the flip side, in terms of the support done for visitors here, when it comes to investment attraction, is it safe . . . Did I understand, is that what some of the funds being provided to EDR [Economic Development Regina] and SREDA [Saskatoon Regional Economic Development Authority] are being used for?

Ms. Bourgoin: — Yes, exactly. We also have a budget that's allocated for incoming diplomatic visits. And so we've had an unprecedented number of incoming diplomatic missions through ambassadors, consul generals, high commissioners, which is a really good sign, I think, an outcome of Saskatchewan's value proposition. And that cost is borne by the diplomat.

And in most cases, the potential investors are bearing the cost of that as well unless they're eligible for a program that is funded, for example, by the Ministry of Agriculture through Agribition. But where there are some costs incurred in order for Saskatchewan to provide support, they're managed through the office here.

The Chair: — Seeing that we have reached our agreed-upon time for consideration of these estimates and no more questions, we will now adjourn the consideration for the estimates of the Ministry of Trade and Export Development. Minister, any closing remarks you may have?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Well briefly I just want to thank our team here at Trade and Export. Just a great team to work with. I've had the privilege of working with a number of these folks for a long time. And Richelle specifically, owing to the fact that she's moving to ICT, I just want to say thank you so much. I've had the privilege of working with Richelle for a long time, and she's one of the best public servants I've ever met, so I just want to say thanks to her and thanks to our whole team. A great, great group.

The Chair: — Ms. Young, if you have any closing remarks?

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you, Madam Chair. Again I'd express my appreciation to the officials present tonight as well as all those doing the work that goes into preparing not just the budgets but for these committees this evening. And of course congratulations on the new role. I look forward to working with you there.

The Chair: — That concludes our business for this evening and today. I would ask a member to move a motion of adjournment.

Mr. Francis: — I so move.

The Chair: — Mr. Francis so moves. All agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. This committee stands adjourned until Tuesday, May the 2nd, 2023 at 3:30 p.m. Thank you everyone.

[The committee adjourned at 19:45.]