



STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE ECONOMY

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE ECONOMY

Daryl Harrison, Chair
Cannington

Meara Conway, Deputy Chair
Regina Elphinstone-Centre

Tajinder Grewal
Saskatoon University-Sutherland

Racquel Hilbert
Humboldt-Watrous

Sally Houser
Regina University

Kevin Kasun
Prince Albert Carlton

Kevin Weedmark
Moosomin-Montmartre

[The committee met at 15:30.]

Procedural Clerk: — Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to the Standing Committee on the Economy. My name is Jessica Start, and I'm the committee Clerk for today.

So the committee does not currently have a Chair, and it is my duty as committee Clerk to preside over the election of a new Chair. I'd like to remind members of the process. I will first ask for nominations. Once there are no further nominations, I will then ask a member to move a motion to have a committee member preside as Chair.

I will now call for nominations for that position. And I recognize MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] Weedmark.

Kevin Weedmark: — I nominate Daryl Harrison to the position of Chair.

Procedural Clerk: — Thank you. MLA Weedmark has nominated Daryl Harrison to the position of Chair. Are there any further nominations? Seeing none, I would now invite one of the members to move that motion. And I recognize MLA Weedmark.

Kevin Weedmark: — I move:

That Daryl Harrison be elected to preside as Chair of the Standing Committee on the Economy.

Procedural Clerk: — Thank you. All right. So it has been moved by MLA Weedmark:

That Daryl Harrison be elected to preside as Chair of the Standing Committee on the Economy.

All in favour of that motion? Any opposed? I declare the motion carried and invite MLA Harrison to take the Chair.

Chair D. Harrison: — Thank you, committee members. I'll introduce everyone before we proceed to our business. And there's any substitutions? Okay, we've got Racquel Hilbert; Kevin Kasun; Kevin Weedmark; Noor Burki is substituting in for Tajinder Grewal tonight; and Brittney Senger is substituting in for Meara Conway.

Pursuant to rule 148(1), the following 2026-27 estimates and 2025-26 supplementary estimates no. 2 were committed to the Standing Committee on the Economy on March 26th, 2026, and March 18th, 2026, respectively.

So the 2026-27 estimates: vote 1, Agriculture; vote 23, Energy and Resources; Environment, vote 26; vote 16, Highways; vote 89, Immigration and Career Training; vote 84, Innovation Saskatchewan; vote 35 and 172, Saskatchewan Research Council; vote 90, Trade and Export Development; vote 87, Water Security Agency.

2025-26 supplementary estimates no. 2: vote 1, Agriculture; vote 23, Energy and Resources; vote 16, Highways; vote 89, Immigration and Career Training.

Tabling of documents. I would like to table two documents from

the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel. These are lists of regulations and bylaws filed with the Legislative Assembly between January 1st, 2025, and December 31st, 2025, which have been committed to the committee for review pursuant to rule 147(1). The documents are ECO 4-30, Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel: 2025 bylaws filed; and ECO 5-30, Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel: 2025 regulations filed.

The Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel will assist the committee in its review by submitting a subsequent report at a later date identifying any regulations that are not in order with the provisions of rule 147(2). However the committee may also decide to review any of these regulations or bylaws for policy implications.

General Revenue Fund Immigration and Career Training Vote 89

Subvote (IC01)

Chair D. Harrison: — No. 5, consideration of estimates. Today the committee will be considering estimates and supplementary estimates no. 2 for the Ministry of Immigration and Career Training. We will begin with consideration of vote 89, Immigration and Career Training, central management and services, subvote (IC01).

Minister Schmalz is here with his officials. I would ask that officials please state their names before speaking and please don't touch the microphones. The *Hansard* operator will turn your microphone on when you are speaking to the committee. Minister, please introduce your officials and make your opening remarks.

Hon. Eric Schmalz: — Thank you very much. Good afternoon, Mr. Chair, and committee members. I am pleased to be here to present the Ministry of Immigration and Career Training's budget and estimates. Joining me this afternoon is Deputy Minister Drew Wilby; assistant deputy ministers Christa Ross and Darcy Smycniuk; and my chief of staff, Shane Garritty. And my apologies to Mr. Smycniuk. I will get it right one day.

Other officials will introduce themselves as necessary.

First I would like to thank all of those in the ministry who had a hand in developing this budget and preparing for estimates. Your dedication does not go unnoticed.

The 2026-27 budget protects key priorities for Saskatchewan including affordability, health care, education, community safety, and sound financial management while addressing the challenges of a province that continues to grow. The 2026-27 budget protects Saskatchewan's future by strengthening the province's economy and supporting job growth.

The Ministry of Immigration and Career Training's budget protects Saskatchewan's economy by building the workforce of tomorrow. By now you will have heard the Premier and other cabinet colleagues of mine reference the pending 60 projects worth over \$60 billion. Private investments like the recent announcement from Bell Canada of an AI [artificial intelligence]

data centre here just outside of Regina, or northern mining projects like NexGen and Denison's new greenfield uranium projects, and Foran's new copper mine.

Our ministry's mandate is to ensure that the labour market in Saskatchewan is not an impediment to its economic growth. The latest job numbers from Statistics Canada show Saskatchewan's labour market is strong. In February Saskatchewan's unemployment rate was 5.6 per cent, the lowest unemployment rate of all provinces and well below the national average of 6.7 per cent. Saskatchewan's full-time job growth rate also leads every other province at 3 per cent with 14,700 new full-time jobs created year over year in February.

But there is always more we can do, Mr. Chair. That is why this budget is investing nearly 125 million in workforce development programs that support unemployed and underemployed people, including \$21.8 million for adult essential skills training which provides people with the foundational skills and abilities they need to get a job, such as literacy and the opportunity to attain a grade 12 credential; \$22.2 million for training programs delivered through the post-secondary institutions that provide people with the skills and credentials they need to work in an in-demand occupation in sectors such as health care, construction, mining, and manufacturing; \$25.9 million for pre-employment programs and services which are offered through third-party partnerships and include work placement opportunities and career counselling; and \$10.4 million to support persons with disabilities to prepare for transition into the workforce.

We are also increasing our investment into apprenticeship training in Saskatchewan to the tune of \$27.2 million, or an increase of \$2 million this year. This additional investment will ensure that 300 more apprenticeship training seats are delivered for in-demand construction trades like electricians, welders, millwrights, just to name a few. A corresponding increase to the apprenticeship training allowance is being made to ensure that apprentices attending training away from home are compensated accordingly.

An investment I am really proud of this year, Mr. Chair, is an increase to both Regina and Saskatoon Trades and Skills Centres. A total investment of \$3.5 million, or an increase of \$534,000, will fund three new training courses at each of the Regina and Saskatoon centres. The Regina and Saskatoon Trades and Skills Centres are on the front lines, training unemployed or underemployed individuals in the basic knowledge to begin careers in the trades.

Participants in these programs are provided wage supplements while they attend their course to simulate and prepare them for jobs they will work in when their program is completed. These programs are offered in partnership with employers who have jobs available for the individuals who successfully complete the program.

Our government is also continuing to invest \$3.7 million for training and settlement support of our government's health human resource action plan by purchasing training seats for in-demand health care occupations. This year's health care training seats prioritize continuing care assistants, licensed practical nurses, registered psychiatric nurses, medical laboratory assistants, and diagnostic medical sonographers.

I would like to touch on our Indigenous and northern services branch, Mr. Chair. Our government has a goal of growing Indigenous participation in the workforce. The Saskatchewan labour market strategy prioritizes investments designed to increase Indigenous participation in the workforce, with a specific emphasis on preparing job seekers for opportunities in the resource sector. The Indigenous and northern services branch work directly with employers, Indigenous businesses, post-secondary institutions, and service providers to do just that. The data speaks for itself. The number of off-reserve Indigenous workers continues to rise, reaching 67,300 in the year 2025, an increase of 6.7 per cent from 2024.

We are making this impact by innovating partnerships. The ministry partnered with Cameco and SIIT [Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies] to deliver the northern trades training program at Rabbit Lake mine site, which aims to increase the number of women in skilled trades at Cameco and other northern mining operations. The program introduced participants to industrial and heavy-duty mechanics, carpentry, electrical, plumbing, and welding. I look forward to more innovative partnerships like this in the future.

I would like to highlight a newly announced partnership with the federal government to protect workers and employers affected by tariffs. This year's budget is seeing a \$9.2 million increase in funding through the labour market transfer agreement, or LMTA. This targeted and time-limited support will be used to support intensive training for unemployed workers or training for employees on federal EI [employment insurance] work-sharing agreements to protect them from job loss due to tariff impacts.

We in Saskatchewan are thankful that we are not seeing severe impacts from tariffs as some other provinces are experiencing; however we are happy to partner with the federal government to ensure this backstop is in place to protect those who may be or are affected. It was a pleasure to announce this funding partnership last week with Member of Parliament and Secretary of State for Rural Development Buckley Belanger in the beautiful city of Prince Albert, of which I am only slightly biased, Mr. Chair.

Lastly, Mr. Chair, I would like to touch on the Saskatchewan immigrant nominee program, or SINP. This year the allocation from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada is 4,761 nominations. While this is higher than 2025's initial allocation, it is still lower than we ended last year after some late-in-the-year increases to our total nomination number. This requires the SINP to continue with sector caps for trucking, accommodation, retail, and food services sector in 2026 to ensure the limited numbers of nominations are available to serve all priority sectors as well.

[15:45]

Capped sectors are limited to support current employees with a valid temporary resident status. Capped sectors are also limited to 25 per cent of the SINP's total allocation in 2026 with the potential for mid-year adjustments if IRCC [Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada] increases our nominations as they have in the past. Each capped sector is provided its own cap within the 25 per cent to ensure that one sector does not monopolize this small pool of nominations.

New for 2026, intake windows have been also introduced for capped sectors so that the small number of employers cannot monopolize the pool of nominations at the beginning of the year. Intake windows are spread out every two months throughout the calendar year and employers may only apply to nominate a worker who has six months or less remaining on their work permit. This policy is designed to ensure that those workers facing the most immediate loss of their status in Canada are able to remain in the country and continue working in their intended occupation. This is the fairest way to distribute such a small number of nominations, and it does not favour one group over the other.

For 2026 the priority sectors were updated to include all industries noted in Saskatchewan's labour market strategy. These include health care, agriculture, skilled trades, mining, manufacturing, energy, and technology. To reflect the critical importance of these sectors to our province's economy, priority sectors do not face sector caps or limits on recruiting internationally.

With that, Mr. Chair, my officials and I would be happy to take any questions from the committee. Thank you very much.

Chair D. Harrison: — Thank you, Minister. I will now open the floor for questions. MLA Burki.

Noor Burki: — Well thank you very much. First of all, congratulations to our new minister for taking his role, and with that I will say thank you to all minister's staff for all your hard work. And I have to start questions now? Okay. The Assembly staff as well, you know, make sure that they're doing a lot of hard work and we recognize their hard work and support as well.

We have important issues to discuss on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan, and I hope that we will work in this spirit to explore the issues I will be raising. As we unfortunately know, the people of Saskatchewan are facing a higher rate of financial anxiety than anywhere else in the country. Part of the challenges for many people in this is that they might not have the right qualification to access jobs, higher-paid jobs.

The government increased spending in labour market programs this year in the fiscal plan, page 6. It is partly due to address underemployment. In the last year, underemployment remains troublingly high. Thousands of people in Saskatchewan are part-time employed despite hoping for full-time work. And in August underemployment in Saskatchewan was around 8.6 per cent. Now that the underemployment is almost a full per cent point higher, this has likely increased significantly.

Can the minister outline how many more people will be trained due to the increase of this spending?

Hon. Eric Schmalz: — Thank you for the question. I would again like to point out that Saskatchewan does have the lowest unemployment rate in the country within the current fiscal year.

We are moving from 5,000 to 5,300 training seats. There will be an additional allotment of funding provided through the tariff relief funding with the federal government to be able to upscale should the need require that there needs to be some training supports put in place for individuals who are impacted by tariffs.

So there's the ability of us to move in that direction to ensure that there's supports in place for any people who are going to be impacted, particularly in the steel or forestry sectors or softwood lumber sectors, specifically, as well as anything in the manufacturing, agriculture, any of those types of areas.

But I'll let my deputy minister expound a little bit more on that.

Drew Wilby: — Thank you, Minister. Deputy Minister Drew Wilby. And thank you for the question. As the minister highlighted, directly related to this budget, we'll see 300 additional apprentice training seats through the Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission. So that means individuals that are out there, that are getting their employment opportunities in the skilled trades, will have the opportunity to further those credentials to work towards their level 1, their level 2, 3, and 4 and eventually hopefully their journey person designation as well. So a significant investment there, and the opportunity to continue to move folks into especially the construction trades. So approximately a \$2 million investment on that front.

Additionally, as the minister highlighted, there is the money available from the federal government, the \$9.2 million that we're looking at that we will determine over the course of the year because obviously Saskatchewan isn't in the situation that other provinces are, such as British Columbia and Ontario, where there is a significant hit in tariff-affected workers. We have seen some uptake in that area to date. But obviously going forward with that new money, we'll be able to target it. We believe that could train up to 1,800 individuals, so workers that may be underemployed or unemployed due to tariffs are looking to re-skill and maintain employment within their respective industries.

As well, that investment I don't think, you know, can be undervalued in terms of the money to the Trades and Skills Centres in both Saskatoon and Regina. So that's giving those individuals that need that step up, that want to get engaged in the economy . . . Maybe they are underemployed, possibly unemployed, but they're looking to get those skills to go onto the front lines of the construction trades. The hope with that is obviously they get that training. They get employed. With that training, they receive a wage supplement. They get employed. They become valuable members of that team, and then they want to pursue the apprenticeship program as well and get further certified. So there's a variety of investments in the budget that are designed to, you know, to address what it is that you're highlighting.

I would also suggest that there are no reductions in the budget too in terms of our training programs. There may be a realignment of some programs and services, but there's not a reduction there. So in terms of the whole numbers and where we are to date, we'll continue that into '27-28 . . . or '26-27, if I can remember what year we're in. '26-27.

Noor Burki: — Okay thank you for your response, Minister and Deputy Minister. When will the people of Saskatchewan see a significant decrease in underemployment? When?

Hon. Eric Schmalz: — Thanks for your question. Yes. So again I have to highlight that Saskatchewan remains to be the lowest unemployment rate in the country — 5.6 per cent being the

lowest unemployment rate in the country. We are well below the national average of 6.7.

The labour market — again in my opening comments — remains strong. We have 14,700 full-time jobs added in February this year. We are increasing jobs. We are ensuring that the employment numbers are on the right trend in the province, and we want to ensure that we're leading the pack. I'm going to pass it over to my deputy minister here for further expoundment.

Drew Wilby: — Thank you, Minister. Again, deputy minister, Drew Wilby. Just, you know, further along what the minister has said, you know, last year we added 15,200 jobs year over year in 2025. That's an all-time high reached for Saskatchewan's working-age population, our labour force employment including both full-time and part-time, as well as employment for men and women, immigrant employment, and off-reserve Indigenous youth and working-age population employment.

Most recent stats of course month to month and year over year, so for February, full-time employment increased by 14,700 from a year ago. That's 31 consecutive months of year-over-year increases for jobs. As the minister highlighted, our annual unemployment rate was 5.2 per cent which is the lowest across the country.

So obviously, you know, we're attuned to market conditions. We're attuned to what's happening across the country and across the globe for that matter. And no, Saskatchewan's not an island, and there's more work that can be done. But we think right now, you know, in terms of the budget we have in front of us and attempting to protect the Saskatchewan economy, that we're in okay shape.

Noor Burki: — Okay. Does the minister have any target rate? If so, what is it?

Hon. Eric Schmalz: — Thanks. Obviously the goal is always zero, zero per cent unemployment. Obviously we want to make sure that we are tracking to that goal, but anything under 5 per cent is considered virtually fully employed because there will always be a segment of the population that is either transitioning in and out of the workforce.

I will say that we are, you know, finding some innovative ways to work with the Ministry of Social Services, for instance, on helping develop skill sets with individuals who are currently working with Social Services. And I'm going to let my deputy minister talk about that a little bit more, as those conversations have been ongoing with the Ministry of Social Services.

Drew Wilby: — Thank you, Minister. Drew Wilby, deputy minister. So we have been working as a one-government approach with the Ministry of Social Services to ensure that, you know, those individuals that need that extra assistance to move into the labour market receive that connection point to the Ministry of Immigration and Career Training.

And so working with that front-line staff and the list that they have and making sure again that that connection point comes in through our career centres, which we have across the province in communities with a regional footprint, which we are quite proud of still being able to maintain that footprint. And getting them

engaged, connecting them potentially to job offers, but also working them through the Trades and Skills Centres. You know, as we highlighted that investment that's there, making sure that if they do have the ability to connect and if they do have the willingness to connect that we are connecting them and having them go through with the cohorts that there are in place in those Trades and Skills Centres.

So again making sure that, you know, government isn't just operating in an island, where ICT [Immigration and Career Training] is doing its work and other ministries are doing theirs. We're looking at that continuum approach to make sure that those hand-offs and those connection points are there. Because we do know that that grey area is the most difficult to work in, where it may be one ministry's boundaries and another ministry's boundaries — how do we create that connection point between the two ministries? So some exciting work. It's preliminary at this point, but hopefully next year when we're back we will be able to report back on some successes out of that pilot project.

Noor Burki: — Thank you, Minister and Deputy Minister. So given the need of many people to be able to increase their earnings to just keep up with the cost of groceries and increase in the rate by the government, does your ministry have any analysis or targets how this year's budget will change wage growth to ensure that people in Saskatchewan have jobs and put any food on the table and allow them to live the life they want?

[16:00]

Hon. Eric Schmalz: — So our key focus continues to be on areas where the highest-paying jobs are training people for entrance into the market in those high-paying jobs, particularly in the mining and resource sectors and the skilled trade sectors, including in the health care sector.

The average weekly wage rate in Saskatchewan is up 2.4 per cent compared to last year, so we are seeing an increase in the average weekly wage. And even further into that, we are seeing women's earnings also continue to grow. In 2025 the average weekly wage rate for women was up by 83.8 per cent compared to 2007. And that is a 23.6 per cent increase when compared to 2018 and 2 per cent compared to 2024. So we are seeing those numbers trend in the right direction.

We want to continue to grow that through providing those training opportunities for individuals, to ensure that they have the best opportunity to earn the highest wages possible. And I want to turn this over to the deputy minister if you'd like to expound on any of that.

Drew Wilby: — You know, Minister, I think I'll politely decline. I think you covered it off very well.

Noor Burki: — Well according to Statistics Canada, Saskatchewan had the worst NEETEST [not in employment, education, or training, excluding short transitions] rate at the last publication that we heard about it. The NEETEST are the young people not in employment, training, or education outside of short transitions. This means the youth that we need to help build a future in this province, so that they don't leave the province, and help build our province going forward.

In the estimates we see a reduction to the training and employment services in essential skills as well as skill training in the labour market programs expenses. Can the minister explain what he is doing to address this very concerning rate in this budget?

Hon. Eric Schmalz: — So in 2025 youth employment increased 2.9 per cent and reached 84,100, which is above the pre-pandemic levels. So the youth population is up 4,000; labour force up 5,700; and employment was up 5,500.

So I'm going to turn it over to the deputy minister. He has some more information on some of the areas that we are looking to improve these numbers even though we are still well above the national average.

Drew Wilby: — Thank you, Minister. Drew Wilby, deputy minister. And you know, youth unemployment, obviously a concern across Canada. Saskatchewan is in a better place than most, as the minister has highlighted, which is important. But we still have our attention and our thought to it.

We were able to invest \$50,000 with the Saskatoon Industry Education Council a couple of weeks ago for a conference up in Saskatoon. And it was an exciting conference with association leaders, business leaders, Indigenous leaders, and others coming together — post-secondary education, the health care sector for that matter too — to come together and look at some of the challenges and begin to address . . . not begin to address but continue to address those challenges that we're seeing.

And understanding youth. You know, I've got three boys myself, and them compared to me at their age, we're quite different, you know. We've got to look at it through that generational lens and scope, and especially in a post-COVID period as well and the impact that that's had. But targeting those services and looking to address some of those pieces with our youth.

And also getting into the school system. The minister's highlighted the investment in the Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission and the apprenticeship system generally. But we know we have more work to do getting into our high schools, looking at promoting those pathways into employment.

If we have jobs that are available in our construction sector, in our ag manufacturing sector and others, just to name a couple, let's make sure that we're promoting that, bringing industry partners to the table, which is the role the Saskatoon Industry Education Council, as well as the Regina . . . We're very pleased to be able to fund both of those and having those connection points again and making sure that we're showing youth those opportunities for those high-paying jobs, potentially the mining sector, what we see at BHP Billiton and what's coming up there.

So you know, continuing to do that work and work with our partners is crucial, and moving that ahead. And that's one example of how we're doing that as a ministry and as a province.

Noor Burki: — Thank you, Minister and Deputy Minister, and thanks for being connecting with communities. My worry is that how the ministry are expecting changes this year with the reduction of funding.

Hon. Eric Schmalz: — So what we've found and what particularly is in contravention to the policy of what we have laid out for some of our post-secondary institutions and training centres is that we have a reserve limit on how much these institutions can keep in cash reserve, because it is provincial dollars, obviously, that are going to be rolled out to provide training to individuals coming into these programs. With the institutions that we've . . . There was a reduction in the funding that the government's putting in and reliance on them using up some of the extra money that they have in these reserves. Some of them are quite significant actually.

So there will be no cuts to programming or seats through this. We've had very good conversations with those institutions, and they are on board with the program and how we're going to roll this out. So I can rely on the deputy minister to more, we'll call it, more comprehensive answer on exactly how these programs are going to be rolled out.

Drew Wilby: — Well thank you, Minister. Drew Wilby, deputy minister. Comprehensive, I'm not sure about that, but we'll give it a shot anyways. And just for clarity, Mr. Burki, I just want to make sure you're taking about the reduction that's showing in training and employment services as well as the skills training areas of the ministry? Okay.

So in terms of the skills training, it's exactly what the minister's highlighted. We have money basically sitting in some of our regional college and post-secondary training partners' bank accounts. And its been their very strict policy in terms of what that can be put towards. And it's being put towards our programs and services. That's longstanding. That goes back many, many, many, many, many years, over 20 years likely.

And so what we decided to do is work with our post-secondary training partners — and in particular this year with Northlands College and also with Saskatchewan Polytech — and see if we could draw down those reserves to a more manageable level, and so that's just what we've done. And so with Northlands we've had great conversations. They're willing to, you know, allocate that money to its intent and purpose which is to our programs and services, as well as with Sask Poly.

And so the reduction that you'll be seeing there is equivalent to those reserve retentions. The policy across the board is to get those institutions down to a \$500,000 retention, which we think is manageable and makes sense, rather than millions of dollars sitting in those bank accounts. At present, Northlands has about \$7 million of our money in their bank. So you know, being able to put that towards programs and services is where that was intended and designed to do.

On the training and employment services side in which you see a reduction is actually a staffing cost reduction. That's not a program and service reduction. So across government, we are looking at a workforce realignment through attrition. The Ministry of Immigration and Career Training's share of that is thirteen and a half employees over the next two years, which we believe is manageable within that attrition framework.

And so of course by attrition I mean retirements and vacant positions. So we won't see an impact on front-line service delivery. You know, we will be looking at some of those other

positions that are available, but that equivalent will be about a \$432,000 reduction that you're seeing there, which is our share of that this year. So again no reduction to programs and services with either of those reductions. It's just funding that's being allocated in a different way.

Noor Burki: — So if this cut is for staffing, so what's the main reason that we cut this one from staffing? We're not hiring? Laid off? Or what happened?

Hon. Eric Schmalz: — Thanks. Yeah, and so as government, we've implemented a workforce realignment policy where we're making sure that we are operating at the most efficient level possible to ensure that we're doing our part and not requiring the taxpayer to compensate for additional staff that are potentially not required in order to perform the function.

So what we've done is, you know, specifically use tools like attrition management. We're not looking to lay anybody off or fire anybody. It's all about just using those methods — attrition management, retirements, things like that — to ensure that, you know, we hold off staffing those up given the fact that we've got, you know, a little bit more flexibility when it comes to the workforce.

I'll let Drew talk about that a little more.

Drew Wilby: — Thank you, Minister. Again, Drew Wilby, deputy minister. As the minister has highlighted, it's an attrition policy and so it won't be individuals that are in jobs right now. It'll be a job that potentially opens up through, you know . . . And then through vacancy management, we're able to deal with that position, or potentially through retirements, again with a strategic glance to making sure that we keep front-line service intact. We protect those services that the people of the province require and need and that we continue to do the good work of the ministry moving forward.

You know, very manageable within our existing framework. We believe that we can achieve that over the next two years, that number that, you know, that has been provided within the ministry. And overall through government, that's a planned 3 per cent reduction as the Finance minister has clearly highlighted on his budget speech.

Noor Burki: — Thank you, Minister. Given the global context of tariffs and other possible economic disruption, can the minister further outline how the budget will ensure more young people that are at risk of falling into the NEETEST category or are in NEETEST . . . so our province will not be anymore the worst in this category, but offer more young people hope and the promise where they can build their future?

[16:15]

Hon. Eric Schmalz: — Sorry. Hopefully *Hansard* is not mad at me after I touched the microphone there with a piece of paper. I get one mulligan I think, is that correct?

All right, yeah, so we've got a tremendous demand for skills trade in this province. Our economy is booming especially in the resource sector. So we want to make sure we're there supporting it by providing opportunities for individuals to get training in

those high-paying, lucrative jobs. So we've conducted obviously as part of due course, conducted the *Saskatchewan Industry Labour Demand Outlook* for 2025 to 2029. And I'll read you some of the key findings here today:

ICT's outlook indicates that Saskatchewan will have approximately 119,100 net job opportunities between 2025 and 2029 — 36 per cent . . . due to economic growth (referred to as expansion demand) and 64 per cent (76,220) due to exits from the labour force mainly as a result of retirements (referred to as replacement demand).

So those will be people coming in to replace people who are retiring.

All major industries are expected to experience an increase in job openings over the forecast period. The largest gains are expected to be in health care . . . retail trade; educational services; professional, scientific and technical services; construction; public administration.

Due to the aging workforce, replacing retired workers is anticipated to be the primary source of job openings for most industries. However, economic-driven growth is expected to be relatively high in several industries, including professional, scientific, technical services; construction; real estate, and rental and leasing; finance and insurance; and wholesale trade.

Provincial economic growth is expected to average 1.4 per cent annually over the forecasted period, with about 40 per cent of industries expected to experience above-average growth. Only one industry . . . is expected to experience a slight reduction in average employment growth over the forecasted period, largely due to the persistent downward trend by employment in the sector over several decades. The industry's net job openings remain positive.

That's off our saskatchewan.ca website. I'll turn it over to — I'm going to say it again — Smycniuk.

Darcy Smycniuk: — Perfect.

Hon. Eric Schmalz: — Okay, our ADM [assistant deputy minister] Mr. Smycniuk, to have further information.

Darcy Smycniuk: — Yeah, thank you, Minister. Darcy Smycniuk, assistant deputy minister. Just would like to maybe highlight a couple of opportunities that we have to work with employers and industry associations in terms of how we actually make this work.

So in the last year we've partnered with Cameco and SIIT in northern Saskatchewan to deliver a northern trades training program at Rabbit Lake. And it was really focused on increasing the number of women in skilled trades at Cameco and other northern mining operations. These individuals were trained by a female journeyman. It was 10 female apprentices that participated in the program, and they were educated in industrial and heavy mechanics, carpentry, electrical, plumbing, and welding. So a real good cross-section of skilled trades that are required not only at the mine site but with some of the supplier organizations in northern Saskatchewan.

Another unique partnership was with Rise Air and Ya' thi Néné Lands and Resources, Prince Albert Grand Council, Cameco, Orano, and PrairiesCan [Prairies Economic Development Canada]. So a multi-organization partnership to deliver a pilot training program in the North. And this was really supporting Indigenous candidates from northern Saskatchewan to become professional pilots through skills upgrading, mentorship opportunities, and guaranteed employment with Rise Air upon completion of the program.

Noor Burki: — Thank you, Minister and Deputy Minister. So going back to the essential skills, we are seeing about 2.3 million reduction in this line item, almost to 10 per cent. We understand that addition last year came due to the federal reduction in the labour market transfer agreement.

Can the minister outline to what extent these reductions result from less funding federally? Or was it a provincial government decision to reduce the funding for this year?

Hon. Eric Schmalz: — So again this has to do with particularly the surplus retention in the schools, the schools themselves, the institutions themselves. Again as highlighted by the deputy minister, there is approximately \$7 million sitting in Northlands College currently that we are asking them to draw down to fall in line with the policy of \$500,000 being their standard carry-over for year over year. We want to make sure that those dollars are being used for the programming, and they will be used in that course.

There's been some good collaboration with the college with our ministry, along with Sask Polytech as well. So we want to make sure that there's . . . again, those dollars are being used rather than sitting in a fund being accrued by the institution.

Chair D. Harrison: — Yes, MLA Senger.

Brittney Senger: — Thank you. I'm so unprepared, look at this. So my understanding is that the supported employment transition initiative, or the SETI program, has been eliminated as of today. From my understanding and from what the deputy minister had just mentioned, the new initiative isn't coming into effect within the next year, it seems like. So I'm wondering what plans the government has to replace the program in the interim.

Hon. Eric Schmalz: — Yeah, and just quickly before we dive into the answer on that, I just want to thank SARC [Saskatchewan Association of Rehabilitation Centres] for their collaboration and their continued support of individuals looking to be rehabilitated and provide them with the opportunities to get back into the workforce and contribute not only to their own success but the success of our province.

I'm going to turn it over to Deputy Minister Wilby here in a second. I just want to say that what we are seeing is a realignment of this organization through collaboration. In fact it was SARC's own initiative that provided us with the direction on this. There won't be any reduction in the number of spots, which will be 90, I believe, currently. There will be a small reduction, or some reduction in the funding, but there will be a bridge for the program going forward.

And I'm going to again turn it over to the deputy minister here

for further explanation.

Drew Wilby: — Thank you, Minister. Deputy Minister Drew Wilby, and thanks for the question.

Yeah, as the minister has highlighted, you know, the SETI program is transitioning into another program. The funding will continue with SARC. It will be potentially at a slightly lower rate.

But what we did with SARC is we worked with them over the last two years and had a discussion about the service that they provide. This is specific to those that are living with disabilities and getting them engaged in the workforce. And we told them, "Look, use creativity. Use the art of the possible, and we'll work with you on this." The funding envelope remains intact in terms of going forward, and we were looking to target the same number of clients that we have over time, which is 90.

SARC's come back with a proposal, which is why I say potentially a slight reduction, because they have costed it slightly less than what the old program was. But it's designed to continue to move individuals into the employment market.

You know, there's a lot of myth out there in the community about this. I know you may be subject to that. I think we were subject to that as well. I believe Ms. McNeil from SARC has sent an email to you and me both just to try to clarify things on this and where we're at. You know, in terms of our commitment to SARC it remains fully intact. We believe they are one of our valued agencies obviously, providing employment assistance to persons with disabilities.

I'd also highlight that our funding envelope for that particular program overall was increased \$500,000 last year. So we have a full commitment of \$10.4 million overall to employment assistance for persons with disabilities across the province of Saskatchewan. What SARC is looking at is potentially a model of providing those services to those in rural, remote, and northern locations, which obviously is a key driver and a key piece for the province.

And I would say if we're going to fulfill pillar one of our labour market strategy, which is getting Saskatchewan people employed in those jobs that are out there, this is a key piece. We need to get individuals, and we need to work hard to get individuals living with disabilities into the labour market and get them into those employable opportunities.

So again maybe just to summarize, you know, there's no reduction in our commitment to SARC. We continue to work with them. We will bridge them for the next month. If it's a month, if it's two months, we'll bridge them for that to make sure that they are fully supported until they are up and running with their new coordinator, which as I understand is what they are working on right now.

Just a little bit about SETI. SETI goes back about 15 years. So the Saskatchewan employment transition initiative — make sure I get my acronyms right — it was two-year funding envelopes. We provided the money to SARC. SARC then provided the money out. And it was a two-year funding envelope that they provided out to the funded agencies for seed funding for creative alternatives to see what could be done. Basically mini-pilots, if

you will. And they worked through that obviously, and if they were successful the expectation is that they would find funding sources potentially, including the province.

So in 2024 when we did look at modernizing this agreement with SARC, they communicated to their agencies; said, look, it is a two-year funding piece. We understand that in January they communicated to their funded agencies that they were looking at moving in a different direction and that more communication will take place.

With the thousands of viewers that are watching today, I'm sure this will be publicly communicated now. You know, we could wish. But we're happy to entertain any further questions you have on this one.

Brittney Senger: — Okay. Thank you so much for elaborating on that. So for clarification then . . . Yes, SARC does amazing work just to give them a shout-out as well. They're fantastic; utmost respect for them.

For clarification then you said that you were going to bridge their funding for the next month or so. So is the program expected to come into effect within the next couple of months while you bridge that funding?

[16:30]

Drew Wilby: — Yes. The program will be expected to come into place May 1st, but that's dependent on the hiring on SARC's part as long as they're able to get the people in place to do that work. We don't want to leave them short on that, so we'll be with them along for the ride until they're able to get that in place. And then we look forward to — sorry, pardon my language — but be along with them for the ride with their new initiative too and see how this works out.

And I think this really speaks to the creativity in the CBO [community-based organization] sector in working with our partners and having them find solutions with us. You know, I referenced the Saskatoon Industry Education Council and the work they did with us and continue to do with us on the youth side of the equation and the youth employment side.

And this is another example in the persons with disabilities side, where we've got a key partner who is willing to roll up their sleeves, look at the challenge, and potentially look at doing things — I wouldn't say differently — but maybe in a way that reaches out to those clients in a bit more strategic manner and make sure that they're getting the service delivery.

Because at the end of the day that's what's important, is those clients, and making sure that they're benefiting from the money that we're investing.

Brittney Senger: — Okay, so just a bit more of a follow-up here. And thank you for elaborating on that. So for clarification then, the remainder of the funding, is any of that funding going to CBOs? So the 10.4 minus the 5. Is any of the remainder of funding going to CBOs? Or how is that being distributed?

Drew Wilby: — Just for clarity, the remainder of the 10.4, what's sitting in that envelope? Yes, all of that money would go

through the CBO network across the province. We have service providers in Saskatoon, Regina, and the Prince Albert market and across the province that provide those services. And so we do invest in the CBO delivery partners.

There's very little direct delivery of programs and services from the ministry. We do have our regional offices across the province as far north as La Ronge and Meadow Lake to as far south as Estevan and if we could call Moose Jaw south — we'll call Moose Jaw south — and out to Yorkton, North Battleford, Prince Albert, Saskatoon. I'm missing a couple and I'm going to feel horrible about it, but we'll get there — Lloydminster. And so with that we bring our clients in, and clients can come in on that storefront model.

As well they can call in to our service centre and be redirected to either locally or to one of those connected pieces. And then from there they're connected to an agency that can go and deliver that service. So all of that money would go to the CBO partners.

Brittney Senger: — And sorry, how many CBOs were accessing that funding from that same envelope?

Drew Wilby: — So in '24-25, within that funding envelope we had 23 service providers, so that would be 23 CBOs. Now with those CBOs we had 57 agreements, so one service provider may have more than one agreement depending which service they're providing. I'll take SARC as an example. We have different agreements with them and with others as well. So again that's 23 service providers for 57 agreements across the province and a total investment of \$10.4 million.

Chair D. Harrison: — MLA Burki.

Noor Burki: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. In the government's own *Building the Workforce for a Growing Economy: The Saskatchewan Labour Market Strategy*, essential skills were highlighted as crucial to supporting skills for the tourism sector, Indigenous learner, and others.

Can the minister break down which sector and learners these cuts will be impacted? And what work has the ministry done to evaluate the total impact on employment growth, learners' support in this, that will be resulting from that?

Drew Wilby: — Deputy Minister Drew Wilby. I think the important context here in . . . And Mr. Burki, I apologize if I'm offside on this, but I think the common theme is a reduction in our skills training envelope. There is no reduction in the skills training envelope. That envelope remains intact.

All we're asking is two institutions in particular to draw down their reserves, which is taxpayers' dollars which is sitting in a bank account in those two post-secondary institutions. And so our programs and services, they remain intact, whether it be on our skilled trade side of the equation and our investment on that front — which is actually up because of our additional \$2 million for 300 apprentice seats across the province. Also we've got the additional 500-plus thousand dollars going to the trade and skill centres.

So there's no reduction in the investment in that area. We continue to fully invest, and actually in turn we increase our

investment on that front. So there's no reduction in service, there's no reduction in the delivery that's out there, and there's no reduction in seats across the province.

Noor Burki: — So you mean there is no reduction in skill training as well?

Drew Wilby: — That's correct.

Noor Burki: — Okay. Credentials continue to be significant challenges for many qualified people coming to the province. I noted that funding for immigration settlement and credential recognition is seen at 3 per cent reduction in this year's budget.

Can the minister outline how and to what extent this is due to change in the number of the people looking to have the greater skill recognized and due to the changes in the program that we can see?

Hon. Eric Schmalz: — So this speaks directly to the federal government and our allotment, or our numbers under the SINP program that have been reduced significantly since 2025.

I would say that we've had a \$200,000 surplus in that funding to provide supports for those individuals. When the numbers were reduced, that number remained and was cut then to offset the number of individuals that were coming. Obviously there's 4,700 coming compared to when it was high, it was 7,250.

So there's a reduction in the number of SINP applications and newcomers to the province. We want to make sure that we're aligning our funding for those programs, obviously, to reflect the new reduced numbers.

Drew Wilby: — Just to make sure I understand the question. It was the reduction, the \$200,000 reduction on the settlement side of the equation? Yeah.

So as the minister's highlighted, that was directly as a result of the federal government policy changes of moving from 7,250 to 3,625 last year. And then this year we actually were just above 5,000 spots by the end of last year.

This year we were anticipating about 5,500 was the mark that we were looking for from IRCC, and like other provinces and territories we're disappointed to see that lower. So our number's 4,761 for the year.

In terms of the settlement side, you know, we had \$200,000 in surplus that because of the reduction in numbers we were able to reduce. But what we do want to watch closely, and this here obviously is what the federal government has done and what we believe is abdicating their responsibility for settlement services across the country, and not only across the country but especially in the province of Saskatchewan.

They've taken a significant cut out of our funded agencies. So their money doesn't flow to us to the agencies; it flows direct to the agencies. To date they still haven't communicated to us what that actual reduction is going to be. We're talking an announcement that was three months ago, and so that's a bit of a vacuum for us to work in, which is unfortunate.

So we're working with IRCC to hopefully get a sense of what that is and where that's going to be targeted and exactly which services they're reducing to which providers. But in terms of ours, I think what's important to note with that 200,000 is it wasn't allocated to any CBO in particular. It was money that was sitting there in surplus at the end of the year last year.

Hon. Eric Schmalz: — Yeah, thanks. And also I just want to maybe provide some context with respect to the efforts that we're making at the ministerial level.

What we've been advocating for and continue to advocate for in every conversation that I have with the federal minister, is our own provincial autonomy on determining immigration numbers, as is done in Quebec. We want to make sure that we have that ability to pivot and provide supports to industry where they're going to be needed, where personnel is going to be needed. We want to make sure that we're there and able to do that with our own ability, our own jurisdictional ability to be able to provide that support. So we're continuing those conversations as well.

Noor Burki: — Thank you, Minister, for your response. But the question I raise is because a lot of people, that they're coming with really good educational background. They're facing so much problem with their credential recognition and stuff like that. Economically it is always good that we can put the people in right professions where they are being trained. And I know it's really not very hard, and economically it's very good for us.

But if you think that we were having in past budget, in last year's budget, if we over-allocated money and reduction happened, we still have surplus and we have sufficient money so that this area of credential check, people should not be having issues with that. And that should be with the same speed as we were having before, just to make sure of that.

Hon. Eric Schmalz: — Thanks, yeah. And also again, we want to ensure that everyone's aware that the credential recognition grant funding is still in place. I think it's about \$910,000 that still remains in place and it provides a path for individuals who come to Canada with credentials to help them navigate that.

We have actually what we call navigators within the Ministry of Immigration and Career Training to help provide that support to them so that they can find a path to utilizing their credentials to help grow our economy and support individuals who are here now and will be coming in the future. And I'll pass it over to Drew to break that down maybe a little bit more.

Drew Wilby: — Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Mr. Burki, for that question, I think a very important point being raised about credential recognition especially right now. You know, we're looking at labour mobility across the country and ensuring, you know, not only those newcomers to Canada but others have their credentials recognized from one province to another.

The second pillar of the labour market strategy is credential recognition and making sure that those that do have those credentials have them recognized, whether they're underemployed or unemployed, and they're gainfully employed in the labour market.

We were recently on a trade — or not a trade mission, that would

be interesting — but a recruitment mission to Mexico, signed an exciting agreement with the Mexican government. But I ran into two individuals down there, heavy-duty mechanics. I went out . . . I was out of the main room — sorry, let me, if I can tell a story . . . I apologize.

But went into the coffee room and I ran into a young fellow and had a chat with him. And I said, you know, how'd you get here . . . or where'd you come from? And he said, oh I came from a ways away. And I said, well where was that? And he said, Nunavut. And I said, hang on a minute, we're in Mexico City and you came from Nunavut? Tell me more please.

And so he worked through it, and of course Nunavut doesn't have a pathway to permanent residency. Well it turns out there's not just one heavy-duty mechanic. His twin brother is a heavy-duty mechanic as well. So they said, you know what? We flew to Montreal; we overnighted in Montreal. We flew to Mexico City. We came to the job fair that we had there. And both of them walked out with three employment offers in hand out of that job fair.

Both have now settled in Lloydminster. They're fully employed with I believe Redhead Equipment in Lloydminster and gainfully contributing back into the Saskatchewan economy and on their way to permanent residency.

I raise that because there was another individual that I met there. His name was César. César sticks with me. César is a fully trained electrician and he wants a job in Saskatchewan. But of course because of the compulsory trade that electrician is, he's not able to come directly in. But if we could find a way to recognize those credentials in Mexico before he comes to Canada, have him certified, and have, you know, an exam passed so that he could prove that he has a journeyman-like qualification, he could come to Saskatchewan and be gainfully employed in an area that we significantly need it.

Obviously we want to train Saskatchewan folks first, but if we're not able to, let's recognize those credentials and then move to international immigration recruitment as well. So a little bit of a blend of pillar two and three there on that Mexico story.

So in terms of the credential recognition grants, as the minister has indicated there's \$910,000 available. That remains intact this fiscal year. On the nursing credential recognition grant side, that provides up to \$20,000 for unlicensed nurses that are living in Saskatchewan to help them get those credentials recognized.

And the international credential recognition grant provides up to \$6,000 to internationally educated health professionals as well.

You know, we are looking at this across the board and there's a reason we call our folks navigators — to navigate individuals down the pathway — because it's complex and the regulators often, you know, get in the way of that piece. They do it for a good reason, but sometimes we have to work with the regulators and move that along so that we can get individuals fully recognized so they can be gainfully employed in the province in recognizing those credentials.

Thanks for bearing with me with my story.

Noor Burki: — No, I love your story. Stories make things more personal and touching as well. And if we wish and like the stories of attracting people to our province, that's great.

[16:45]

This last year, and I think it's my third time that I'll stick with the same question. You might have heard or some of your colleagues might have heard. We talked about it last year, the Saskatchewan concerning trend: long-term retention rate of immigration. Can the minister update if we see or expect any improvement in the rate of how we can compare with other provinces in Canada?

Christa Ross: — Okay. Christa Ross, assistant deputy minister. Thank you for the question on retention. I do have some positive news to share. Our main source for retention data is through a federal database called the IMDB [Longitudinal Immigration Database]. So that database essentially integrates or links together immigration data with CRA [Canada Revenue Agency] tax filer data.

They issue a new release every year, There is a bit of a time lag, so the most recent data set we have is as of the 2023 tax year. But based on that latest release, we have seen our five-year retention rate for newcomers increase. So it has gone up from 63 per cent to 65 per cent. And again, that's on average over a five-year period, how many newcomers were destined to Saskatchewan and have continued to remain and file taxes over that time period.

Noor Burki: — Well, if it goes that percentage I will be really happy with that. But being a person immigrant, when I moved to this province in 2008 from one small ethnic province that we have back home, we were about 70 families that we moved here. In 2012, we shrank to 35. At this time we are 17 families.

So I don't know how the method works with statistics, but yes, people are using our province as an airport. I'm not saying we don't have a great province. We have a lot of opportunity. But as soon people complete their PR [permanent residence] and stuff, they just leave our province, which is heartbreaking.

Anything, any strict measurement, or any kind of thing. We can't retain people. We can't put them in the province. We can't force them. But is there any way in long term that we can keep people by having some magnetism so they can stay with us in our province?

I can give you my personal example. I am staying here. I was an IT [information technology] professional working with Rogers telecommunications when I came here. I'm staying in this province just because of the good school that we have, and this is Regina Huda School and my kids going to that one. Due to that school, I'm staying there.

Do the government have anything like, having community centres or some kind of thing, faith-based things, that community will stick with? That no, I'm not going to give . . . There is a culture. There is a value. There's people. Anything that we can do out of the box?

Hon. Eric Schmalz: — I'll just quickly speak to some of the things that we're trying to do as government. And most of them

are financially motivated obviously. We want to make sure that we're . . . We have a graduate retention program which offers tax incentives to young people and individuals who are graduating from post-secondary education institutions so that they want to remain here. There's an incentive for them to remain here, including some of the affordability measures and, you know, low taxes that we're trying to keep in the province to ensure that it's an attractive place for people to set up their home and work, play, and raise a family here.

Those are some of the things that we're trying to do at the government level. Obviously we want to be there in support of communities that are looking to set up a, as you put, faith-based supports. Obviously we want to work as government to help support and foster those things.

But primarily what right now we're doing is ensuring that there is a significant financial component to the incentives that people are wanting to take advantage of and staying in Saskatchewan.

Noor Burki: — Okay. I see the allocation for the newcomer settlement has been increased which is a good sign for this year's budget. How much of increase is addressing this problem of retention of people?

Drew Wilby: — Drew Wilby, deputy minister. What you see there and what you're highlighting, although we would love to take credit for a great news announcement, as you portrayed it, that's actually a reallocation of funding. So that's that grant that I talked about, the credential recognition grant. That's moving from one subvote line down to the subvote line that you talked about. So that's just a movement of money through our budget. It's not a new investment. It's moving it from our trade and employment services down to our credential recognition area.

Noor Burki: — A follow-up with the retention. Is there any further evidence of difference to immigrants staying or leaving with the extent they receive support through your ministry?

Hon. Eric Schmalz: — Yeah, I'll just speak broadly to that. Obviously whenever we're able to provide those supports to individuals who want to come to Saskatchewan and call it home, we want to make it as welcoming as possible with the supports available to them to feel like they are not walking alone on a dark path. We want to make sure that they're provided those supports to ensure that they feel welcomed and an integral part of our province, which they are.

We want to make sure that they are supported alongside their families so that we can provide them with that desire to stay here and be part of more broadly the economy, but our social fabric as well.

Drew Wilby: — In addition to that as well, the introduction of *The Immigration Services Act* has done many things for us. And I don't know if we're going to get into much of that today or not, but obviously, you know, some exciting announceables and news for us.

But one piece that's often overlooked is the ability that it now provides for us to provide pre-arrival services, so not just services in Saskatchewan but also abroad to those that are coming to Saskatchewan. So I'd use the example of the agreement that

we've signed with the Mexican National Employment Service and the ability to work with them and actually provide some of those services on the ground in Mexico for those that do have a job offer in hand and are coming to Saskatchewan.

I would say it allows us to, you know, do some work explaining what to expect, what life is like here, and connecting to services before arriving, which, you know, I've never been in that position and, Mr. Burki, I know you have. But being able to see that before coming to the province and being able to make those connections, I can only think, would help. And attaching to the local labour market, attaching to the local communities as well is setting one up for success.

Noor Burki: — Thank you. Given that we see much more positive retention rates in other provinces, has this ministry done any cost-benefit analysis on improving the retention rate more seriously or economic damage of such a high share of immigrants leaving?

Christa Ross: — Okay, thank you for the question again about retention. So you know, the trends, I mean sometimes you're comparing apples and oranges as well, right, in terms of the labour market realities, the, just, individual choices that people make about where they want to live and what's important to them.

I think, you know, if you look at sort of comparable jurisdictions in terms of population size and the size of the municipalities they might have and what that offers, and the number of post-secondary institutions and things like that, if you look at somewhat comparable jurisdictions such as Manitoba. I can remember at last year's estimates, you were drawing comparisons to Manitoba. They're actually experiencing, or have been experiencing, a similar trend as we have in terms of their retention numbers declining. So the gap that has existed between ourselves and our neighbours to the east has actually been narrowing.

But again, it's a bit of comparing apples and oranges, because if you look at how they've set up their nominee program — which, like us, is the primary source of immigration — but their source countries and the criteria they've set up are very different.

So we've tried to intentionally align our provincial nominee program, which as I said is the main source of immigration to Saskatchewan. It accounts for about 80 per cent of all newcomers to the province. We're very intentional in trying to align that to labour market needs so that individuals are coming with job opportunities. Because we do find that that's where we see the strongest retention, as you know, if individuals are able to arrive and they have an employer waiting for them and a job opportunity already secured. And then we continue to invest in settlement services to wrap around that, to welcome those families, help them settle and integrate into their communities.

And then as Drew mentioned, you know, with *The Immigration Services Act*, you know, when we look at our retention data, I don't think we're starting . . . We have yet to see the impacts or the outcomes from some of the changes and new initiatives we've introduced. But I do believe *The Immigration Services Act*, which only came into force in 2024, is going to have a positive impact on retention because that is strengthening the overall integrity of

the immigration system.

So it's making sure that the employers who are recruiting through the system are legitimate, genuine employers, and that newcomers are not being exploited or taken advantage of. So I think, you know, that initiative is one example of something that isn't yet showing up in our retention stats. But I think a couple years from now, a couple more data releases, we'll start to see some outcomes from that, similar to some of the credential recognition work we've already talked about.

You know, that really just started to take effect in 2022-2023 in terms of some new legislation around that to help us hold regulators a bit more accountable and put some timelines and bring in some more transparency. And then also to provide the grants and some financial assistance and provide a bit more of a tailored service to help individuals get their credentials recognized.

Those kinds of initiatives aren't yet showing up in the retention stats that we're able to share with you today, but it's all really part and parcel as part of a strategy (a) to be a destination of choice, but also obviously a destination that people choose to remain in longer term.

Noor Burki: — Thank you for detailing a reply. So that's amazing.

The budget document on page 36 highlights the federal immigration policy has been tightened, but it is expected to be relaxed later this decade. That's what we heard. Can you summarize how your ministry budget has adapted to help swing in recent years? And are you preparing for an eventual increase?

Drew Wilby: — Deputy Minister Drew Wilby. Thanks for that question. Yes, one of the interesting things I found when I came into the ministry was how reliant we are on federal policy changes, which is somewhat unfortunate. But it is a reality of course in terms of the two sides of the House and the business in which we do.

We've taken some action within last year's budget and again this year's budget to look towards what that future might be, to look towards the reality that we have right now. We've talked a little bit about that this afternoon. You know, last year I believe we reduced by three FTEs [full-time equivalent] in our immigration services branch just because of the reduced workload that was there — again that accountability to the taxpayers.

It was a decision last year just after budget where we decided to roll down our farm owner and entrepreneurship program. So we communicated that to our staff and publicly last April, May. And as a result of that, we unfortunately had to communicate that we were shutting that down as of October. And so three staff . . . or five staff total were there. In October they were given their, you know, their options underneath the collective bargaining agreement. Two staff chose to stay with the ministry, and three chose a severance option. Never news you like to deliver. But again, it was just the reality of those federal decisions in which we had to make. So again, some tightening up of our budget and making sure we were equipped going forward.

[17:00]

What we haven't done is what the federal government has done. And I don't mean to keep harping on them, but IRCC cut their workforce by 33 per cent, which what we're seeing is delays in processing times. We're seeing the use of AI, which is fine, but a lot of secondary reviews on applications happening because of the use of AI, and mistakes that's being made and humans having to go and check those mistakes on the back end.

And so we made a conscious effort that we would equip ourselves with, you know, the appropriate staffing mix to make sure that we were solid going forward, to make sure that we were addressing the needs of employers as well as of the individuals that want to come to Saskatchewan and work here, make a life here. And then of course, as you've highlighted today, those on the settlement services side of the equation as well, and on the credential recognition piece.

So there's been a lot of thought and context go into that. Also in how we've allocated our streams and looking at those high-need sectors. Last year it was specific health, agriculture, and skilled trades. And by agriculture I mean the value-added side of agriculture. They were the only sectors we allowed to recruit internationally. As well they were able to recruit to whatever they required, as long as it was underneath the total threshold.

We have had to cap the trucking, accommodation, retail, and food services sectors. And again this year we've capped that again, but to a point where we're well connected with the employer community to make sure that, you know, they do have some of those pieces in place that they require in order to stay afloat. But we've also been able to extend the international recruitment out to some of those other sectors under our labour market strategy as well.

So in short I believe, you know, we're learning as we go. We're strengthening the system as we go. Not only are we strengthening the immigration system and the work that we're doing there, we're strengthening the compliance piece as well and making sure that we have a much better understanding of what's happening out there in the community and tackling those bad actors if and where that's required to make sure that we're protecting those individuals coming here as well as protecting Saskatchewan businesses that are playing by the rules.

Noor Burki: — Thank you, Deputy Minister, for giving us a clear look on that. In budget 2024 and 2025 we allocated a lot of money for programming integrity support. It's been almost three years. If you can give me a little bit of detail about that, by this program that the government launched to be sure they can check the integrity of the program.

How many fraud charges been laid? And how many were cleared? And how many still are in PIU [programming integrity unit]? And how much revenue we generated from that? And what is the planning of government in this next year? How much like they are expecting that people will be investigated?

Hon. Eric Schmalz: — Yeah, and thanks for that question. I want to just quickly preface some of what the responses will be from the deputy minister here with just some commentary on the situation and what we've done as a government to ensure that we're protecting individuals. Not only the individuals who are coming here but the individuals, the work, our workplace, our

workforce integrity. We want to make sure we're supporting them as well.

I want to say that we've drawn a hard line on this. We are taking a zero-tolerance stance. What effectively these individuals who are taking advantage of people's desire to come to our province, what they are participating in is tantamount to human trafficking. And for me personally, it is completely unacceptable. My career, prior to becoming a member of the legislature, was in law enforcement. And it is something that I've witnessed first-hand and take personal umbrage with.

So anything that we can do as a government or as a ministry in particular to support individuals in ensuring that they are not being taken advantage of by bad actors in the industry, we are looking to augment our ability to do that. That includes hiring a full-time prosecutor to ensure that these cases are being heard in a timely manner and these individuals are being brought to task on all of this.

I'm going to turn it over to the deputy minister to speak to that more in depth. But I want to ensure that that is being communicated to the people who are here now and maybe coming in the future, to ensure that they know that they will be supported. And if they are finding themselves — or if they have any questions — finding themselves in a situation that is maybe bordering or touching on this, please reach out. Please reach out to the ministry. We will be there to support you.

You go ahead.

Drew Wilby: — Thank you, Minister. Deputy Minister Drew Wilby. Yes, our compliance framework and enforcement framework has been crucial. What we found is when we do publicly announce a charge or we publicly announce an administrative penalty, we actually have people come and want to pay their administrative penalty.

We had one individual who, after our first charges were announced, drove down from Saskatoon — I won't name the individual — but said "where do I pay" and had a cheque ready to go to pay to the comptroller of Saskatchewan. So I think safe to say that the action we're taking is having an effect on that front as well as protecting individuals too.

So a few stats that you asked for. We've had four charges — three employers and one immigration consultant — that are before the Provincial Court in Moose Jaw, Saskatoon, and North Battleford. One employer file was approved by the Crown prosecutor for trial with the summons to be served imminently.

We've had five administrative monetary penalties issued against four individuals and one employer — 27,000 in total with three paid, for \$17,000 in collection.

Four compensation orders were issued against one employer and three individuals, totalling \$169,240. We've had 54 licence and certificates of registration refused, suspended, or cancelled for various violations of *The Immigration Services Act*, and 298 employer certifications of registration audited with 21 found non-compliant.

I think one of the most interesting pieces for me was a case where

it was an individual in China who had been defrauded of \$96,000. The individual came to us, obviously was upset, connected with us from China. We were able to issue an order for the 96,000. We were able to give that individual their \$96,000 back. To me that really speaks to the success of that client service, you know, whether they're in Saskatchewan or abroad and looking to come to Saskatchewan, ensuring that we're able to drive that out.

The other key piece of that story is the consultant was in BC [British Columbia]. So not only are we localized in Saskatchewan, now we have players across the country and internationally that are trying to take advantage of this system that we're able to tackle.

A couple other stats for you: as of January 31 our program compliance branch has processed 3,022 core applications and renewals and maintains a registry of 5,896 active employers who recruit foreign workers. So speaks to a bit of the extent of the individuals that are in this area. They audited 329 registered employers, of which 307 were found compliant. And those who were non-compliant, they were able to suspend their core or eliminate their core altogether.

There's a variety of tools they can use, which again is to ensure some of those individuals are dealt with. But also it gives them an opportunity where maybe, you know, it was something that wasn't that serious, where they can bring themselves back into compliance. Because compliance really relies on three legs of the stool. It's education, it's intervention, and enforcement. And it starts with education and making sure folks know what it is they need to be doing; what are the rules of the game, you know; how do we conduct our business.

From there potentially an intervention is needed. Maybe it's a reach out. Maybe it's a site visit. Maybe it's something more intensive. And then lastly, it's enforcement and utilizing those tools that we have available to us to be able to drive that out.

An area that is of grave concern is immigration consultants and recruiters. There's some great consultants and recruiters out there, but there are also those that are not so good. We've processed 254 applications and renewals for consultants or recruiter licences, and again maintained a database of 662 active licensees, who provide immigration consulting and recruitment service. And we want to make sure that those that are playing by the rules are continuing to conduct that and doing the work that needs to be done, but those that aren't are being caught.

And we're also working with our partners federally, with CBSA, the Canada Border Services Agency, as well as the RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police] and IRCC as well. And of course on the temporary foreign workers side, with ESDC [Employment and Social Development Canada]. Sorry to throw all the acronyms out. Just wouldn't be a government official without the acronyms. Isn't that true?

So you know, working with our partners in making sure we have a full wraparound service here, because it takes more than just one. It really takes a village on this front to be able to make sure that we are getting to where we need to get to.

Noor Burki: — Thank you, deputy minister, for your detailed reply for that. It's really very important that we can keep, protect

our services that we are providing people, so people are not misusing that. Thank you for that.

The funding for the Canada Job Grant is ending according to the budget that I have seen. I don't know whether there might be some money rolling from there, but as far as I can see, my understanding is that the grant especially allowed a non-profit to train workers. Will the funding be replaced in a different line item? And can the ministry share that analysis that would have done or would impact any program ending for this fiscal year?

Drew Wilby: — Thank you for the question. So the Canada-Saskatchewan Job Grant was eliminated as part of last year's budget. If you recall last year when we talked, Mr. Burki, the federal government reduced what were called the labour market transfer agreement top-ups. So those had been in place since, ironic, the first round of tariffs under the first Trump administration. And then so those labour market transfer agreement top-ups were provided to the provinces to, you know, obviously provide those services that were required to individuals to help them get engaged in the labour force and in the work force.

Saskatchewan's share, that was \$17.6 million. And so unfortunately that was a big hit from the federal government. So as a result we had to make some decisions, and part of that was to eliminate the Canada-Saskatchewan Job Grant.

What you're seeing in this year's budget was the residuals. So we had some contracts that worked their way through last year. So we maintained \$750,000 and a small staff to deal with that. We're able to finish the wind-down of those. The staff are gainfully employed in others areas of the ministry, so we did not have to eliminate anyone from those positions, thankfully. But again that grant has been reduced.

I think going forward, you know, obviously the federal government has provided us with the labour market top-up agreement top-ups again, this time for tariff-affected workers. So it's funny; what was old is new again. But they put some very tight parameters around that. And so will it be used like the job grant was? No, it can't be because the feds have said that's just not in the cards. But we will be able to use it creatively to ensure that, you know, those that may be tariff-affected, either underemployed, unemployed, or potentially looking to re-skill into those employers to keep them going, will be able to benefit from that.

So there's shades of things ahead. You know, we will look to invest that money wisely, obviously into those key areas where we need it, whether it be forestry, whether it be steel or other sectors of the economy, and make sure that Saskatchewan and Saskatchewan people are benefiting from those investments, of course following the rules that the federal government has set before us.

Noor Burki: — Thank you, Deputy Minister, again. In estimates we see a funding increase in Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission, which is great. We, as you know, been supporting additional 300 — as we mentioned in the discussion as well — apprenticeship for training seats. And just that will totally increase the seats of 5,300 highlighted in the budget.

We would like to know if the ministry has any data on what the total demand of apprenticeships is for young people and in industry?

Drew Wilby: — In the apprenticeship system, it's important to sort of compare what's going on in the economy, which will then be reflective in that system of course because with opportunity comes the demand for apprenticeship. Obviously with 120,000 jobs forecast over the next five years, many in the construction sector, you can imagine that there is a significant demand for apprenticeship.

Part of the challenge too on that is balancing the needs of the workforce. And so I'll take an example. If there's a hot sector of the economy or a hot area — let's take the Estevan area and what's potentially going to happen down there with nuclear, with the thermal power transition, as well as other pieces in that area — you know, there's a significant demand for individuals. And then releasing those apprentices for eight weeks to go to school becomes difficult too. And so you have to balance a lot of those factors when looking at that demand.

[17:15]

We believe there's about 7,700 or slightly more apprentices registered in the system presently. So those may be individuals that are making their way through. Maybe they've taken a year off and they're not in a seat, or they potentially could be waiting for that training opportunity to pop up.

Or you might be like my son, who is a third-year apprentice coming out of a pre-employment program in heavy equipment truck and trailer, and he's asking his dad how he gets registered in the system, because he looks at it and he's confused. I'll tell you, his dad's even more confused than that because IT is not my specialty, which is why we've got great officials to guide it. So he's an example of an individual that may be in there and waiting for a seat.

So to what could be a really long story, I'll try to provide a short answer — that we know that there are about 7,700 registered apprentices. The investment here will get us up to 5,300. That doesn't mean there's a gap of 2,400. It just means that there are an additional set of apprentices somewhere in the system. Some maybe haven't completed their journeyman but they've completed their year four, or they're waiting to take a journeyman again, just depending on their self circumstances.

And others are obviously gainfully employed out in the labour market, and they just don't want to take the time away to go back to school for those eight weeks and will continue to do that in the future. I hope that provides the answer you're looking for.

Noor Burki: — Thank you. Following up with apprenticeship and labour market, is there any specific people to support young people who need additional support such as NEETEST youth to start and complete their apprenticeship?

Drew Wilby: — This is a key area of focus for the ministry going forward, will be, how do we further engage our young people into the apprenticeship system? How do we further engage them into the skilled trades area? I remember being a . . . Here come my stories again, I'm sorry. I remember being . . . [inaudible]

interjection] . . . You like my stories? Okay.

I remember being an elementary school student, Roland Michener School in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. Go Roadrunners. We were probably in about grade 4 and the uranium trailer showed up. And we went out and we experienced the uranium trailer, which we all thought was really cool. The one thing that sticks in my head was seeing the yellowcake, but also being able to pull and feel how heavy and dense uranium was compared to lead and other metals. And I thought, this is really cool.

So I went home and I asked my dad about uranium. Dad was a lifelong salesperson with Acklands-Grainger in Saskatoon and, you know, he just, he engaged and taught me about that, and talking about whether it be uranium or potash mining, and got me captivated.

Now why I ended up a civil servant, I'm not sure. Maybe I should have gone on a route to skills trades, but this is . . .

Hon. Eric Schmalz: — Because of the cool people that you hang around with.

Drew Wilby: — That's right, that's right. That's you, Minister, and all of you of course. Sorry to digress.

But in terms of the engagement with youth, that is a key focus. And I know, you know, the Minister of Education is there with us as well, as well as the groups that I've talked about like the Saskatoon Industry Education Council, Regina Industry Education Council.

As well, there's the Saskatchewan apprenticeship and trade commission has the Saskatchewan youth apprenticeship program. So this helps high school students understand the benefits of apprenticeship and careers in the skilled trades. It's overseen by the commission. It's delivered in hundreds of schools across the province. And as of January 31st, 2026 there were more than 2,200 students registered in the program.

So part of this is that front-line engagement as well as the marketing and communication to get those kids captivated and connected to the system. So the hope is that as they come through and as they graduate out, they want to go and get careers in the skilled trades and then go and of course register as apprentices as well.

So there's a variety of supports and services there, as well as the trade and skills centres in Saskatoon and Regina. And we've talked about the increased investment there. They're designed to get not only youth but others — but in particular, youth — that step up into those construction trades particularly, and then hopefully engage and capture them so that they want to go through that apprenticeship system and get their four levels and their journey person down the road, so that they then can give back and begin to train the youth of tomorrow and the apprentices and the skilled tradespeople of tomorrow as well.

Noor Burki: — Thank you, Deputy Minister. Will you provide me some percentage of completion of apprenticeship rates in the previous two years, like what is the success? And what is the goal for this year by having such an increase in the funding?

Sarah Collins: — Hi. Sarah Collins, executive director with the skills training branch. Thank you so much for the question. You're looking just to confirm for some kind of outcomes, statistical information for the apprenticeship commission for the last couple of years.

The most recent year of data that we have is of course '24-25. That would be the last full year of data. And maybe I'll talk about a couple of things that are going really well at the commission, including the commission manages a very high fill rate every year. So that's the number of classes that fill, so there's no classes that kind of go to waste every year. Their fill rate in '24-25 was 95 per cent, and that was the same in '22-23.

One of the other statistics that we can talk about is the number of journey person certificates issued. So keep in mind that although there's 5,300 seats this year, that would be across all kind of four levels of technical apprenticeship training, and so at any given point in time you're not going to graduate 5,300 people. So last year they issued 1,002 journey person certificates. And in the year previous they issued 983.

Other information that might be valuable to you. You've talked a little bit about youth and what that looks like. So the number of youth apprentices registered, they're up almost at 3,000. So in '23-24 it was 3,045, and in '24-25 it was 2,839. And they've started recently tracking the conversion rate. You've heard the deputy minister speak about the Sask youth apprenticeship program. They started tracking the number of individuals that transition from that program into the apprenticeship commission — '23-24 it was 30.7 per cent, and that increased by 5 per cent last year to 35.3 per cent.

They have a proportionate number of Indigenous apprentices as a proportion of population. And I'm just getting that number here for you. So last year it was 17.1 per cent. Sorry, this is '23-24. And last year it was 17.2 per cent.

Noor Burki: — Thank you. Thank you.

Hon. Eric Schmalz: — Thank you. So when we mention the 1,200, I believe it was 1,200 or 1,000? The journey persons . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . 1,002 journey persons. It's a four-level program or four-stage program. So there's still individuals who are engaged in the remaining training seats who are at varying levels of that. This year I believe was the most we've seen with the level 1 entrance, so they're starting to come in, you know, a lot more in a lot higher volume at the level 1 area. So there's level 1, 2, 3, 4 and then the journey person certification. And that comes through in the values that were expressed here today of 1,002 for last year.

Noor Burki: — Thank you, Minister. To make it really optimal what the ministry will be supporting young people to make sure they complete an apprenticeship, reach to the maximum optimal level, what is the planning?

Hon. Eric Schmalz: — Thank you. Yes, and so what we're doing to ensure the highest level of engagement and retention through these programs is ensuring the seat allocations are going to areas where individuals are able to access those opportunities. So in centres not just located in the two large urban centres but also in smaller urban and smaller municipalities to ensure that

the access is available to young people.

We're also engaging individuals in their high school career to ensure that we have that ability to bring them into the possibility of them engaging in a trades and skills training program offered through the SATCC [Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission]. We want to make sure that we're able to provide that to them, not just in large urban centres, but also spread out throughout the province as well.

So I'll pass over some more technical data on that front.

Sarah Collins: — In terms of the ministry . . . Sorry. Give me just one second. I'm just going to grab the right sheet. It's all good. I just wanted to make sure I was talking about the right thing. Might be a little career limiting if I was talking about the wrong thing.

So one of the great examples that exists out there is BHP Potash Academy at Carlton Trail. The program that exists is a pre-employment . . . or it's an employment program that exists using skills training funding, so not just apprenticeship funding. But we're often looking for ways for skills training funding to complement other forms of funding out there. It's a program focused on achieving industrial mechanic credentials.

So one of the great examples that exists out there is BHP Potash Academy at Carlton Trail. The program that exists is a pre-employment . . . or it's an employment program that exists using skills training funding, so not just apprenticeship funding. But we're often looking for ways for skills training funding to complement other forms of funding out there. It's a program focused on achieving industrial mechanic credentials.

The first cohort that went through had 11 students, and the program supported participants kind of with fundamental concepts and essential skills related to mining as well as important safety certifications and mechanical basics. These kind of job-ready skills position students for immediate entry into the workforce. And so while they're attending school, they're actually employees of BHP at Carlton Trail.

There's a second cohort that just finished in February and there was 13 students enrolled. I don't have the number in front of me, but I know that there's a significant portion of women that also attend that program, which means that we're helping women enter skilled trades careers.

Noor Burki: — Thank you for giving those details. Do we have any data about how many participants, Indigenous and non-Indigenous? If we can have some data about that in apprenticeships.

Sarah Collins: — At the apprenticeship commission?

Noor Burki: — Yes. Yes.

Sarah Collins: — Okay. Yeah. So in terms of the percentage of Indigenous apprentices, I'm going to give you '24-25 data — it's the last full year — if that's okay?

Noor Burki: — Yes.

Sarah Collins: — Percentage of Indigenous apprentices is 17.2; percentage of women apprentices, 10.1 per cent; percentage of visible minority apprentices, 8.7 per cent; and percentage of apprentices that identify as experiencing a disability, 12 per cent.

Noor Burki: — That was year 2024?

Sarah Collins: — Yeah.

Noor Burki: — What about 2025?

Sarah Collins: — So I only have data up until December 31st, so it's a partial year, so this could change. Do you want . . . Skip it? Yeah, this was the '24-25 fiscal year. Apologies.

Noor Burki: — Okay, I think we're running out of time as well. I will just quickly . . . One last question: that last year the federal reduction of our seats allocated were cut by 50 per cent, and we were just left over with about half of that, 50 per cent.

And we know that many provinces, they approach to federal, they make a deal. Our neighbouring province, Manitoba, they reach out to federal and they make a deal with them that those people, the leaving students, that their work permit will be extended for two years so they can stay in the province. So later on they can enrol into the SINP program, the provincial nominee program.

My question is, we didn't have this program. Because this can retain a lot of good people, especially young people when they graduated from university they're ready to go. They get used to with the language. They have developed work ethics. They are just fruitful trees. They can get into the industry, the market. Why we didn't do the same thing as Manitoba did?

[17:30]

Hon. Eric Schmalz: — Yeah, and thanks for the question. Obviously I would be remiss if I didn't put this on the record that we have written to the federal minister four times to be offered the same opportunity as Manitoba on this front, and we were denied four times.

We are currently offering, through the SINP program for seats, a path to permanency. There's going to be 700, I believe — is it — 750 seats available for individuals who are currently in a post-secondary education that are on student visas essentially to be brought in through the SINP program and retaining that knowledge base that they've gained here in country and in province to ensure that they are helping to, again, grow our economy in Saskatchewan and grow our province.

Again we've advocated and we continue to advocate with our federal counterparts on opportunities like those available to Manitoba. However again I would be remiss if I just said that we were seeing any success in us lobbying for those allowances.

And I'll let . . . Do you want to add anything to that, Drew?

Drew Whitby: — Yeah, I think the minister has placed that very, very well. I would just add that Manitoba doesn't have that policy in place anymore, that IRCC is no longer allowing them to do that. And so every jurisdiction across Canada is basically in the same boat at this point in time.

Chair D. Harrison: — Thank you. Having reached our agreed-upon time for consideration of these estimates, we will adjourn consideration of the estimates and supplementary estimates no. 2 for the Ministry of Immigration and Career Training.

Minister Schmalz, do you have any closing comments?

Hon. Eric Schmalz: — I would just like to take this opportunity to thank ministry officials and the ministry staff for their hard work and diligence in not only preparing for these estimates, but also in the work they conduct and do on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan every day. It can't be overstated how much I, as the minister, and people of Saskatchewan owe them a debt of gratitude for their continued service to our province.

Chair D. Harrison: — Thank you, Minister. MLA Burki, do you have any closing comments?

Noor Burki: — Sure. Thank you very much, Minister, for giving a really detailed time and on the back of . . . [inaudible] . . . Do you want to say something?

Hon. Eric Schmalz: — Yeah, sorry. No, I was just thinking with the Chair afterwards, I've got one more thing to follow up. Sorry, I neglected to thank the committee as well. Obviously I wanted to make sure that you were recognized for your work on this committee as well, so thank you.

Chair D. Harrison: — Thank you, Mr. Schmalz. MLA Burki, do you have anything else?

Noor Burki: — Thank you. The pillars that we see behind ministers or executives or bureaucrats are hard-working people, and I don't know how much time you spend for that. Thank you for all the hard work that you guys do. We recognize it at each and every level. Without your efforts we would be not where we are. Thank you and we always appreciate that.

And along with that, I will say, the staff of the Assembly, thank you very much for . . . [inaudible] . . . and my colleagues on both sides, thank you very much for coming. And we wish and pray that we can make this province the best province ever that we can. Thank you.

Chair D. Harrison: — Thank you, Minister. And your officials, thanks for coming in this afternoon. I'd also like to thank the committee for their work here today. I'd also like to thank the Clerks and *Hansard* as well.

And that concludes our business for today. I would ask a member to move a motion of adjournment. MLA Kasun has moved. All agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair D. Harrison: — Agreed. Carried. This committee stands adjourned until Wednesday, April 1st, 2026 at 3:30 p.m. Thank you.

[The committee adjourned at 17:34.]