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Department of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills

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Honourable Derek Bennett, MHA

RESOURCE COMMITTEE

Department of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills

Chair: Scott Reid, MHA

Vice-Chair: Craig Pardy, MHA

Members: Pleaman Forsey, MHA
Sherry Gambin-Walsh, MHA
Jordan Brown, MHA
Perry Trimper, MHA
Lucy Stoyles, MHA

Clerk of the Committee: Bobbi Russell (A)

Appearing:

Department of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills

Hon. Gerry Byrne, MHA, Minister

Karen Stone, KC, Deputy Minister

Seamus Breen, Assistant Deputy Minister, Corporate Services and Policy Branch

Sharlene Jones, Assistant Deputy Minister, Employment and Labour Market Development

Katie Norman, Assistant Deputy Minister, Immigration and Population Growth

John Tompkins, Director of Communications

Ryan Harding, Communications Manager

Kerry Chaytor, Executive Assistant to the Minister

Also Present

Hon. Fred Hutton, MHA, Minister of Housing

Hon. John Abbott, MHA, Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure

Chris Tibbs, MHA

James Dinn, MHA

Jim Locke, Government Members' Caucus

Colby Greeley, Official Opposition Caucus

Steven Kent, Third Party Caucus

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Fred Hutton, MHA for Conception Bay East - Bell Island, substitutes for Perry Trimper, MHA for Lake Melville.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Chris Tibbs, MHA for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans, substitutes for Pleaman Forsey, MHA for Exploits.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Jim Dinn, MHA for St. John's Centre, substitutes for Jordan Brown, MHA for Labrador West.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, John Abbott, MHA for Signal Hill - Quidi Vidi, substitutes for Sherry Gambin-Walsh, MHA for Placentia - St. Mary's.

The Committee met at 5: 30 p.m. in the House of Assembly Chamber.

CHAIR (Reid): Okay, we're going to get started now, if everyone is ready. All the Members of the Committee are here.

Just a few housekeeping matters, I guess. In terms of when you're speaking, just wave to let the people down in Broadcast Centre know where you are so they can turn on the right mic. Wait for your light to come on before you proceed to speak. Say your name and position each time that you speak, so we have that for the record.

They're telling me to tell you to not adjust the chairs that you're sitting in. The water coolers are located on that end and down here as well.

We've got some substitutions here, so I'm just going to read those out. Substituting for the Member for Exploits is the Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans. Substituting for the Member for Labrador West is the Member for St. John's Centre. Substituting for the Member for Lake Melville is the Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island. Substituting for the Member for Placentia-St. Mary's is the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

So those are the substitutions. I'm going to ask everyone to identify themselves first before we get into the meeting.

Do you want to start off, Minister?

G. BYRNE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My name is Gerald Francis Byrne, sometimes known as Gerry Byrne, and I'm the Minister of Immigration, Population Growth, and Skills.

I'm joined by an excellent executive. To my immediate left is Deputy Minister Karen Stone. I'll ask the deputy minister to initiate a discussion of the staff that's assembled, but I want to say how deeply, deeply pleased and enamoured I am with the amazing executive within Immigration, Population Growth and Skills.

Karen is joined by quite a contingent of amazing experts and people who are passionate about the jobs that they do. To my immediate right is someone who breaks that mould in Corporate Services; he's still got a heart though. Seamus Breen is our assistant deputy minister of Corporate Services and Policy. Mr. Breen adds a real depth to the shop.

Sharlene Jones, our assistant deputy minister for Labour – now, I keep on getting the formal title of this shop a little bit confused, so Sharlene, why don't you – I always keep calling it the workforce development branch, but it's not. It is the Labour Market Development and –

S. JONES: Employment.

G. BYRNE: And Employment. That's right. And we'll get to that in a moment.

To the back ranks – for the purposes of the microphones, is it important that people self identify, Mr. Chair?

CHAIR: Yeah, maybe that would be better.

G. BYRNE: Okay. Sorry about that.

CHAIR: If you could wave your hand and just give your name and position, I guess.

Okay, we'll start over here.

K. CHAYTOR: Kerry Chaytor, Executive Assistant to the minister.

K. NORMAN: Good evening, everyone.

Katie Norman, Assistant Deputy Minister, Immigration and Population Growth.

J. TOMPKINS: John Tompkins, Director of Communications.

R. HARDING: Ryan Harding, Manager of Media Relations.

CHAIR: Okay.

I'll ask the Members and their assistants to identify themselves. We'll start here.

F. HUTTON: Fred Hutton, MHA for Conception Bay East - Bell Island and Minister of Housing.

C. PARDY: Craig Pardy, MHA for the historic District of Bonavista.

C. GREELEY: Colby Greeley, Researcher, Office of the Official Opposition.

J. DINN: Jim Dinn, MHA for St. John's Centre.

S. KENT: Steven Kent, Researcher, Third Party Caucus.

CHAIR: Okay.

Let's start on this end.

J. ABBOTT: John Abbott, MHA for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi and Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

C. TIBBS: Chris Tibbs, MHA for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans.

J. LOCKE: Jim Locke, Government Members' Office.

L. STOYLES: Lucy Stoyles, MHA for Mount Pearl North.

CHAIR: I am Scott Reid, Member for St. George's - Humber and Chair of the Committee.

I think we have some minutes that we have to get approved – I think they have been circulated – from the last meeting. So I'm going to ask for a mover. Do we need a seconder?

CLERK (Russell): No seconder.

L. STOYLES: So moved.

CHAIR: Moved by Member for Mount Pearl North.

All those in favour of approving the minutes?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against?

We will consider them passed.

On motion, minutes adopted as circulated.

CHAIR: So I'm going to start off and I'm going to ask the minister if he would like to make some opening comments.

G. BYRNE: I was going beyond that, Mr. Chair. Thank you very, very much for the opportunity.

Before I begin a formal presentation, I would like to acknowledge that there is a wonderful person who's important in my life, who's having her birthday with us instead of being with people who she appreciates and

enjoys, she's spending her birthday with me. That is Kerry Chaytor.

Kerry, happy birthday to you,
Happy birthday to you,
Happy birthday, dear Kerry,
Happy birthday to you.

K. CHAYTOR: Thank you so much.

G. BYRNE: I hope you enjoy the next three hours. This will be the longest three hours I've ever spent in this Chamber myself.

OFFICIAL: (Inaudible.)

G. BYRNE: I always got somewhat of a fallback.

CHAIR: Okay, no other comments?

G. BYRNE: No, I do actually. I want to thank everyone for the time tonight. We've got a lot to cover. This is a department, which is an extraordinary department, which has seen several changes over the last decade in particular.

You may often refer to the Department of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills by some of its former names or associations, whether it be the Department of Human Resources and Employment. It transformed from that in 2015 into the Department of Advanced Education and Skills. Subsequently to that, the Department of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour, taking on additional duties. Then, of course, in 2021, it became a very, very focused department related to and putting it in its title itself, Population Growth.

Population Growth, of course, is based on some fundamental tenants. It's security for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to stay here, to grow here, and that comes with skills and jobs, but as well, the purposeful intention of attracting newcomers to Newfoundland and Labrador. That's where Immigration was built directly into the title of the department to give it clear focus and to

set the stage for its intentions, which is to break a 50-year cycle of population decline and bring it into Population Growth. That's been an objective of governments for many, many decades.

I'll speak more of this in a few minutes, but we have manifestly changed the dynamic of Newfoundland and Labrador through the work of this department and its partners, not only the people here on the floor of this Legislature but throughout the entire province.

So that is story that's worth celebrating and it should be celebrated. In Newfoundland and Labrador, we fail often to celebrate that which we succeed at. This is an example of where we can all take direct relationship and direct affiliation with a success story.

Work in this department occurs under three branches: Immigration and Population Growth; Employment and Labour Market Development; and Corporate Services and Policy. Those three mighty powerhouses within the department are led by Assistant Deputy Minister Karen Stone, who comes from an august career in the public service. I have to say without any question or any measure of any doubt, she is the best deputy minister that I've ever, ever worked under and with.

The department supports this government's overarching work to promote a healthy, vibrant, diverse communities where we can live, work and raise families. This is really what this is all about. Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are put first in terms of training and employment opportunities, but we share that benefit with newcomers and those who would want to call Newfoundland and Labrador their home and that, Mr. Chair, there are many.

The work includes the creation of a climate that is conducive to economic growth, to competitiveness, to prosperity and it can be achieved through a range of services and supports that IPGS follows. These include

increasing the recruitment and retention of newcomers, promoting diversity and multiculturalism as we go, taking steps to prevent racism and educating our population, educating our people of the value of diversity and how it makes us stronger. It comes from helping employers access and retaining skilled workers in providing programs and supports for apprenticeships and the trades, in ensuring individuals have the skills they need for employment as industries and opportunities evolve and offering career development and planning services, employment and training supports and information about the labour market to all those who would seek to join it.

Mr. Chair, the successes have been many. We, in Newfoundland and Labrador, have been plagued with chronic stories of high unemployment, population decline and significant, significant perennial out-migration with little vision or little evidence of in-migration. This has been a fact and been storied in news for quite some time.

Well, Mr. Chair, record low unemployment is here. There are more people working in Newfoundland and Labrador than ever before. In fact, we recorded just recently the lowest unemployment rate ever recorded in our province since it began to be recorded some many, many decades ago.

Our current unemployment is one of the lowest, at 10.1 per cent, recorded by Stats Canada in March of 2024. This is one of the lowest unemployment rates that we have seen. It has actually even gone slightly lower than that for periods of time.

There are fewer people unemployed, there are more people now in the labour market and in just one month from February to March of this year, there was a drop in those unemployed by 400 people. Every time that occurs, month after month after month, then of course you know you have a real, real trend.

So in terms of population growth, it goes without saying that the bugbear, the confounding and never-ending problem of population decline has been a test of governments of all stripes and varieties for 50 years. After a 50-year period of population decline, taken over its totality, our population is now growing and growing at its fastest rate in 50 years.

Since 2021, the Newfoundland and Labrador population has seen sustained population growth and according to – not according to myself or anyone around me – but according to Statistics Canada, the province's population has grown by more than 14,000 people in 36 months.

We have accomplished that through a variety of means. Some of it is through immigration. Statistics Canada does tell us that the volume of people who are coming to Newfoundland and Labrador from other provinces, including Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who left some time ago, or even more recently, they are coming.

We have people coming from faraway countries, choosing Newfoundland and Labrador as their home – choosing it for all the right reasons. In 2023, last year, we welcomed a record 5,500 new permanent residents – 5,485 to be exact. But when you consider that we had a target of 5,100 for the year 2026, well ahead of the schedule, three years ahead of schedule, we met a target of exceeding that, to 5,500. There is no stopping it.

In the first two months of 2024, we welcomed 1,000 additional new permanent residents. Again, for the purposes of rounding, it was actually 995. This indicates that we are seeing sustained immigration to our province.

Seventy-three per cent of permanent residents are economic immigrants. I want to really emphasize that, Mr. Chair, because some would say, is this sustainable? Can we do this? Is it responsible? Is it the right

thing to do? Seventy-three per cent of new permanent residents are economic immigrants. It means that immigrants are coming to jobs or bringing jobs with them. They're the ones that are buying houses, that are contributing to our economy, that are providing us with new taxes. These are the people that are the health care workers, the new tradespeople, the new people that are really inside our economy. Without them, we would be less.

All immigrants, all newcomers make us stronger and better. Our momentum is growing and, according to Statistics Canada, Newfoundland and Labrador is the only province in Atlantic Canada whose one-year retention rate is growing. We're now at 66.4 per cent for all newcomers. It is much, much higher in other specific and select categories.

We attribute our ongoing success in immigration and population growth in the ability to pivot quickly to changing circumstances. That's really something that government is not particularly well known for. This department knows how to seize an opportunity, to take measured, responsible risks, but risks that do pay off. That is proven by our success in immigration and our success in growing our population. That pivoting to quickly changing the circumstances in moving our resources, both financial and staffing, to where our goals are best supported, will be highlighted here tonight in some of that.

There will probably be sections of the Estimates that you'll want to query a little bit further as to why this particular line item has changed with such a huge magnitude over this line item and so on and so forth. Well, that is what our department does best. We reflect on what the circumstances are and we apply, with judicious accountability, a pivot to best results.

Mr. Chair, it is no question that everyone in this Chamber, everyone in this province, everyone everywhere who's associated with

this initiative, we stand strong with Ukraine. Today, more than 4,300 Ukrainians, the equivalent of the entire Town of Port aux Basques, or other large centres in our province, are living and raising their families here in Newfoundland and Labrador. Prior to February of 2022, there were seven.

Helping us build a better Newfoundland and Labrador every step of the way, these are people who are directly engaged in our labour market and creating a better way of life not only for themselves, but for all of us. Our retention rate of the Ukrainian initiative, 86 per cent – 86 per cent of all Ukrainians that arrived here are staying here. That, I don't think, is a retention rate that can be mimicked in any other place in Canada.

Almost 500 employers have hired Ukrainians. Ukrainians are living in more than 60 communities throughout our province, and there are Members in this Chamber right now at this Committee hearing that will reflect on how Ukrainians are in your communities. And I want to thank you for being a part of an incredible welcoming effort to them. You are some of the very reasons why they have stayed.

More than 1,100 Ukrainians have already been nominated for permanent residency and many more are applying regularly. The Ukrainian community in Newfoundland and Labrador continues to lay down roots throughout the entire province. March saw the opening of a special homeland school. I won't even begin to try to pronounce it right now, but it has a special Ukrainian name. This school, a Saturday school, is offering children with lessons in the Ukrainian language and culture. The school is the first of its kind, not only in Newfoundland and Labrador, but in all of Atlantic Canada.

Connection to home is what creates comforts. When people feel comfortable that they're not surrendering everything about themselves when they arrive at a new place, that not only they're welcomed here, but they're still welcomed and encouraged

and supported in who they are and what they contribute, that helps them to make the decision to stay.

Like all of Canada, this province has a housing challenge. We do not shy away from that reality. This challenge is complex. It requires, sometimes, complex solutions on many fronts. In the case of the Ukrainian community, the vast majority are living in independent housing. No Ukrainians are living in provincial subsidized social housing. The past two years of working with the Ukrainian community, with the exceptional retention rate of 86 per cent, has taught us the importance of robust settlement supports for newcomer retention. That is why, in *Budget 2024*, we plan to invest \$15 million to support newcomer resettlement throughout all of Newfoundland and Labrador for newcomers.

Training to meet high labour demand with competitive salaries is a function of all of this, but it is not just of our newcomer community; it is for all of our communities. There is a labour demand for good jobs with good pay found throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Chair, I want to highlight something, which is worthy of highlighting because it's true. Statistics Canada tells us that Newfoundland and Labrador average weekly employment earnings in Newfoundland and Labrador are the fourth highest among all provinces at \$1,218 per week. To ensure a ready workforce to meet a changing demand for jobs, our government is investing more than \$160 million to provide programs and services to help over 15,000 individuals secure employment, secure better skills and to take precarious employment and turn it into secure, permanent employment.

We are helping to meet the demand for skilled workers by providing annual supports to over 1,200 apprentices. That is through an investment of over \$6 million in skills training to cover costs associated not only

with their apprenticeship training, such as tuition, textbooks, child care and travel, but other supports as well.

I'll speak more of some challenges we are now currently experiencing with some of our funding partners, the federal government. I'll speak more on that shortly.

Skilled trades – we are priding ourselves for our excellence. And again, this is a story that is worth celebrating. Far too often we fail to celebrate that which is worthy of celebration. We support 3,765 registered apprentices in this province who are directly engaged with 1,200 employers. Newfoundland and Labrador tradespeople achieved one of the highest Red Seal pass rates in the country. Our pass rate is 8 per cent above the national average.

So if one were to query: How are we doing on our training? The obvious test is how do we compare on the national stage. Newfoundland and Labrador trades people achieved a higher Red Seal pass rate than most other provinces, 8 per cent above the national average. The 2023 level/block exams, our pass rate was also exceptionally high.

To help us never, ever, ever thinking that we should just simply relax and enjoy those successes, we are currently engaged in an apprenticeship system review to be able to make sure that we are continuing on with a program of excellence.

We hired a noted, nationally known expert in evaluation of the apprenticeship programs, a firm that has done significant work in this area already and continues to be noted as a renowned expert. They're providing us with a review of some of the things about our apprenticeship program. This review is being completed using a diverse mixture of primary and secondary data collection methods including stakeholder consultations.

There were 57 interviews conducted to date; 20 stakeholder submissions were received; 5 town hall style consultations were held; there was a document review; and research and collection of information from provincial, federal and other sources. I anticipate receiving a final report in this in the very near future. It will be shared.

I said earlier that there is some uncertainty about some of the funding programs. You may recall that I sounded a clearing call that there were issues with a long standing federal-provincial arrangement. The labour market transfer agreements have been in place since 1997. Newfoundland and Labrador formerly signed on to this program through a devolutionary exercise in 2007. From 1997 to 2007, we were a participant in this as a co-partner role, as a co-managed role. In 2007, we took a more formal position, as had all other provinces, at that point in time, to manage the program directly. That program has provided significant resources to our province. Just recently, through the core Labour Market Development Agreement or Labour Market Transfers, \$142 million was provided this past year for LMDA work, but also, in addition, the Workforce Development Agreement, the WDA.

There was a formal notification in January of 2024 that the federal government was considering removing what was known as the top-up. The top-up was an additional increment of funding that was granted in 2017. The 2017 top-up was granted by the federal government over an extended period of time, recognizing that from 1997 to 2017, there was no incremental cost of inflationary indexing of the original programming. They gave that money under the specific stated intention that this will be a place to stabilize the program and stabilize labour market activity while new agreements were being negotiated with all the provinces.

Those negotiations did not occur by act of the federal government. They just did not

engage, despite being asked by all provinces and territories to engage. As of January, they gave formal notice of an intention to potentially remove the top-up, which is a removal of \$625 million nationwide of Labour Market Development funding. For Newfoundland and Labrador, it would mean a potential loss of \$16.8 million annually in funding.

Well, yesterday, in the federal budget, that was a decision Ottawa took. It is not a decision that this government or any provincial or territorial government across the country is prepared to accept. Much of my day today, as it was yesterday, as it has been the case since January 22, 2024, has been spent dealing with this unnecessary removal of funds by the federal government. We will not stop until we get the federal government to rectify this. I'm speaking of all provinces and territories, and Newfoundland and Labrador has been a leader in this regard.

So this additional funding has now been taken out of the budget. IPGS has a \$16.8-million problem that it needs to resolve. I want to say this upfront: Organizations cannot bear the burden of this. I have already contracted, forwarded, six months of guaranteed financial support to all of our core-funded partners in Newfoundland and Labrador so that they do not have to worry about making payroll.

They are actively engaging the federal government themselves on this. They are the ones that are saying to the federal government: You have taken away labour market supports, here is our demand now of you.

That is a fair and reasonable approach. They, like ourselves, feel that provinces and territories are the best ones to make labour market decisions because that is where this program came from. The Labour Market Transfer Agreements came about, formerly in 1997, because it was, at the time, in the aftermath of the Quebec referendum. The

Chrétien government, at the time – and I know because I was there – they took a decision that the federation had to restyle itself and repivot itself accordingly. The federal spending power was being used in provincial and territorial space. The Chrétien government decided, not only to devolve labour market programming to the provinces and territories, but sent cash with it – over \$2 billion.

So the top-up was a 2017 tool to be able to allow for a cost of inflationary indexing. Many groups in Newfoundland and Labrador who had not seen a raise in funding for many, many years, benefited from that top-up.

We will work to see where the federal government has their own programming. The federal government is now moving more and more into provincial and territorial space with a unilateral, federal government labour market programming, which is completely inappropriate because as the federal government said itself in 1997, it is provinces and territories who know labour markets best, not Ottawa. It appears that Ottawa is moving into a space where the best player is being reduced and the less effective player, Ottawa, is rising in prominence. That is not healthy for our federation.

Mr. Chair, I see that you're bellowing me on. There are more things that I'd like to talk about in terms of the international student visa cap and some other issues for Newfoundland and Labrador.

I'll conclude by simply saying from a pro-form exercise, there will be elements of the Estimates that you'll say that it will be variations from one year, from increases from one year to the next in Salaries. This will largely be a result or often be a result in the negotiated wage increases, the 2 per cent wage increase for each of the four years for unionized members of our civil service.

There will also be some variations because of vacancies that then became filled in subsequent years and other issues and, also, the budget did call for an additional position in key areas of priority, including and especially, immigration. So I'll say to you upfront and clearly that many of the questions you ask about Salaries and variation in Salaries will be driven by that particular circumstance. We can get into the details as we go along.

So with that said, thank you, colleagues. I hope that helps provide you with an even stronger awareness of what the Department of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills has done, and what the potential is in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR: Okay, we're going to move right into the first headings.

I'm going to call on the Clerk to read the headings.

CLERK: 1.1.01 to 1.2.03 inclusive, Executive and Support Services for the Department of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills.

CHAIR: The first responder has up to 15 minutes and then each following speaker has 10 minutes to ask questions and then we go around again.

I'll call on the Member for Bonavista to start.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Chair.

I thank the minister for the overview. I think we can probably go home now. That was lots of information, and I say that because I am new to the department. I was going to initially ask for a wide berth because this is all new to me, as far as hearing first-hand and the intricate details of the operation of the department, much the same as my young researcher colleague here.

We would celebrate, as well, the population growth. I think we all celebrate the population growth. If I may just start generally, I printed off and I'm looking at now the section that would apply to your department from the Budget Speech. I just wanted to raise a few things that might alleviate some of the sections to follow that, in a general nature, I can throw out to you.

You had mentioned that you have manifestly changed the population decline, and that's wonderful and that's what we celebrate. Can you explain more about your retention efforts? If we're looking at 86 per cent of the Ukrainians that are remaining, what are the efforts that you would qualify and quantify that is making an immeasurable impact on those retention rates?

G. BYRNE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It is a pleasure to do that because our retention efforts are something that are a hallmark of Newfoundland and Labrador, it's the welcoming spirit of Newfoundland and Labrador that has driven this and we are known across the entire country and, in fact, internationally, as providing some of the best supports.

There are many categories or descriptors – more importantly and better aptly put, there are many, many backgrounds to newcomers to Newfoundland and Labrador. Every newcomer has to be looked at individually with direct eyes to see their direct and immediate needs. In Newfoundland and Labrador, we are given space and we're given capacity to nominate through economic pathways.

What that simply means is that Canada, Ottawa, grants us the ability to recruit and attract people with specific skills, people who could fill specific jobs. So the types of supports that are needed for resettlement initiatives for that particular background of individual is different than, say, someone

who comes as an asylum seeker or as a refugee.

When it comes to those who are economic immigrants who are looking to seek permanent residency through our Provincial Nominee Program or the Atlantic Immigration Program, these are individuals who, by definition, come with skills, they come with jobs, job offers, they come with language skills and they come with a community already supporting them: their employer. That's always been the case and, in fact, the Atlantic Immigration Program, as devised by the federal government, actually had a requirement for employers to be actively engaged with the housing question.

So these are individuals, generally speaking, who come with strong independence. But, still, we provide them with additional language skills, not only for them as required for upgrading, but with their family members. We come with some meaningful job supports for them. They come with short-term skill supports, where appropriate. There is a number of different categories.

But one of the things that we know is absolutely essential in this regard is feeling culturally connected to the community at large. They cannot be made to feel like outsiders, and that is what Newfoundland and Labrador does best. We make sure that they feel welcome and that they can feel as though they're contributing back.

For example, we've established a Ukrainian community centre already here in St. John's. There is a Ukrainian community centre here. We are delivering informal language training services. I've received many requests and applications come our way for support for cultural celebrations by Members here present. This is another way that we support this.

Delivering employment supports to newcomers and employers, including professional mentorship programs. We're

delivering bilingual workshops to navigate housing search and real estate market searches. We're establishing a community resource directory, including details on health and mental health services. We're exploring a peer support program. We're establishing a summer day camp, in particular for Ukrainians here in this case, but for others, in an exploratory stage, for language, culture and heritage exploration. In the longer term, a bilingual child care and after-school program is being planned and pursued.

So those are some of the things that we looked at. When it comes to our most vulnerable – and this is where I take particular attention – it is Canada that directs to Newfoundland and Labrador refugees – government-assisted refugees. We do not have the authority to independently solicit, to transport, to select refugees. Only Canada can do that in partnership with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Canada does not tell us, very often, when refugees come to Newfoundland and Labrador. In fact, I often get a call 24 hours in advance by Canada indicating that an arrival of refugees is imminent. That creates a challenge because we don't get the ability to be able to work up the necessary arrival supports, but we do it and we do it well, with the support of the Association for New Canadians.

The Association for New Canadians is Canada's contracted resettlement service provider. Canada selects them as one of 50 organizations across the entire country. The ANC is one of those 50 and it's the only one in Newfoundland and Labrador, notwithstanding the Francophone organization that supports Francophone immigrants to our province. The ANC is, obviously, the largest and it now has support centres throughout the entire province.

Canada does not fund the ANC very well. It is Newfoundland and Labrador that is now providing the bulk of funding to the ANC because we feel, to get to where we need to be to provide those supports, we do what we need to do. I am lobbying Ottawa all the time to provide more supports to the ANC but, in this particular case, I can't wait. We're doing it and we're doing the job for them.

C. PARDY: Thank you very much for that detailed answer.

That was good. It was pretty comprehensive and expressive, no doubt about that.

How many children do we have of Ukrainian population in metro area, St. John's, for curiosity? I know we have them in Bonavista. I'm just wondering, in the metro region, how many children?

G. BYRNE: This is one of the reasons why our schools are now growing. For the first time, we have had actual enrolment increases after a 50-year decline. I cannot break down for you, Mr. Chair, just exclusively the metro area at this point in time. That would be the function of the Newfoundland and Labrador school district to be able to do so. But what I can tell you is that there are 686 Ukrainian children enrolled in schools as of April 7, 2024, in Newfoundland and Labrador across 63 communities: 686 Ukrainian children.

C. PARDY: That is wonderful.

Has the Department of Education supplied any second language, ESL teachers to help in what you had said as far as the linguistic part? I mean, I can only imagine what it is for a Ukrainian to go into our school system without understanding the English language. In my district, we had one ESL teacher that would be deployed for the whole district of schools. That is going to fall short when you inject 686 children into the school system.

Do you have a number on that and how these children are being accommodated in the school, i.e., the English Second Language instruction?

G. BYRNE: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the Member for the question.

You're absolutely correct, it is needed and it is being provided. One of the things about the Department of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills is we are sometimes considered or expected to be sort of the clearing house, we're the mini government of all immigrants: health care questions flow through us; education questions flow through us; driver's licence questions flow through us and we do not mind at all. We're good at it. Education is probably the better Estimates to be able to ask that direct question to.

But I will throw it over, knowing that Katie may have some perspective on the types of supports. Katie Norman, our assistant deputy minister responsible for Immigration. She may have some additional perspective on the types of supports the Department of Education and the school board have put in place in this initiative.

K. NORMAN: Good evening. Thank you for the question and thank you, Minister.

I don't have specific detail on the level of funding or the number of English additional language teachers that have been engaged by NLSchools, but as the minister mentioned, the Department of Education would be the best place to answer that.

However, I can say with confidence that NLSchools officials have been heavily engaged since the very beginning of this initiative. At one point, weekly, now, biweekly calls with our department on planning for education services for students and have been extremely responsive in working with the Association for New

Canadians to support the large growing number.

I can say, I do have a data point that the minister didn't have in front of him, in metro schools, we have 634 children, Ukrainian children attending at present, as of today.

C. PARDY: Okay, good.

Thank you.

K. NORMAN: Thank you.

C. PARDY: If I may, does your department gauge the interprovincial movement of residents from rural to urban? Would you have any figures or any data related to that? We all know it's occurring, I'm just wondering whether you track the data or not.

G. BYRNE: Thank you for the question.

When a Ukrainian arrives in Newfoundland and Labrador, they have no legal responsibility or requirement to register where their current whereabouts are or where they intend to go. They're given an automatic three-year entry permit ability to stay in Canada, anywhere in Canada, and they're also given a three-year, open work permit.

But we're fortunate that the Association for New Canadians does indeed have a direct relationship with Ukrainians. They're our service provider in this regard. What I can inform you that the ANC informs me of is that it's roughly almost a 60-40 split: 60 per cent of Ukrainians are in the metro St. John's area and 40 per cent are outside.

Maybe Katie Norman, you might be able to refresh that data, but that's why we're able to come to the conclusion of such a high retention rate amongst Ukrainians because they're actively engaged in the Association for New Canadians.

But it really is true, when Ukrainians are found in 63 per cent of communities throughout the province, they are everywhere throughout the entire province. It is not a metro St. John's exclusive phenomenon.

C. PARDY: Just the number now, 634 children in metro, and that would put 53 children outside of metro. So that's a big difference, but you're saying that's a 60-40 split?

G. BYRNE: No, so when we consider children, of course it's school-aged children from the age of five to 16, 17. But also, what we're finding is that outside of St. John's, it's often single-bodied individuals and couples that are taking jobs outside of the metro area, working in everything from mines to fish plants to software firms to everything, yeah.

C. PARDY: Yeah, I know we have five in Bonavista. So five out of the 53 are in Bonavista.

In my remaining time, Minister, we know, and everyone is aware, that we probably got four issues that we would have generally for our general population: housing, child care, health care and you mentioned education, so I'll leave that one out. But the other three, can you give a little summary on the housing, child care and health care?

I know that some of these Ukrainians that are coming in are helping with our health care, but if we have our families then, just for curiosity, how many of them would have family doctors and the number and what percentage has housing. I'm sure you gave me a statistic a little earlier. If my memory was a little better, I would be able to recall it.

G. BYRNE: Right.

C. PARDY: But in your overview, I think you had mentioned about some housing success, that a significant number of them

have housing and are no longer in temporary accommodations.

G. BYRNE: Yeah, so 95 per cent was the actual number that I provided with you.

No, unfortunately I cannot, I know that's a burning issue and in the totality of the issue I cannot describe for you specifically the number that are using Family Care Teams or have direct commitments in relationships with family physicians and other things. That's really a question for the Department of Health and Community Services.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Minister.

CHAIR: Okay, I'm going to move to the next questioner.

The Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, I believe you used the number 5,485 newcomers that came to the province last year. First of all, is that correct? Did I hear that right?

G. BYRNE: Yes, I believe you did, yeah.

J. DINN: Okay.

G. BYRNE: I will correct the record, that's permanent residents who came to the province last year. That's actually those who attained permanent residency in Newfoundland and Labrador.

There is a distinction because the number of newcomers would actually be a bit higher.

J. DINN: Okay. Would the 4,300 Ukrainians be permanent residents, or would they be newcomers without that status at this point?

G. BYRNE: As I indicated, the number of Ukrainians who have already successfully obtained permanent residencies is in the 1,100 range. So, no it's not. The number of

Ukrainians obtaining permanent residency to date is 1,129.

J. DINN: Thank you.

What I guess I'm looking at is the total number of newcomers who arrived in the province over the last year, maybe the last three or four years as well. But I'm looking for the breakdown of the number of newcomers who arrived in the province over the last year. And maybe a breakdown, if possible, by how many of them were refugees, how many are economic immigrants, asylum seekers, permanent residents. And maybe even a breakdown, if possible, by country of origin.

I'm assuming that, from what you're saying here, that the vast majority of people who came to Newfoundland and Labrador are from Ukraine.

G. BYRNE: Yeah. So why don't I start – I think we do have that information. I saw it here. Those who know me know that I never keep a paper on my desk normally, but I've got a flurry of facts and figures and pieces of information.

I'll begin with your latter question, which is the countries of origin for PNP, for the Provincial Nominee Program. Predominantly Philippines, India, Ukraine, Nigeria and Iran. For the Atlantic Immigration Partnership Program: India, China, Philippines, Bangladesh and Nigeria. So those are the predominant countries of origin that individuals come from.

I can break down for you, on an annualized basis, the number of permanent residencies, the growth in permanent residencies to Newfoundland and Labrador. That should be available to me fairly simply. What is the chart for the –?

OFFICIAL: We don't have that (inaudible).

G. BYRNE: We don't have that here?

J. DINN: I'm good with getting that information sent over as well.

G. BYRNE: Okay, thank you.

J. DINN: Okay, that'd be great.

I think, if I understood as well, the next question was going to be how many people in this province became permanent residents last year, which is a little bit different as opposed to people who came to the province who were permanent residents to begin with. But any people who had settled here, did they become permanent residents while they were living here?

G. BYRNE: Well, some obtained permanent residency overseas and there's a separate terminology, called landing, which is when they actually arrive here. So some actually applied for permanent residency to Canada through Newfoundland and Labrador pathways. They obtain that while overseas for various reasons, and then they land here.

I can get Katie Norman to explain that process a little bit further, if the hon. Member would like to get a brief on that.

J. DINN: Sure.

K. NORMAN: Thank you very much.

So, MHA Dinn, the number that the minister cited of 5,485, that's the breakdown of the total number of new permanent residents. We can provide you with the detail within that. The typical categories would be Provincial Nominee Program, Atlantic Immigration program, which are our two provincial pathways. There are federal economic programs as well which comprise a smaller share of landed economic immigrants, and then the government-assisted refugee, privately sponsored refugee humanitarian compassion and family-class newcomers are there.

Minister Byrne mentioned earlier in his remarks that 73 per cent of newcomers come through provincial economic pathways. The remainder are individuals who come through those other pathways that I've mentioned, but we can provide you with a table that shows the exact data by pathways. So family, refugee, economic and humanitarian compassionate.

J. DINN: Perfect.

I've encountered – I guess people have come to me as well. But what are some of the obstacles or the hiccups or the problems that people have encountered in obtaining permanent residency here? I know we had a number who, in terms of the type of job that they take on sometimes within the provincial government, they come to us and they're fearful that they will lose or jeopardize their permanent residency status.

I'm looking at what are the obstacles that your department has encountered to people obtaining their permanent residency?

G. BYRNE: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for the question.

Federal processing time – undoubtedly the biggest obstacle is the exorbitant amount of time that the federal government takes to process, to complete and finalize an application. The Provincial Nominee Program is just that. We nominate to the federal government. I think it's really important to kind of make clear that distinction.

At the end of the day, for no immigration program does Newfoundland and Labrador have the final say. We are granted a partnership space within that program or process. We can recruit, we can work with employers and we can work with would-be newcomers to attract them and to resettle them. But, at the end of the day, all we can do is we submit a nomination to the federal government. Our process takes literally

days. The federal government's system takes months. Our average processing time is just about 34 days, Katie Norman?

K. NORMAN: Our service standard is 25 business days.

G. BYRNE: It is 25 business days for turnaround in nomination, generally speaking, unless there's a piece of missing paperwork. The federal system, however, is onerous.

J. DINN: We've got a number of Ukrainians that have settled in the province over the last year. I think you talked about an 86 per cent retention rate of Ukrainians, if I understood that correctly. Eighty-six per cent of Ukrainians came here and stayed here.

G. BYRNE: That is the information that the Association for New Canadians provides us.

J. DINN: How is that measured? Do they determine retention as they've been here for more than six months, more than a year, two years, three years? I'm just trying to look at how do they determine that we're retaining them.

Because you might do an assessment and, in six months, they're still here, so we retained them; but in a year and half from then, they're all gone.

G. BYRNE: I cannot thank the Member enough, Mr. Chair, for that question because it is since March of 2022. It is the composite figure of all Ukrainians who have arrived since Russia's illegal and immoral war on Ukraine, and our retention rate is at 86 per cent in perpetuity for all those who arrived.

J. DINN: Thank you.

As the war goes on, are we seeing a decline in the number of Ukrainians, or is it steady as she goes?

G. BYRNE: Thank you very much for the question, Mr. Chair, and to the Member.

It does fluctuate somewhat; it has had its ebbs and flows to some degree, but it is a constant inflow. When Canada had indicated that it was pulling the plug, as it were, on the special Canada-Ukraine entry visa, there is somewhat of a surge that does occur. It's one of the reasons why sometimes our temporary accommodations are quite full. And that is because we often get a surge of people who may believe, because of what Canada has been communicating, that the pathway may be closing soon.

But, beyond that, we started this with four charters, that brought in 704 or 705 Ukrainians. We were going to continue on with that program of special airlifts, but what we discovered – and this is again where we pivoted – Ukrainians were arriving effectively, the equivalent of an airlift, a charter each and every month on their own.

So we used some of those resources for better resettlement functions. That's really kind of an amazing story. We got the ball rolling, we created a critical mass; an affirmation of the value and what it is to live in Newfoundland and Labrador amongst Ukrainians. Once we had that critical mass of Ukrainians, Ukrainians started to arrive independently, without any government assistance. They chose Newfoundland and Labrador and 86 per cent of them are still here.

CHAIR: Okay.

We're going to go back to the Member for Bonavista for a second round.

We're on the heading Executive and Support Services. The first round there were some general questions, so we're going to do that.

C. PARDY: Make hay, you're saying. That's right.

You had mentioned in that answer, Minister, 73 per cent are economic residents, which you had said earlier, and then you added provincial. Just help me out with my understanding of that, not federal, provincial economic residents.

G. BYRNE: Yeah, I really appreciate you asking that question because it is one of the nuisances, it is one of the novelties, one of what is unique about Newfoundland and Labrador.

Most newcomers to Ontario, economic newcomers, arrive through federal pathways, pathways such as the Express Entry. It's not called Express Entry because it is any faster. The federal government calls it Express Entry because if you express an intention to come to Canada and you have a certain skill, you may be granted entry into Canada. So if you express it. It's not the Pony Express; it's the conversation express.

In Ontario, most economic immigrants are through federal pathways. Here in Newfoundland and Labrador, it is the exact opposite. Very, very few newcomers – economic newcomers – arrive through the Express Entry program, the federal program. I think about 9 per cent, Katie? You're doing the math now. I don't even know if it's 9 per cent. We have about 20 per cent that arrive as refugees; 74 per cent as provincial economic; and the rest as federal economic.

So thank you for providing me an opportunity to kind of make that point.

C. PARDY: So on the funding stream, can you inform me the difference between the provincial and the federal? I am assuming the 10 per cent that would come federally would have funding attached to them, more so.

G. BYRNE: No, not as an economic – there will be language services. The federal government does provide, through its network of resettlement service agencies, of

which the ANC is one of 50, they do provide funding to those newcomer resettlement service agencies.

The purpose and function of those resettlement agencies, such as the ANC, is to assist with language training. You could say well, why do they need language training if you already have to have one of the two official languages, English or French, capacity in that in order to be economic immigrant? Well, their children or spouses may not necessarily have full language capacities.

But here is the thing, and I'll say this again, I've said it out loud many, many times, and I'll say it again here tonight and look for any champions to join with me on this cause, if you were to look at what resettlement service agencies should be doing and where their focus should be and, therefore, where the funding formula should be based/derived from, it is refugees. The people who have some of the greatest language challenges, greatest integration challenges, employment challenges, a number of different challenges. The resettlement service agencies are not provided funding from Ottawa based on a formula that calculates refugees. It calculates all kinds of newcomers.

And here is the thing, PEI, for example, if you were to break it down as to where it should be, what's the funding per capita per refugee. The ANC gets \$9,000 per year per refugee in Newfoundland and Labrador; Prince Edward Island gets \$90,000 per refugee. It is quite a gulf, a chasm, a difference. Is it legal? Is there something gone wrong here?

That is what the federal formula spits out. It's the wrong formula, because it takes into consideration those who are economic refugees, the very people who, I will argue, need supports, but who need less supports. It does not target specifically and directly the needs of those who are most challenged.

So I have raised this with my colleagues in Ottawa, the federal MPs here in Newfoundland and Labrador repeatedly, with the federal minister of Immigration, and anyone who will listen to me: You've got the wrong formula; you need to correct your formula.

That's why Newfoundland and Labrador has to and will step in to make sure that, to the best of our ability, newcomers, especially marginalized newcomers, vulnerable newcomers, are not left unprotected.

C. PARDY: Yeah. It's absurd; really, the difference is absurd.

G. BYRNE: Absurd. It cannot be described any other way.

C. PARDY: Yeah.

G. BYRNE: If you're to look at it strictly from the point of view: Who needs to be served? Who deserves to be served? How are they being served? I've said this to my colleague from Prince Edward Island, I won't hold back on this because they have a high economic immigration rate, and a low retention rate, they actually do well by this formula, and that's one of the drivers.

We deliberately do not want to be a puppy mill, and we won't be a puppy mill.

C. PARDY: No.

G. BYRNE: So we are very targeted about this. We want anyone who arrives here, we're going to do our very, very darn well best to make sure that they want to stay and they have the supports to stay. Because at the end of the day, people will choose to live where larger communities exist.

We find that often in certain African communities, the Eritrean community, some of the members of the Nigerian community and other communities, where you have larger populations in other parts of Canada, we do have a certain out-migration. It's one

of the reasons why our retention rate is not where I'd want it to be, but those individuals will, and their families will choose to move where you have larger populations of where you came from.

C. PARDY: Yeah.

G. BYRNE: But when we make a welcoming environment, we make sure that those communities within communities are prominent, have capacity enough, have strength enough, they will stay and our retention rates will go even higher.

C. PARDY: Minister, I'm going to go to some line items now.

G. BYRNE: Okay.

C. PARDY: 1.1.01 and work my way to 1.2.03.

I know you had stated a little in your preamble, you had stated last year, the collective agreement in 2022, four years at 2 per cent. So I'm assuming that when we look at Salaries, the differences, then that would be attributed to the 2 per cent collective agreement, generally.

G. BYRNE: In this particular instance, as a good example, you're absolutely right. The delta, or the difference of \$1,700 increase is indeed a negotiated salary increase of 2 per cent, which was for management staff in this particular case.

C. PARDY: Okay, yeah.

1.2.01, Employee Benefits, I know that last year you had budgeted \$600 and it settled in at \$5,200. That is 1.2. 01, Employee Benefits.

G. BYRNE: Right.

So there was a delta. The 2023-24 revised went by \$4,600 from the '23-'24 original budget. The division required additional funding for Law Society fees in this

particular case, which is a standard benefit that would be provided to anyone who is normally a member of the bar and employed by the provincial government. That's a pretty standard benefit that would be provided.

C. PARDY: Okay.

In Supplies, I think it was over budget by more than double from last year.

G. BYRNE: So within Supplies, we're seeing an increase of \$2,400. A lot of this expenditure was related to a workplace assessment. We take workplace injury to be very, very serious and there were expenditures that were related to ergonomic assessment supplies, such as desks that prevent back injury and other things.

So the \$2,400 in this case was one-time office supplies mainly due to ergonomic assessment supplies.

C. PARDY: That was directly within your department?

G. BYRNE: Correct.

C. PARDY: Okay.

You've got Property, Furnishings and Equipment in that same heading, 1.2.01, 12 times what the budgeted amount was. It settled in at \$8,400. I'm just wondering if you can explain that.

G. BYRNE: There was an increase in property of approximately \$7,700 revised last year. There were two related events here. There was a fairly significant move where there was consolidation – IPGS was located on the third and fourth floors of the West Block and there was staff we consolidated more into the third floor, so that move did create some furniture restock and some ergonomic assessments in that regard as well.

C. PARDY: What precipitated that move? Because I know there were some departmental changes. What precipitated the move of offices?

G. BYRNE: Transportation and Infrastructure, which is the landlord of the building, did an assessment as to full, good space utilization and they told us.

C. PARDY: So Minister Abbott?

G. BYRNE: Don't even speak his name ever again.

C. PARDY: Good.

CHAIR: Okay, I've got to move to the Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, how many newcomers are currently still staying in hotel rooms in the province? What's the average wait time, I guess, upon arrival to securing a place to live? What portion of newcomers are still spending more than 50 days in temporary accommodations?

G. BYRNE: Right now, we're occupying a total of 109 rooms. We have 223 guests of the 4,700 Ukrainians in Newfoundland and Labrador; 223 are in temporary accommodations. Mr. Chair, this does provide me with an opportunity to speak a little bit about the policy or the circumstance around temporary accommodations.

The overall average nightly stay has been high at times while things got settled away. For those who have been housed, it's been an average of 100 nights. That is now, for those in the hotel, 34 nights on average.

So the average stay in a hotel is 34 nights, but we've instituted a 45-day policy. We are the only province or territory in Canada, except for Manitoba, to my awareness, that has a temporary accommodations opportunity or benefit for Ukrainians, if I

remember correctly. But we do have an expectation that no more than 45 days would be in temporary accommodations and the average is 34 nights.

J. DINN: Is there a fund where if they, say, find a place, they can access \$2,000 payment to help with – I don't know if it's a downpayment, but a financial bonus if they do find a place to live so that they can move out?

G. BYRNE: Well, one of the things about signing a lease, about moving out, is there's someone who's employed, someone who's a wage earner in the family unit. So, in the past, when there was a much more significant number in temporary accommodations, we did provide what we generally just described as a move-out benefit to help take care of some unanticipated costs.

But, generally speaking, Ukrainians are doing this. This is an initiative and a financial circumstance, a financial arrangement, a housing arrangement that they are fulfilling on their own.

J. DINN: I ask it because we did have a family come to us and they had a place to live, but they were denied that \$2,000 because they didn't have a job, but they did have a place they could afford. So I'm just wondering, is that dependent on them finding a place or that they have to have a job? They were willing to move out of the hotel, but because they didn't have a job, they couldn't access that move-out benefit. Would that be fair to say is the policy?

G. BYRNE: Well, the move-out benefit does not exist anymore.

J. DINN: This is when it did. I'm just curious. Was it restricted to those who had a job or to those who could find an accommodation?

I guess, in this case, the person was unable to move out and didn't have downpayment as a result.

G. BYRNE: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the question, to the hon. Member.

Well, the interesting thing about that is success in moving out would really be contingent upon their ability to be able to pay their monthly rental costs. So to move out, without a job, would put someone at risk. We would case manage on an individual basis, everybody.

While I may suggest that this is a hard and fast rule, it has never been a hard and fast rule. We look at every case individually. Does someone have capacity – does someone have a bank account? Let's be honest and clear and say it out loud. There were Ukrainians who came to Newfoundland and Labrador with a significant amount of disposable money, of income, significant – some. So we would analyze situations and say if you can realistically afford your own lease without having a job, then sobeit, carry on. But if you really could not keep a lease going, a rental property going without a job, then we would case manage that and work with them to get a job before move out.

I can't speak to an individual case without knowing all of the individual facts, but there were Ukrainians that did come here with significant amounts of personal resources.

J. DINN: Regarding the number of guest refugees who came looking for a job, I'm assuming, in your previous comments, some came here with work already. They had work lined up. So those who came, let's say, looking for jobs, I'd be interested in looking at how many came but what's the percentage of those who have found work and, I guess, for those, what's the average length of time it takes for someone to find work here in the province.

G. BYRNE: That process is largely managed through the ANC. They have a very, very robust employment service agency dealing directly with Ukrainians. The headquarters of that is located on

Stavanger and we have Ukrainians dropping in all the time. There are those that require some language upgrades to be able to seek employment.

I wouldn't be able to give you those numbers right now, Mr. Chair, to the hon. Member, but we can certainly provide further details when we communicate with the ANC on what the most recent detail of statistics are.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Minister, can you provide an update on the work completed by the Ministerial Committee on Anti-Racism?

G. BYRNE: Yes, I certainly can.

This is an organic process. I'm very proud of the work that we've done, working with community, meeting with groups, talking about the issue of racism in Newfoundland and Labrador, systemic racism in Newfoundland and Labrador, how do we combat it and how do we celebrate and educate all cultures in our province, not just within youth, but importantly within our youth, so that we really create a sense of knowledge and of value of having diverse racial experience and cultures in our province.

The anti-racism Committee, which is a Committee of ministers within the government, have developed relationships with many, many community organizations and individuals in this regard. When I say it is an organic process, the objective – and I know that to certain criticisms by some, there were some that wanted a report, that wanted a start and a finish to our work, but when we established the terms of reference for the Ministerial Committee on Anti-Racism, we said that this would be a living Committee, that we will act as we see it, we will act on institutional and organizational racism, we'll investigate it and we'll work with organizations and institutions to stamp it out.

We've worked with organizations as diverse as they come. Some of the thing that we've already been able to achieve is there have already been collective agreement changes, language within collective agreements, recognizing that faith communities, members of certain faith communities who do not necessarily share traditional religious holidays as what many people in the past may have, collective agreements have been altered to reflect the ability to self-select holidays based on their faith and their tenets.

We're also engaged in an upcoming piece of work on additional public communications on the value of diversity within our community, contribution of it and, specifically, on an anti-racism campaign to launch to the public to keep this message going. We look forward to having that available in the future.

J. DINN: That's where I was heading with it. So if I understand you correctly, I know in schools we've got Sharing Our Cultures. I taught at Holy Heart, very diverse background; a lot of things there to integrate and to share cultures. I think I've been to a number of Sharing Our Cultures and events, but I also encounter the anti-newcomer racism, usually because of scarcity of resources, housing, jobs and so on and so forth.

So if I understand it correctly, this public communication campaign, will it be in the form of, I don't know, television ads, radio ads celebrating our cultures, more or less promoting the importance of diversity in our Newfoundland culture, something to celebrate or is this something that's more or less internal, within schools or whatever?

G. BYRNE: No, it's both. You know, just around the corner at Macdonald Drive, I've been there and celebrated cultural events. It's amazing what schools can do, are doing and the impact that schoolchildren have on the home, change whether it be new perspectives on the environments, whether

it be new perspectives on gender identifications, whether it be new perspectives on diversity, it's children that actually positively infect the home with benefits. So working with children is a natural starting place, but we really do need to say and say out loud: the norm for all of us is tolerance, acceptance. That is the norm. It is abnormal and inappropriate to default to intolerance and unacceptance and by saying that in a very visceral, public way, through all sorts of different media, we really do communicate that message and we pronounce who we are.

If you really want people to stand to a message and internalize it themselves, you've got to have the courage to be part of that message and the courage to be part of that message is to say it and say it out loud. The more often we trumpet that, the more effective it becomes.

J. DINN: Thank you.

CHAIR: Do you have any further questions?

The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Minister, one of the frequently asked questions that's universal in all these Estimates is a copy of the binder or the flash drive. I'm just assuming that we would have that. So a lot of the questions we would have, would be in that information.

G. BYRNE: You'll have what I have.

C. PARDY: Fantastic.

G. BYRNE: We're going to provide an electronic flash drive.

C. PARDY: Good.

G. BYRNE: The book that I have, you will have.

C. PARDY: Okay.

The community employment corporations, what section – that wouldn't be in this section here, would it not? No, not in the first one. That comes a little later.

G. BYRNE: It does, I believe, yes.

C. PARDY: Yes, it does.

Looking at 1.1.02, Allowances and Assistance, 09.

G. BYRNE: I don't think there is a 1.1.02.

There's a 1.2.02.

C. PARDY: 1.2.02, my apologies, a rookie mistake.

G. BYRNE: No sweat, all good.

C. PARDY: In 1.2.02, again, sorry on that, in Grants and Subsidies, I know that you had budgeted last year, the amount that you have budgeted for this year, but only \$25,000 was allocated last year.

G. BYRNE: Yes, with that said, you're looking of a delta of approximately \$1.3 million, I think. Is that correct?

C. PARDY: Yes.

G. BYRNE: Yeah. With that said, *Budget 2023* announced a continuation of funding related to community-based organizations, which allocated \$1.3 million to IPGS. There was a shift in where it was calculated or recorded, so that's why there's a differential. In the previous budget, it was recorded in a different place. We just moved it according to instruction to where it needed to be.

C. PARDY: Okay.

G. BYRNE: That fair?

OFFICIAL: Yeah.

C. PARDY: Yeah.

On 1.2.03, I'm just assuming now the increase in Salaries – and you can just confirm and I don't think I need to go back to it again – that is related to the 2 per cent collective agreement?

G. BYRNE: Yeah –

C. PARDY: Would it amount to that differential?

G. BYRNE: There was a revision of approximately \$19.5 million. This was actually related to – it's a little bit of a twist up here. There was a hiring of a graduate recruit and paid leave payout for a former employee, and partially it was also offset by savings related to the vacancy of the departmental program coordinator position. So it was three inputs.

Who's the graduate recruit?

OFFICIAL: (Inaudible.)

G. BYRNE: Okay.

So we had a graduate recruit. There was a paid leave payout for a former employee, and there was some savings related to a vacancy.

C. PARDY: Okay, good.

Grants and Subsidies, I know there are only \$21,000. I'm assuming there's not a long list of those. Is it a short list or, if you want, you can defer me to the list?

G. BYRNE: We could definitely provide that.

C. PARDY: Yeah, that is good.

G. BYRNE: It will be in the binder (inaudible).

C. PARDY: Mr. Chair, that would be all the questions I would need to ask in this section.

CHAIR: Okay.

Any other Members have questions?

The hon. the Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

With regard to the Job Creation Partnership funding, can I have a breakdown of that and how many people have availed of it in the last year?

G. BYRNE: We definitely can. Which subhead?

J. DINN: That's just general.

G. BYRNE: Just in general, okay. Not particular to any particular subhead at this point in time.

Job Creation Partnerships, the budget was \$7 million. We had 198 agreements signed, supporting 867 individuals with supported employment programming.

J. DINN: Oh, I was waiting for you. You were waiting on me. I'm waiting on you.

Okay, good enough. Perfect.

I just want to go to the three JobsNL wage subsidy options.

G. BYRNE: Yes.

J. DINN: A few things, first of all, in particular it talks about 60 per cent subsidy to a maximum of \$12 towards the hourly wage rate. This also is JobsNL 42, Ukrainian wage subsidy and JobsNL 28.

Now that the minimum wage has gone up, will the maximum amount of \$12 be increased as well?

G. BYRNE: No, there are no plans to do that at this point in time; we'll reflect on that.

The uptake of that particular program is fairly high; it does de-risk a new hire, and that is really what it's meant to do, is to de-

risk a new hire, so that the employer – if a particular prospective employee who they are really interested in hiring but may not necessarily have all of the skill sets, that may need some on-the-job training or some other sort of tutelage, those wage subsidies are very, very impactful in helping that.

It's unlike, say for example, a not-for-profit organization which is directly tied to minimum wage, we would always increase wage subsidies to a not-for-profit organization to the minimum wage standard at least. But this is a well-subscribed program at \$12 an hour. We'll continue to monitor that and if there needs to be an offset, we'll consider it.

But, with that said, I have to say to you that with the federal decision to jam us up with \$16.8 million in cuts, that's going to become – if we can all communicate collectively and with a single voice, how terrible this decision was and is. When an organization comes with great ideas, but new ideas, we're going to be very, very hard pressed. Especially ideas that require multiple-year funding, we're going to be very hard pressed to be able to support those great ideas, because we're kind of jammed up just doing the core funding, the basic funding that we've been doing for many, many years. We don't have an option of looking at new opportunities.

I think it stinks.

J. DINN: Right now, if I'm looking at these correctly, so I take a look at JobsNL 42 and Ukrainian wage subsidies. So 42 weeks, basically, the first 14, second 14, third 14. What happens at the end of that, and I'm assuming if the person is hired on past 42 weeks, do they become the sole responsibility of the employer?

What if the employer says, look, I can't afford to keep you on at this rate? Or is there the hope that the employer is going to carry on – I have spoken to small businesses who said, look, I won't be able to do this. If this doesn't continue, I doubt I'll

be able to keep these people on, especially at minimum wage. What's the plan post 42 weeks?

Thank you.

G. BYRNE: Well, the employer does assert, attest, that they intend to keep the person on after 42 weeks. That's important to note; it is part of the application process that would normally lead to a full-time job. It is a little different for JobsNL 28, because it's recognized that that may be somewhat of a seasonal job but an important job for someone who may need work experience.

A couple of things: No, we're not in a situation that we can force an employer to keep them beyond the program; but, at the same time, we take note as to whether or not they do and that becomes a consideration of a future application. Should that employer come forward and say I had a JobsNL 48 and I had to let the person go but I'd like to try it again, we'll take all factors into consideration in a future application from that employer, and that may not necessarily look well for them.

J. DINN: Will you be monitoring as well if a person – and take whether the person is Ukrainian or anyone else out of it, but let's say you have a long-term employee already there, plus now I have a new hire, I'm going to avail of these subsidies, I have a chance to put another employee here to help me out, run out of the subsidy and the employer understanding that I applied for a subsidy, I have a choice of letting one go or the other and I'm going to have to let go of the non-subsidy person. For a small business, that would be a significant business decision.

In other words, making sure that at the end of it, you're not laying off one and keeping the one that has the subsidy agreement as such. Are there going to be any plans to monitor that to make sure that there are no negative consequences as a result of it?

G. BYRNE: There are no plans to do that because that is what is done. It is a contractual commitment within the program is that it has to be an incremental – that, as a result of a new hire, that there cannot be a consequential layoff associated with that business. So that would be –

J. DINN: I'm talking about at the end of the 42 weeks when that money is no longer there and that person has – that's what I'm concerned with. I guess that would play into, as well, the whole notion of why I'm concerned, I guess, about racist, anti-racism is because it's easy to blame, sometimes a newcomer, well, they got the job and you don't get all the facts with this, but it troubles me deeply and especially as the job market shrink at times. I just want to make sure everyone who is in this province has a job, has a place in which to live, has a school in which to go to, a community that they call their own.

That's my only concern with that, Minister, and I know you don't have an answer for it now, but I'm hoping that as some point as this goes through that there's some monitoring of this to make sure that there are no unintended consequences as to what seems to be a pretty decent program.

I have a few quick questions. Well, I don't know if they'll be quick answers, but we'll see.

How many people will the Office of Indigenous and Northern Skilled Trades help in the coming year?

G. BYRNE: Oh, that's an excellent question. I think we just got an update on that. If you want to ask another question, because we do have –

J. DINN: Sure thing.

G. BYRNE: While we fish for the answers because we just got that information.

J. DINN: An update on the Study and Stay Program, as well, is it bearing any fruit yet?

G. BYRNE: I'll ask Katie Norman to give some details on the Study and Stay Program because that is hot in my mind because we're starting a new season of it. There's been some invites go out to welcome the next class.

But with the Indigenous skilled trades office, I've got some fantastic statistics: 778 clients have been serviced to date in a number of different – 778 clients registered; 640 of which in Happy Valley-Goose Bay office; Corner Brook, which is a new office but home to the Qalipu First Nation, 105 clients; and St. John's is 55 clients.

A significant number of them were indeed male; 23 per cent were female at 181; 597 were male, but in terms of skilled trades, the percentage of female self-identifying as Indigenous trades people, interested is a higher percentage for female than what we see the in trades generally. So that's fantastic news that we have a high female participation rate. We're going to try and get that even higher. I think that pretty well covers it. I got some more details.

The Study and Stay Program, Mr. Chair, with your indulgence – Katie Norman, if you could add some current details on Study and Stay.

K. NORMAN: Certainly. Thank you, Minister.

So in 2018, International Education Newfoundland and Labrador was funded to deliver their first Study and Stay Program which was supported by both IPGS and ACOA as part of a pilot program launched across Atlantic Canada. This program was designed to assist international graduates at College of the North Atlantic and Memorial University to develop connections to employment and entrepreneurship networks in an effort to lead to meaningful

employment after graduation and ultimate retention of those international students.

So due to the success of the 2018 through 2022 program, IENL, which is now known as World Education Network Newfoundland and Labrador, received additional funding of \$273,000 from our department to carry out the Study and Stay Program until 2025.

So as the minister just mentioned, the seventh cohort of the program began in October 2023, with 138 students enrolled, many of which, more than half, are master's degrees students but there are also individuals at the undergraduate level, diploma programs, post-graduate diplomas, certificates and Ph.D.s also engaged.

Thirty-three countries are represented within the Study and Stay Program, including Ghana, Pakistan, China, Egypt, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Brazil, Hong Kong, Mauritius, Nepal, Philippines, United States, Afghanistan, Albania, Bahrain, Belize, Cameroon, Czechia, Dominica, Guyana, Indonesia, Iraq, Jamaica, Jordan, Malaysia, Romania and Tanzania. So needless to say, a very diverse group of students: 75 per cent are Memorial University students at the St. John's campus; 19 per cent attend College of the North Atlantic; 4 per cent at Marine Institute; and 2 per cent at the Grenfell campus.

Some new enhancements were launched to Study and Stay this year including an immigration advisor program to provide opportunities for those students to explore pathways to permanent residency in Canada. There's also a mentorship component, which was launched this past January, with approximately 52 students matched to 33 mentors. There is also a group mentorship.

Thirty-five workshops have been completed with these students on things like skills building, networking and how to engage with local professionals. We're also now holding alumni events such as monthly

meet ups to facilitate connections for those who graduated from Study and Stay.

Just coming up soon, the annual (inaudible) will take place from April 25 to 27 and approximately 80 students are involved in that.

J. DINN: Thank you.

That's it.

CHAIR: Seeing no further questions for that heading, I'll ask the Clerk to recall that heading again and we'll vote on that one before moving on to the next one.

CLERK: 1.1.01 to 1.2.03 inclusive, Executive and Support Services.

CHAIR: Shall those headings carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subheads 1.1.01 through 1.2.03 carried.

CHAIR: So we're at 7:15 now. Do people want to take a break for 10 minutes or shall we do another one and then break? What is the consensus?

C. PARDY: I'm good.

J. DINN: Okay, carry on.

CHAIR: Okay, we'll do another one and I'll check with you after the next heading.

Okay, I'll ask the Clerk to call the next heading.

CLERK: 2.1.01 to 2.1.07 inclusive, Employment and Skills Development.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Chair.

2.1.01, Salaries, I'm aware of the 2 per cent, I just want to know if there are any intricacies with that, the change in figures there. You had \$1.3 million down to \$1.2 million last year.

G. BYRNE: Yes, so thank you, Mr. Chair, to the Member.

The \$80,900 delta difference, there were short-term vacancies in the division that created some savings that are or will be filled. That's why the delta's back up to more historic levels for the upcoming budget year.

C. PARDY: Okay. 2.1.02, Allowances and Assistance, a significant increase, \$3.2 million. Just wonder if you can quantify as to where that's earmarked.

G. BYRNE: Yes, this is an interesting and amazing initiative. You may recall that on November 8, 2023, the Premier announced a new Poverty Reduction Plan. Part of that came new funding. There was new funding for a new program to train, connect and assist those under-employed individuals to employment, particularly those that may currently be on income support and who may not necessarily be eligible for EI supports through the Skills Development Program and other things.

So there was a direct initiative to encourage employment opportunities for those who would otherwise not be able to avail of them.

C. PARDY: Perfect.

I think we just had one gentleman in Port Union avail of that program.

G. BYRNE: Could very well be.

C. PARDY: I think that's going to be very successful in that particular one that I'm thinking of now. That would be the program, okay.

G. BYRNE: It could be the case.

C. PARDY: You've got the Grants and Subsidies there in section 10 of that one, 2.1.02, and again, I guess that would be listed within the binder?

G. BYRNE: That is correct.

Grants and Subsidies, there is a delta there of \$272,000, but the Grants and Subsidies itself would be available within the binder.

C. PARDY: Good.

When I first came to the House in 2019, probably one of the first petitions I had mentioned was that they closed the then referred to as AESL office in Bonavista. I don't know if you recall that.

G. BYRNE: I do.

C. PARDY: Yes.

G. BYRNE: I was the culprit. I was the minister at the time.

C. PARDY: No, Minister Mitchelmore.

You might have come right in on the heels of that because I asked you, I think, but I think Minister Mitchelmore might have been the one after that.

G. BYRNE: Okay, I'll take that answer.

C. PARDY: But I did present the petition, I think, to you because you were in there then.

G. BYRNE: Yes, okay.

I remember answering to it, that's right. I remember answering to it, yeah.

C. PARDY: Not to belabour it, but the data I had at that time indicated that that was the busiest office in the fleet of offices that were in Newfoundland and Labrador, yet that one was closed. That was the one that I was mystified by, why.

Your predecessor in the department gave me the rationale and said that we were saving a million dollars. I did a little bit of math on that and forwarded it back, and he considerably dropped it down by \$600-and-something thousand, but at the same time, that still didn't fly either.

So I'm sure that when you do this, you've got to have a data analysis any time you look at these offices where they serve and make sure they're strategically located, and that was the gist of my petition at that time. We don't need to comment on that but that's —

G. BYRNE: Well, the only comment I'll make, Mr. Chair, that if there was a suggestion that a million dollars would be saved by the closure of one office in Bonavista, someone would need math lessons.

C. PARDY: Yes, I would agree. Even the figure he dropped it to shaved off \$600,000 but even then, I would think, the lessons were still deemed.

In section 2.1.03, I would certainly add my voice in the elimination of the top-up, no doubt about that. I heard you on *Open Line* when you had mentioned that and I know that was speculative at that time.

G. BYRNE: It was, yes.

C. PARDY: You stated then that you weren't sure, just to know that when you came back from your meeting abroad with your colleagues, you had stated this was raised as a potential. I immediately went to our province not being involved in the Greener Homes Grants, which was operated by the federal government.

Any rural individual in my district – which they are rural; they have post office boxes – we couldn't get them through the Greener Homes. I would think that that was indicative of someone abroad trying to have a program with the unique quantities that we have in our province, and that might seem pretty simplistic, but the efforts on trying to get those through without a municipal tax roll, or without a municipal address, a civic address was impossible and frustrating.

So that was one thing that come to mind, but I would certainly add my voice to one that would be supportive of this continuing. I think you mentioned in your preamble that you would provide funding and assured them that funding provided until August? Is that coming from provincial coffers, or did the federal government give a period of time for a transition?

G. BYRNE: Thank you very much for the question. This is really, really important. So I'll just start at the beginning because it's really worth hearing kind of the chronology and the history of this.

All ministers responsible for labour markets across Canada, provincial, territorial and federal, met in Winnipeg on January 16. We had heard rumours up until that date that there was consideration by Ottawa to eliminate the \$625-million envelope that has been in place since 2017, that has been depended upon since 2017, that organizations who helped vulnerable people have used since 2017, may be cut by Ottawa.

It was January 16 that the federal minister formally notified us of that intention, that possibility. I felt I had a responsibility to communicate it directly, even though it was not guaranteed or certain, knowing that organizations would start a brand new fiscal year on March 31-April 1, they were making decisions now that they needed information about.

So to withhold that information would have been irresponsible. I was reluctant because I didn't want to scaremonger, but at the same time I knew that this was not scaremongering. This was really important information, so I went public. And quite frankly, Mr. Chair, I was the only minister in Canada who, to my knowledge, went public about it.

No other province or territory actually indicated that to their clientele. I'm glad I did because organizations needed information to make informed decisions. Lo and behold, on April 16, the federal government cut the program. So, right now, they could be left in limbo with people hired, payroll to meet and uncertain capacity to be able to do it. I could not let that happen.

I am taking a risk, a chance, and it's a measured chance – one that I'm quite comfortable with. But at the same time, they need to be able to make payroll, so I've advanced them six months. We normally advance three months of funding; I advanced them six months. Those organizations that have been normally accustomed to core funding, I advanced them six months so that they can keep their houses in order. They have certainty, so without panic they can lobby the federal government. They can help us to communicate to the federal government how stupid this decision is. Because it's a stupid decision.

C. PARDY: So the money that you advanced them, is that federal monies?

G. BYRNE: It's from the LMDA, and we'll cross that bridge in due time, but I will do whatever it takes to keep organizations that support vulnerable people as whole as I can.

Now, your next question may be: Well then, now that you know that the cut has occurred, tell me the consequences. That would be a fair-minded question for you to ask. My answer to you is this: The federal

government does now have unilaterally delivered federal government programming. So I would like to work with those organizations to use this time, not under a situation of duress or panic, but to work with those organizations to now put in applications to the federal government for ongoing funding from the federal government's new, own-sourced programming.

So you see what I'm saying and you may ask me, Gerry, why don't you just tell us what you're going to do, because you know you're cut \$16.8 million. Well, I'll try my best to make sure that organizations are not impacted.

To suggest that you can remove \$16.8 million a year with no consequence, it's dancing on the head of a pin by the federal government. That's what they're suggesting is that there should be – don't worry about it, you're back to your core funding of 1997 funding.

C. PARDY: Yeah.

G. BYRNE: Don't mind the top-up, that's not core to you. Well, that's dancing on the head of a pin.

So now that we know that the federal government does have their own federally funded and federally delivered labour market programming, we're going to work with organizations to see if they can get access to some of that funding to be able to replace portions of that \$16.8 million.

C. PARDY: Do you envision that they'll come back eventually in due course, maybe in short course, looking at a further withdrawal of money?

G. BYRNE: We are in –

C. PARDY: This is just a top-up; you're going back to the 1997.

G. BYRNE: Yeah, this is just the 2017 money. They have said and said out loud, and they've said in the budget, that's not their plan to go back and look at the 1997 envelope, what they call the core LMTA, but I have to tell you, in 2024, 1997-level funding, that's no way to support vulnerable people and get people to work.

C. PARDY: With the degree of –

CHAIR: Okay, we're going to move to the Member for St. John's Centre now.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

So I've just got to clarify and make sure I'm – in 2.1.03, I don't have anything to ask on 2.1.01 or 2.1.02, but with 2.1.03, what is the budget here? Because if I'm reading it correctly, the amount to be voted is \$138,573,900. If I look at the brackets underneath, I'm assuming that's federal revenue we didn't get? Are we saying that there's no money in there?

G. BYRNE: No, within our public accounting system, you need placeholders so that if you have federal money –

J. DINN: Yeah.

G. BYRNE: – if you want to spend money that comes from a federal source, you have to create a placeholder for it.

Our chartered professional accountant can better speak to this.

J. DINN: You can clarify if I make this worse before you answer it, so we're still looking at a budget and it's of \$138-plus million, or not?

G. BYRNE: Yes, it used to be \$16.8 million more than that.

J. DINN: Sixteen point –

G. BYRNE: Oh no, sorry!

No, no, no, sorry, sorry, sorry. That's in there.

J. DINN: Sixteen million is in there?

G. BYRNE: Yes.

J. DINN: Okay, because it'll determine what questions I ask, maybe.

S. JONES: Yeah, so just to clarify, the \$16.8 million is still within the Estimates, due to the fact that, to Mr. Byrne's point, we had to make an appropriation for it in case we got it. Because the budget is done a month before the federal budget, we were still in hopes that we were going to get that money. So that money is in there, assuming we were getting the federal revenue at that point. So these numbers include the federal top-up money that we are now no longer going to get.

J. DINN: So if I am understanding correctly what the minister is saying, we have two choices: either cut the benefits, cut the services, or, if I understand it correctly, the province is going to find a way to make sure that those that have already signed onto the programs are not left high and dry. Would that be fair enough?

G. BYRNE: No, I don't think so.

J. DINN: But \$16 million is a lot to make up.

G. BYRNE: It would be a fallacy for me to say and for you to sort of interpret that I could come up with \$16.8 million.

J. DINN: Yeah.

G. BYRNE: I cannot. I mean, we are not in a fiscal situation where I can just simply go to our Finance Minister and say: *Comme ci, comme ça*, we just took a hit on \$16.8 million, can you just backstop that in perpetuity?

Mr. Chair, let's remember, there is nobody here that is part of the problem, we're all

party of the solution, but let's remember where this money came from. Ottawa, Canada said this federation is not working correctly; it is not working efficiently; it is not working effectively; Canada should not be engaged in labour market programming. It is provinces and territories who know labour market interventions best, who can make the best decisions.

That was an informed decision that was taken in 1996 and enacted in 1997. It was what created the Labour Market Transfer Agreements. It also said that provinces and territories should have the resources necessary to get that job done. That's why there is in excess of a \$2-billion envelope that went with that devolution. That's why in 2017, the current government said that since 1997 to 2017, the money was insufficient because program costs grew with inflationary pressures.

So they're the ones who put in the additional \$625 million top-up for the purpose of meeting increased costs in programming. Plus, because they said at the time, this would create a stable platform over a series of years while Ottawa negotiates multilaterally and bilaterally with all provinces and territories on a renewed Labour Market Agreement commitment.

It is 2014, Canada decided that the federation is not really what's on the top of their mind; the efficiency of the federation is not what's on the top of their mind; who does the best programming is not on the top of their mind. The federal government said just a few days ago that they want to get back into labour market programming and they are not concerned about any consequence that this may cause to vulnerable individuals or organizations. And I'm not going to mince any words on this: This is ridiculous.

At a time when our labour markets are changing and evolving faster than they ever had before, if ever there was a time for a need for stability, and this is being said by

NDP provincial governments, by PC provincial governments and by this Liberal government, and by individual Members and everybody out there, they're saying this is not the time to create instability in our labour market, in our workforce and in those who are underrepresented in our workforce and in the supports that they need to be in the workforce. This is not the time to be doing this and I cannot understand for the life of me, why this federal government is doing this at this time. It makes no sense.

J. DINN: Thank you.

So I would assume then that programs such as the Newfoundland and Labrador Workforce Innovation Centre would be jeopardized or impacted by this?

G. BYRNE: It could be, but it may not be if I kind find an alternative federal government funding source or if I can – we are going to do a zero-based deep dive once again. We do it every year, year after year, but we're going to try to find efficiencies where we can. I don't want any organization to be unfunded or defunded or reduced of funding.

I think we're all reasonable people; we are reasonable people, \$16.8-million loss per year is not something that could just be accommodated just by a wink and a nudge. It will have consequences. We're just going to do our very darn well best to minimize those consequences through any means possible.

J. DINN: I would assume then that there's going to be little room then as a result for any new initiatives through this program?

G. BYRNE: That I can say with absolute certainty, there is going to be next to zero room for any new initiative, especially ones that require being built into a fiscal framework for more than one year.

J. DINN: Thank you.

I'll move on then to 2.1.04. How many people will be helped now by the added funding under Grants and Subsidies in 2.1.04?

G. BYRNE: Under their Labour Market Transfer Agreements, there are two agreements that are in place. One is the Labour Market Development Agreement, the LMDA. I know it sounds very similar to the acronym of LMTA, but there are two agreements: the LMDA and the WDA, the Workforce Development Agreement.

The Workforce Development Agreement is one that's particularly targeted for individuals with disabilities and vulnerabilities. That's the figure. The Grants and Subsidies went up by \$655,000 because it had to be planned for an assumption that the federal government would recant and still give us full funding within the WDA, which they are now not.

The funding, to the Member, Mr. Chair, is based on a formula. So it's not necessarily the same year after year after year. There are some variations in what the annual funding is. So that's why there are some variations in the funding.

WDA, my deputy just reminds me, is on a strict per capita formula. As we grow our population a little bit, normally, our WDA funding goes up a little bit.

J. DINN: Do we have a number on maybe the people that we're going to be able to help? Any idea of the numbers?

G. BYRNE: Yes. The magnitude of the reduction in WDA from this is – Madam Sharlene?

S. JONES: It is \$2.7 million.

J. DINN: Reduction?

S. JONES: Yeah.

J. DINN: And you can't put that, like, okay, this is going to mean that we're going to be able to help maybe 100 people less or anything like that?

S. JONES: No, unfortunately, there are so many programs. There are five or six different programs in there with different amounts, so it's hard to say. There's not an average cost per person for each one, so we're not able at this point to –

J. DINN: But they might not be able to take on new people or anything along those –?

S. JONES: Correct.

J. DINN: Okay.

In 2.1.05 – I'll squeeze one in. I'm assuming that it's safe to say we're going to be expecting a decrease in federal revenue for the same reasons in 2.1.05? There's a decrease there; are we going to be losing money in that category as well?

G. BYRNE: This revenue change, this delta here on the federal revenue side, in this case, is on the notional allocation of WDA for this year. It's set on a per capita formula and, as a result, the funding can fluctuate each year.

Sharlene, I don't know if there are any particular details that you can add to any fluctuations there.

S. JONES: Mainly the fluctuation, as the minister alluded to, is set by per capita and while our population has increased, it has not increased at the same rate as Canada as a whole, so we ended up with a little bit of a smaller percentage than the previous year.

J. DINN: Thank you.

CHAIR: Okay.

The Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Thank you.

Minister, you drew the short straw tonight having two teachers here elongating, stretching things out, adding commentary where they probably don't belong – questions. There are only two available in the House of Assembly and you got two here at the same time.

J. DINN: Don't underestimate the minister's ability, too.

G. BYRNE: I married a teacher.

C. PARDY: There are a lot of disclosures going on.

It was sage commentary in the House of Assembly one day when someone said that the federal government was morally and intellectually bankrupt. I'm assuming you intend to agree with that.

G. BYRNE: In that case at that time, and doubly so in this case at this time.

C. PARDY: Yeah.

For the record, Minister, you said that right in the House?

G. BYRNE: I certainly did, and I will say that –

C. PARDY: And the Member opposite agreed?

G. BYRNE: The Member opposite who engaged in a conversation with me – I wouldn't call it a debate because, at that point in time, you and I were in common cause on that particular issue and in full agreement that issue was a poor decision. I would argue, given the vulnerabilities of the people that should be benefiting from these programs, it would be doubly so that this is one of the stupidest decisions that I've ever seen come out of a federal government.

C. PARDY: Just to follow up, in the same vein, they're going to withhold the \$16.5 million and I'm assuming they'll still fund us, the province, for the Labour Market Development Agreement, \$122 million?

You know, generally the math, give or take some others, but you don't have great confidence that this is not the start of something that we're going to see a further erosion of our involvement in operationalizing this section, provincially.

G. BYRNE: I will call it out as I see it and truthfully as I see it. I'll be honest with my perspectives. I won't over torque for the sake of over torquing, but I will torque when it needs to be torqued. The federal budget did indicate that the core LMDA, the 1997 funding level, is safe and secure.

C. PARDY: Okay.

G. BYRNE: But in all of the communications from the federal government, with organizations who expressed concerns to the federal government, their reply was – and I'll characterize it this way: With a shrug of the shoulders, they said: What are you talking about? You've got your LMDA funding. You're going to be okay. The top-up, that was bonus money. And bonus money, that's fake money. So you don't have to worry about the bonus money because you've still got the core LMDA money.

So don't worry about that which is different. Don't worry about the top-up because the implication was that you really don't need the \$16.8 million, as long as you've got the original 1997 level funding that you can cut – I will say to you this: We provided \$3.5 million more to supported-employment agencies from money that came from the top-up since 2017.

By God, it is not my intention to cut them a dime. I've got to figure out a way not to do that, and it's going to be tough. I cannot promise you, tonight, on the floor of this

Committee room, that I can do that. I cannot – \$16.8 million, \$3.5 million of which went to supported-employment organizations, organizations that serve people with intellectual disability to get into the workforce – \$3.5 million of it came from the top-up.

I'm really, really disturbed that I am put in this Solomon's choice position, and the federal government has walked away in this particular instance as a partner, in that regard, saying don't worry about it. You've got the core LMDA. Implying that you, Minister Byrne, should cut \$3.5 million from supported employment.

I don't accept that. I'm not prepared to accept that. I cannot tell you, right now, how I'm going to deal with it, if I can be successful about not cutting it. I don't know. I've got to figure this out.

C. PARDY: Yeah.

There are 16 employment corporations in the province –

G. BYRNE: Is there 16 or 17?

C. PARDY: – serving how many? I think it was 700 mentioned.

G. BYRNE: Six hundred and sixty-two comes to mind, but we can check the stats on that.

You can carry on, Sharlene.

S. JONES: Are you asking in particular about the Supported Employment Program?

C. PARDY: Yes. This fits in with this right?

S. JONES: Yes.

G. BYRNE: Yes.

S. JONES: Yeah, so that's also part of the funding. So last year, 666 individuals.

C. PARDY: Okay, and 16 or 17 corporations we have in the province?

G. BYRNE: I thought the number was 15, but we can count them up pretty quick.

S. JONES: We have 15 agreements with community employment corporations, and to your point, Minister, we also have other organizations. That's why you're thinking of a different number.

G. BYRNE: Yes.

C. PARDY: Okay. All right.

S. JONES: But there is 15 there, yes.

C. PARDY: Okay.

In 2.1.03, in the same category, the Operating Accounts that we have here.

G. BYRNE: Yeah.

C. PARDY: I'm assuming that, as is read, the \$532,700 was spent last year, it was all spent?

G. BYRNE: Yes, it was.

C. PARDY: The Grants and Subsidies, that will be in the binder.

G. BYRNE: Yes, it will.

C. PARDY: Minister, you received a letter from the FFAW?

G. BYRNE: Yes, I did.

C. PARDY: More than one?

G. BYRNE: No, just one.

C. PARDY: Oh, just one.

Yeah, the one I'm referring to is the fact that they met with the federal MPs in discussion with Employment Insurance, with the review and with the problems that we had last year

with the seasonal workers in the fishery, they had informed, I think, the union officials in that you would have received money to be able to assist those that would be caught short with EI benefits, and they suggested to the union that they ought to come talk with you.

G. BYRNE: Me.

C. PARDY: So I am just wondering now what your response to that would be?

G. BYRNE: So I do have a response to that. I pride myself on getting correspondence replied to quickly wherever I can. Especially to organizations, such as the FFAW, especially on issues as sensitive and as important as the one that was raised as quickly as possible. I have to admit that I was taken aback –

C. PARDY: Yeah.

G. BYRNE: – not by Mr. Pretty's information, but by the information that Mr. Pretty was conveying to me in the letter.

I know not what Minister Hutchings was alluding to. I have received no additional funds from the federal government, outside of the LMTAs, and if Minister Hutchings is suggesting that the Labour Market Development Agreement or the Workforce Development Agreement can indeed provide insurable employment projects to fish plant workers, that is contrary to what we have been told for 28 years, but I welcome that revised decision by the minister because I will be using that money for insurable employment projects.

However, before I do that, I'd like to get confirmation. My tone is elevating here a little bit. Do you know why?

C. PARDY: Yeah.

G. BYRNE: Because if that is incorrect information, it was irresponsible information to convey. I'm asking for Mr. Pretty, if he

has additional information as to if there was any particular program that Minister Hutchings had referred to in that particular conversation, because I know not what is being referred to, that would be helpful. I'm reaching out to ask the minister directly what she was referring to because what I can tell you and you know very darn well as I do, job creation partnerships are one of the few and only employment programs –

C. PARDY: Yeah.

G. BYRNE: – within the LMDA and it only provides non-insurable, stipend-based benefit – non-insurable benefit, which is of no use.

C. PARDY: Can I add one more comment?

G. BYRNE: Yes, you can.

CHAIR: We'll come back.

C. PARDY: Okay.

CHAIR: We'll go with the Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: In 2.1.07, is it possible to have an update on how the Atlantic trades harmonization program is working, especially now that it is being funded by the province?

G. BYRNE: We can indeed.

It's working very, very well. We're in kind of a command position within that particular effort, but Assistant Deputy Minister Sharlene, if you wouldn't mind, I think you would give the best information there.

S. JONES: So everything is going really well. We took over the maintenance office this past fiscal year. One of the reasons all four Atlantic provinces had agreed and actually requested that the office remained here as to keep with the stability, and everything has been going really smoothly.

We haven't hit any speedbumps along the way, so things are going really well.

I don't know if there is a specific question you had but there has been no issues.

J. DINN: You say it's working well, is there any, I guess, data that would show that it's working well? How did you determine that it's working well?

S. JONES: Honestly, the lack of complaints, to be honest.

J. DINN: We'll work on that.

S. JONES: No, we meet regularly with the other three Atlantic provinces to where their members as well give us feedback and it's been smooth sailing. Everything is going really well. There hasn't been any issues that I've had to bring forward to my deputy or minister because it has all been handled really well and things are moving along smoothly.

J. DINN: Perfect.

Is it possible to have an update on the work that has been done so far to review the apprenticeship program and what, if any, actions will be taken going forward as a result?

G. BYRNE: Yes, that will be a report that's coming out. I alluded to this in my preamble earlier. The work is near completed and we're looking forward to it.

This is just for the benefit of Members. A company called Prism Economics and Analysis was successful through a request for proposals process. This is a company that has already done significant work in this area in the past. They've got a proven capacity. Work has already been done for Manitoba on a strategic review of the Manitoba apprenticeship system, in Nunavut and they've already completed a labour market projection for all of Atlantic

Canda, so they're well, well aware of the field of apprenticeships.

The contract cost was – I think given the volume of work that was required – very modest. Their bid was at \$128,000. Already 50 stakeholder consultations have included 57 interviews; 20 written submissions; there've been five townhall sessions on the Island and in Labrador; document review and a research review; and final report is pending.

J. DINN: Thank you.

In this division, I guess the number of vacancies, and will this affect the smooth functioning of the apprenticeship system?

S. JONES: Currently, right now, there are three vacancies in this division of 41 positions.

J. DINN: Thank you.

So no effect on programming?

S. JONES: No.

J. DINN: Of 41?

S. JONES: Yes.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Purchased Services is under budget. What was the reason for that?

G. BYRNE: I'm lost here, I have to read –

J. DINN: 2.1.07, I think Purchased Services is there, if you look it was budgeted \$6,198,000, it's down by around a million or so. I'm just curious, that's in Purchased Services. And Professional Services went from \$125,000 down to \$72,000, up now to \$123,600.

S. JONES: To address your first question related to Purchased Services. There was one-time savings of \$500,000 in block

training under this activity. This is where we do the class calls that are provided to apprentices to complete their level training. It just so happened that this fluctuates year to year, depending on how many. We always makes sure that there's sufficient budget in there.

This is actually funded through LMDA funding. So when there's savings towards the end of the year in this activity, we reprofile it back under our LMDA activity to ensure that we use it so that we utilize all federal funds. So that \$500,000, and you'll see it offsetting in the revenue that goes with it, those two amounts were actually reprofiled back into LMDA to make sure they were fully utilized.

J. DINN: Okay.

That's it for me, thank you.

CHAIR: Did the Member for Bonavista have another question?

C. PARDY: I just want to make sure the Member for St. John's Centre is okay?

CHAIR: Yeah, yeah.

J. DINN: I'm good, unless you –

C. PARDY: You've got four minutes.

J. DINN: Okay.

C. PARDY: A couple of quick questions.

I was going to add the comment, you had mentioned you usually reply promptly and quickly when you referenced that. Well, this Member can attest that there are no quicker ministerial responses when I would reach out and ask you a question, whether it be on a Saturday or a Sunday, then the quick response that you would supply. So I just want that for the record because that's true. I've told my colleagues the same. You're quick, you're good.

The Employment Assistance Programs for Persons with Disabilities, that's 2.1.05: These are the individuals we would see working in our communities, that would have a coach with them, someone that would be working with them in the community?

G. BYRNE: So what you're referring to is the Supported Employment corporation.

C. PARDY: Yes, yes.

G. BYRNE: Yeah.

C. PARDY: I'm not sure if it's the right section, but I know that –

G. BYRNE: It is in part, yes, that's how part of that initiative is funded.

C. PARDY: I know it's probably in a similar vein, where you're talking about the top-up and the importance of that and going back to 1997 figures. I spoke to one of these coaches one time and asked him. He said they were a significant amount of time since they've had an increase.

I know that stuck in my mind when I seen the heading there.

G. BYRNE: Yeah.

C. PARDY: So I'm assuming that would be up, too. You're not directly involved with that, I guess you would give out money and someone else is operationalizing and delivering this, some other group, or is it going straight from the department, that would operationalize –

G. BYRNE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I really appreciate this question because we are not the employer –

C. PARDY: Okay.

G. BYRNE: – of the job coaches.

C. PARDY: Yeah.

G. BYRNE: The Supported Employment organizations are. But we have a very, very positive partnership with the Supported Employment corporations, and I mentioned this earlier, you are right that in the past they had not received any substantial pay raises. Where they did in the past – distant past –

C. PARDY: Yeah.

G. BYRNE: – it meant that what the Supported Employment corporations had to do was reduce the number of coaches. Instead of having a cohort of, say, 50 coaches at \$13 – I'm just saying numbers –

C. PARDY: Yeah.

G. BYRNE: – at \$14 an hour, in order to give a pay raise, they'd have to reduce to 40 coaches and use the offsetting savings to increase the wages of the 40.

So one of the things I also mentioned to you is that I took a decision that part of the top-up money, \$3 million of it, went to organizations for job coaches. It is up to them to determine how they were going to use it. I am not the employer, but many of them did enable them to raise to minimum wage standards and to provide a certain level of wage increase, some of them, also, employed some additional job coaches and other things.

So out of the top-up, the money that's in question, \$3.5 million of it went to Supported Employment organizations.

C. PARDY: If there was another individual seeking employment and would meet the criteria for the employment and the job coach, they would be approaching the Supported Employment group?

G. BYRNE: Correct.

C. PARDY: It's not a fluid amount that it would come back to the department to determine for additional funds because there's an increase in clientele.

G. BYRNE: No, they contract to us, annually. They give us projections and it's a pretty steady state; money is relatively finite.

C. PARDY: Yes.

G. BYRNE: So we contract to them on a guaranteed basis, on an annual basis and they work within that funding envelope to balance their books, to have a proper organization.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Minister.

Youth and Student Services, 2.1.06, this is the pool which the summer student employment would come under?

G. BYRNE: Generally speaking, yes.

C. PARDY: Would MHAs be consulted in any way before this allocation would be sent out in the district? Sometimes there are little nuances or little things that we've seen or whatever that might assist. At times, you might be asked for a recommendation or a suggestion, right?

G. BYRNE: Yes. So excellent opportunity, if I could, Mr. Chair, to sort of explain the evolution of this program.

Once upon a time in Newfoundland and Labrador, we had an awful lot of high school students and we also had an awful lot of post-secondary education students. There was a decision, once upon a time –

C. PARDY: Yes.

G. BYRNE: – to have a second, like a special program for high school students. Why was that the case? Because, normally, an employer would rather hire a post-secondary, a more mature, an older student with a driver's licence. It was easier and in

their best interest to hire an older student than it ever was a high school student.

Back in the day, a former minister – I don't know who it was – took an informed decision and I think a reasonable decision that we have to carve out some room so that high school students don't get left out. They need work, too. Grade 12 students going into university or Grade 11 students going into Grade 12, then they should be able to have an opportunity to work in the summer months as well.

Well, what happened – that was then; this is now – we actually have more high school students, in some cases, than we have post-secondary students. So what employers were saying was that you have two programs, IPGS; you have a high school program and you have a post-secondary program. I got a post-secondary grant. I can't find a post-secondary student to go to work, because a lot of them once they go to St. John's, they stay in St. John's for the summer, but there is a high school student that I'd love to be able to hire, but I can't because he doesn't meet the rules.

So we took an informed decision this past year to say, listen, let's just push it all together so that there's ultimate flexibility, full flexibility to be able to hire students in an area, in Bonavista, in Winterton or wherever. The utility of having two separate programs became redundant. So now, we're pushing it all together.

I am always sensitive and will always respond to Members' concerns and requests if a particular organization got left out. If there's some accommodation I can make – I think you know me well enough; I've responded to you whenever you've called – I will try to do my best to stop – with this program, we always have to remember, our client is not the employer. The interface to the program is the employer, but our client is the student.

C. PARDY: Yes.

G. BYRNE: That's who we're trying to serve.

It is a great benefit but, as a secondary benefit, it's the employer who also benefits. It's a great symbiosis. It's a great synergy. But our client, we always got to remember, it's the kid we're trying to help first.

So that's the way I kind of approach it. I would rather give money to a great employer, an employer who has a really rich work experience planned out for the kid than someone who's just going to say here go sit behind the cash and punch your time and here's your cheque at the end of the week.

C. PARDY: In a couple of conversations on the summer students, there's a nuance that you need two. I would know and I would validate that yes, they would apply for two and sometimes you would say that we're going to give them one. But there are a couple of those applications of which I think two is integral and necessary.

Whether they portrayed that in the application well enough or not, but I know that would be something that I could say to validate that, listen, they could certainly use the second one, whether they get it or not, but at least that's where I was thinking about the input, before it goes out, to know that I know the area pretty good and that's something I would weigh in on.

G. BYRNE: On follow-up, we also did decide that small- and medium-sized business was the priority. If you were a large-scale employer, you could darn well hire students on your own if you wanted to. That's just applying for a grant for the sake of apply for a grant in some cases. So we did some other changes as well.

Summer sports organizations are keenly a good priority.

C. PARDY: Yeah, good.

The last question on this section, on the Apprenticeship and Trades Certification, 2.1.07: I know about the mobility aspect of our skilled trades and I think the Harmonization Program, that's great, and I think we've pretty well arrived with the harmonization. Would that be correct? You know, as far as the harmonization in all regards with the Atlantic provinces.

G. BYRNE: Thank you for the – basically, there is an overall harmonization, an exchange of information on all trades, but in terms of harmonization, there is an effort to target select trades and sort of build the inventory piece by piece by piece.

ADM Sharlene, I don't know if you can sort of speak to how many trades have really kind of fallen into that or we can get you further information about that.

S. JONES: We can get some further information. However, I will say that where we work together, that if any other trades come up and that any changes are needed, we just keep moving that along.

But all the trades that are harmonized, we can get that list for you.

C. PARDY: That's good.

S. JONES: I believe, actually, it's in the binder; I just can't put my finger on it at this moment.

C. PARDY: I know of one Red Seal electrician who, I think, he was going back to school to do the instrumentation and controls program. I know that within the programs is that if you have the skill set, you certainly don't need to do programs, like in Level 1, a block of which you have excelled at or in the employment that you're leaving, you've shown that you have mastery of.

But I was surprised to find out that these Red Seal electricians who were going back to school to do instrumentation and controls

program had to do the basic electrical Level 1 program.

What the individual electrician had said, they couldn't figure it out, as many times as they tried and made statements. The employer, according to that individual, said they were very frustrated with it. I'm sure it comes with a cost, but to know that they've got to do the basic electrical of a Level 1 block, a Red Seal electrician, I didn't – and according to that, the electrician said this is the only province in our neighbouring provinces in Atlantic Canada that would be the case.

S. JONES: So I can speak to that specific example. Just so you know, that was brought to our attention early September, maybe October of last year. There's a process when that gets brought up, because that was the first time we had heard that there was an issue.

We had to undertake a review of all the curriculum of what was in the basic versus what they did in their Red Seal, and we had to go through it to see, program by program, what skills were tested and what were not to see what we could give credit for and what we couldn't. That took a fair amount of time.

Then we have reached a conclusion of what we could give credit for and what we couldn't, and we brought that forward to the provincial advisory board. So that's just recently gone to the board and accepted, so there are changes coming to that.

C. PARDY: Oh, okay.

S. JONES: So that's one of the good things about when something gets brought to our attention. However, there's a policy and a procedure that got to follow. While I can understand the frustration from the individual saying that makes sense, we have to go through because, to get certification, there are numerous courses and other skills that they have to do.

So we had to just do a very thorough review and it took a bit of time, but we're now there.

C. PARDY: That's good.

I don't want to belabour that, but I had a quick glance at it, and I know that we teach a lot of it at the intermediate-level school, Ohm's law and basic circuitry. That's what the Level 1 was, was pretty basic. I would think that if you're coming in and doing a Red Seal electrician, it would seem pretty obvious looking at the course.

But anyway, one last thing on that: Are we one of the few provinces that don't have a Red Seal certification for an automotive service technician? I know that's not one of the ones we have. When I think of that, and I just throw it out there because in the discussion that I had with an individual, they talked about safety on the roads and they said that whether it be tire tread, whether it be the condition of the car, i.e., after a 10-year period, no inspection necessary, they just wondered about safety on our roads. I thought that was a very valid point that they had made.

G. BYRNE: I totally concur with your assessment of its importance. Automotive service technician is indeed a Red Seal trade that we apprentice in Newfoundland and Labrador.

I'll throw this at you. In terms of pass rates, the Canadian average on the Red Seal exam for automotive service technician is 56 per cent. The Newfoundland and Labrador average pass rate is 84 per cent. National average is 56 per cent pass rate; Newfoundland and Labrador average is 84 per cent pass rate.

C. PARDY: Fantastic.

G. BYRNE: We are in the best of Canada on automotive service technicians.

This is a gauge that I use, Mr. Chair, to the hon. Member: Is our curriculum, is our

instructors, is our education system really performing on all cylinders? The Red Seal, it does create a comparator between provinces on a national level. What is our pass rate compared to the national pass rate?

We are well above on a number of different trades. We're well above the national pass rate and so that gives me good confidence that our instructors are excellent, our institutions are good and our curriculum is good. They're learning the things that are in a national exam.

Newfoundland and Labrador does not write the Red Seal exam; it's a national exam. In order to be able to compete and grade successfully, in a national exam – it's like the public's when we were in high school.

C. PARDY: Yes, that's good.

Probably what I was missing there – is the right term a compulsory trade?

G. BYRNE: So no, there are only five compulsory trades in Newfoundland and Labrador.

C. PARDY: Crane operator – I'm aware of those five. That probably ought to have been the question. Not that you had the Red Seal program, but why it wasn't a compulsory trade, that's all, and that's for a different time. Plumbing would be another one that I would have.

That's good.

CHAIR: Okay.

Seeing no further questions, we'll call the headings.

CLERK: 2.1.01 to 2.1.07 inclusive, Employment and Skills Development.

CHAIR: Shall these headings carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subheads 2.1.01 through 2.1.07 carried.

CHAIR: We'll take a five-minute break now before we proceed.

C. PARDY: Or finish it off?

CHAIR: Or do you think –?

C. PARDY: No, a break?

G. BYRNE: I've never spent so long in this Chamber in my life, so we can keep on going.

C. PARDY: We haven't got long left, have we? Fifteen minutes and we're done?

CHAIR: Okay. If that's the agreement, we'll stay.

G. BYRNE: It would be groundbreaking for me, right, Fred?

We started at 5:30 p.m. –

C. PARDY: Yeah, that's right.

G. BYRNE: – so normally it would expire at 8:30 p.m. but –

CHAIR: We've got two more headings to do.

Let's see, if we did a round of questions on each heading, if Members can limit their time, that would be great.

C. PARDY: Yes.

So limit the questions and limit the answers.

Okay, Chair, that's up to the minister.

CHAIR: It's fine.

J. DINN: (Inaudible) are allowed to have time on the clock?

CHAIR: Yeah, it's okay to leave time on the clock is what I'm saying.

Okay. Let's go; let's call the next heading.

CLERK: 3.1.01, Regional Service Delivery.

CHAIR: The Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Minister, 3.1.01, Salaries increasing by \$550,000?

G. BYRNE: Yes. So the difference in the 2024-25 Estimates, they're up by \$550,000 over the 2023 original budget. The adjustments of salaries across the department – there were adjustments of salaries to better reflect actual requirements and because of the negotiated increase of 2 per cent. But, more importantly, and more influentially, there were additional four LMDO positions that were approved in last year's budget and announced in last year's budget and brought into the Office of Immigration and Multiculturalism.

So that is four new positions, plus the 2 per cent and some other variation there.

C. PARDY: Purchased Services, Minister, increasing by almost \$100,000.

G. BYRNE: Based on the zero-based budget review, that was what we found to be the case. There were also some additional costs related to occupational health and safety requirement expenditures. So that's caused the increase of \$92,100.

C. PARDY: My last comment on this section would be that the apprenticeship program officers travelling from Clarenville down to Bonavista to meet with future apprentices or current is wonderful. That's something that we hadn't seen for a while, but I think the

data will show it'll work and it's a good initiative.

G. BYRNE: Good to note.

C. PARDY: I yield my time.

CHAIR: Thank you.

J. DINN: No questions.

CHAIR: No questions, okay.

So seeing no further questions, we'll call that heading.

I'll ask the Clerk to call the heading.

CLERK: 3.1.01, Regional Service Delivery.

CHAIR: Shall that heading carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subhead 3.1.01 carried.

CHAIR: Okay, we'll keep moving.

I'll ask the Clerk to call the next heading.

CLERK: 4.1.01 to 4.1.02 inclusive, Immigration and Workforce Development.

CHAIR: The hon. Member for Bonavista.

C. PARDY: Thank you, Chair.

The Association of New Canadians, how much funds do they receive? I'm assuming it's part of a grant/subsidy?

G. BYRNE: Yes. So if you could indulge me, Mr. Chair, because in these subheadings related to the Office of Immigration and Multiculturalism, this one

and the ones to come, you're going to see a fair bit of variation between last year and this year, some reprofiling of funds.

For a consistent explanation, we'll deal with each one individually. In *Budget 2023*, last year, the Office of Immigration and Multiculturalism received one-time funding for the Ukrainian Family Support Desk. That was announced in the budget, and this included money to continue providing for airlifts.

Throughout '23-'24, we welcomed – while we had planned for additional airlifts beyond the four that we did, what we experienced was that we actually – and I alluded to this at the very beginning – got the equivalent of what was a charter load of people every two months coming on their own.

So we did take a decision, as I said earlier, that you take in data, you take in information and you pivot, when the data tells you that it's best to pivot. So that's what we did. Instead of actually bringing in additional charters, what we did is we pivoted by using this funding instead to offer enhanced settlement services for the growing number of Ukrainians who found their way to the province.

These targeted investments have helped foster, now, the community of 4,300 Ukrainians that are here and that's some of the things that will pay for the temporary accommodations, the wage subsidies and other things.

So I just want to say up front to you that this will be a principal driver to a lot of what you will see as some quite visceral swings in funding levels.

C. PARDY: Okay.

How much are the Association for New Canadians allotted in '23-'24?

G. BYRNE: In '23-'24, the total was \$33 million, almost \$34 million, of which a

significant portion of that was sourced in last year's budget.

C. PARDY: Okay.

Just a quick overview as to how it's used. So they use that \$33 million – how are the funds used?

G. BYRNE: So, actually, I will correct – specifically for the ANC, it was \$31 million.

C. PARDY: Okay.

G. BYRNE: There were some additional related costs that were flowed through our department directly but it's \$31 million to the ANC. The vast bulk of that money was for temporary accommodations, for language services and a variety of other resettlement supports.

So everything from pre-arrival services, reception services, the temporary accommodations and meals, settlement case management services and other things.

C. PARDY: Do they provide their budget to you for analysis?

OFFICIAL: Every week.

C. PARDY: Yes, they do?

G. BYRNE: They do. We are not the governing body of the ANC. The Association for New Canadians has a governing body, a board of directors. We do have an ex-officio role on the board of directors, but that is ex-officio so we're able to attend meetings.

Given the volume of expenditures and making sure that we're meeting financial commitments and requirements, the ANC is reporting to us on a weekly basis.

C. PARDY: In which line item does he travel occur?

G. BYRNE: The travel for –?

C. PARDY: You had the planes, the four charters – or you had allocated for the charters, which it didn't materialize, and I think that you had mentioned that in your –

G. BYRNE: That would be allocated under Purchased Services.

C. PARDY: Purchased Services, okay.

What would account for the large increase in what was budgeted and revised last year under Professional Services?

G. BYRNE: In '23-'24, IPGS, in the budget itself, it was announced publicly that we had received a \$2 million allocation for communications, marketing and promotions. Some of the things that are attracting interest in Newfoundland and Labrador as a place. That was part of that money.

Spending was up by half a million dollars and some of the costs associated with that was charged to Professional, as opposed to Purchased Services. So some of this was rightfully put into this particular budget item.

C. PARDY: Did the Transportation and Communications lines have anything to do with travel here or the flights?

G. BYRNE: No.

C. PARDY: A significant variance there from what you budgeted to what you expended?

G. BYRNE: Correct.

I'll ask Katie Norman, just to make sure that I'm not leading anyone, including myself, astray.

Katie, if you'd like to respond to that particular question.

K. NORMAN: Certainly, thank you.

From a transportation and communication perspective, the revised budget was revised down by \$360,000 given – the minister has spoken about this – the growing number of Ukrainians who are coming to the province.

In mid-2023, Canada announced the closure of the application process for the Canada-Ukraine authorization for emergency travel, which means that if people hadn't applied by that date, they didn't have an opportunity to. So we pivoted our approach.

We did not have officials located in Warsaw, Poland, where we had previously been operating a desk, because we realized that most people had their visa. They were making independent decisions on where to go and we utilized that funding instead to support settlement services because we saw the increasing pace of arrivals here in Newfoundland and Labrador and felt that that funding would be better utilized instead of having folks abroad, having additional resources here in our province.

C. PARDY: Thank you very much.

I yield my time.

CHAIR: Okay.

The Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Minister, can you provide a breakdown of the retention rates of international students and out-of-province, domestic Canadian students that have attended post-secondary institutions for the last five to 10 years by landing year, when they came here?

Obviously, you may not have that now, but –

G. BYRNE: We will do our best to uncover that for you, but that is largely the Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador's Internationalization Office. Sometimes we take the assumption that international

students who come to MUN really do want to jump and sort of stay in Newfoundland and Labrador.

MUN is not our greatest source of newcomers, of future permanent residents. In fact, it is employers. That's not to undervalue MUN and its role in attracting people to our province, but it really is employers and employment opportunities that are our greatest draw.

So we will endeavour to provide you with as much information as we can provide you, but it really starts with how many international students MUN takes. The only way we can actually tell you about that is how many PR applications we receive from a MUN graduate down the road. So the data is not necessarily that great.

J. DINN: Yeah, I'm not just looking at MUN, but any of our post-secondary institutions.

G. BYRNE: Sure. Yeah, we can do that.

J. DINN: Last year there was a call for proposals for projects to support the social, economic and cultural integration of newcomers to the province, through the Labour Market Integration for Newcomers Program. How many projects were funded and what was the total amount awarded?

G. BYRNE: That was a very successful program and I think if I can allow Katie Norman, because you've got that in your notes there as to – I know there's some paper shuffling that has to occur.

K. NORMAN: Yeah.

G. BYRNE: It's quite an extensive list.

K. NORMAN: I do.

So, last year, under the Office of Immigration and Multiculturalism, 151 organizations were funded, with a total of over \$23 million, almost \$24 million. Some of that funding is federally sourced, so you

won't see it all within the OIM section. Some of it will be in the LMDA and WDA section. There is a list located in the binder that you'll receive with the breakdown by organization.

J. DINN: Thank you.

How long do international students keep their MCP once they've graduated?

G. BYRNE: Again, it may be best to direct this at Health, but we can answer it because it is fairly static. The government and Health and Community Services took a decision to extend MCP coverage well after graduation. And then, of course, if they're gainfully employed, whether or not they have permanent residency status or not, they can continue on with MCP coverage as well.

It really is worth noting that Ontario and Quebec and several provinces don't provide any public health insurance to international students while in study. Not only does Newfoundland and Labrador provide MCP, public health insurance coverage, upon and after graduation, but we also provide international students with health coverage while in study.

Ontario and Quebec, even though they're very successful at attracting international students, those international students have to take out private insurance policies. It is mandatory because they're not covered by OHIP.

It is quite interesting that we really do have one of the more generous public insurance coverage for international students, both in study and after graduation, than any other province in Canada.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Final question: Has your office been engaging with the federal government regarding streamlining the process for getting professional credentials of

newcomers accredited, and what updates can you share on that front?

G. BYRNE: This is a field which is very, very important. You may be very aware within the business activity of the House of the *Fair Registration Practices Act* and other statutes that have come forward. It is always important to remind ourselves that licensure, recognition of credentials, is not a decision of the provincial government.

A decision which was taken some years ago – many years ago – by this Legislature, same as in just about every legislature in the country, this Legislature delegated authority for licensing to professional organizations, whether they be the registrar of nurses, the Medical Association, engineers and geoscientists, so on and so forth, there are 43 different licensed professions.

So when an internationally educated nurse looks to be licensed in Newfoundland and Labrador/Canada and wants to work in Canada, it is a professional licensing body outside of government that decides on whether or not that nurse can be licensed.

Our greatest efforts are to work with the licensing bodies of our province to streamline that process. I got to tell you, from the nursing point of view, I don't know if we could find a better partner. The nursing profession wants nothing more, nothing else other than to maintain the highest quality of safety standard, safety of practice and professionalism of practice. The registrar of professional nurses has done everything they can to make sure that that process is as streamlined and internationally educated nurse friendly as it possibly can be.

But we do work with the federal government and the federal government, in their budget a couple of days ago, did continue on with some funding availability for some programs to be able to assist that.

J. DINN: Thank you.

That's it.

Thank you, Chair.

CHAIR: Okay, thank you.

Seeing no further questions, I'll ask the Clerk to call the headings.

CLERK: 4.1.01 to 4.1.02 inclusive, Immigration and Workforce Development.

CHAIR: Shall those headings carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subheads 4.1.01 through 4.1.02 carried.

CLERK: Total, Department of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills.

CHAIR: Shall the total carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, Department of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills, total heads, carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report the Estimates of the Department of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills carried?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, Estimates of the Department of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills carried without amendment.

CHAIR: I'd like to thank the minister and his officials here today and all the Members of the Committee for their questions.

Do we have any updates or notice of next meeting?

CLERK: The next meeting is Tuesday, April 23 at 9 a.m.

CHAIR: Okay.

I need motion to adjourn.

C. PARDY: So moved.

CHAIR: Moved by the Member for Bonavista.

I don't need a seconder for that, do I?

CLERK: No.

CHAIR: Okay.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

Thank you, again.

On motion, the Committee adjourned.