

MINISTRY OF LABOUR
WRITTEN RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS RAISED AT THE
STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS
Alberta Hansard (Transcript No. 29-3-13)
November 7, 2017

Transcript Page Reference: PA-573

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

Answer:

- The *Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act* provides waged, non-family workers with the protections workers in other sectors have. At this stage, only the high level requirements are in place and we are currently consulting on how to implement the technical standards.
- Until the technical standards are in place, the enforcement approach will be to react to complaints and reportable incidents.
- We are asking for additional feedback and input on the technical working group reports until January 15, 2018 so we can build technical standards that make sense for Alberta's farm and ranch industry.
- The AgCoalition (farm and ranch employers) are working with government and have formed a health and safety association (AgSafe) to support the sector as it moves forward.

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

Answer:

- Employment in the Agriculture industry in Alberta has been fluctuating over the last 5 years.
- Employment in the Agriculture industry was at 58,800 in 2012, increased to 64,200 in 2013, decreased to 60,800 in 2014, increased to 63,200 in 2015, and decreased to 51,600 in 2016 (Table 1 provides more details).
- There has been a pattern of employment increases in one year followed by a decrease the following year, but the causes of this pattern are unclear.
- It is not clear what has caused the fluctuations in employment in the agriculture industry, as this is a complex issue with multiple variables (mechanization, consolidation, etc.).

- Since the *Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act* was enacted, there have been 2,125 new Workers' Compensation Board (WCB) accounts opened and over 1,200 workers have had claims accepted by WCB (to June 30, 2017) and were provided with compensation and benefits similar to workers in other parts of the labour force.

Table 1. Employment in the Agriculture Industry in Alberta

Sub-sector	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Crop Production	22,100	26,900	24,800	18,600	20,500
Animal Production	28,200	29,000	28,200	33,800	26,600
Other	8,500	8,300	7,800	10,800	4,500
Total	58,800	64,200	60,800	63,200	51,600

Source: Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey

Mr. Hunter: Okay. Thank you.

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

Answer:

- Employment in the agriculture industry in Alberta was 64,200 in 2013, 60,800 in 2014, 63,200 in 2015, and 51,600 in 2016 (this data is based on Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey).

Table 1. Employment in the Agriculture Industry in Alberta

Sub-sector	2013	2014	2015	2016
Crop Production	26,900	24,800	18,600	20,500
Animal Production	29,000	28,200	33,800	26,600
Other	8,300	7,800	10,800	4,500
Total	64,200	60,800	63,200	51,600

Source: Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey

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

Answer:

- As of November 11, 2017, there were 4,121 employers in the farming and ranching industry that had registered an account with WCB. They represented 11,530 paid non-family member workers in the industry.

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

Answer:

- There were 9,565 farms in Alberta reporting paid workers according to 2016 Agriculture Census results. However, as this data does not differentiate family versus non-family, it is difficult to determine exact number of farms covered under the *Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act*.

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

Answer:

- Based on 2016 Agriculture Census results, it is estimated more than 31,000 farms do not have to sign up for WCB coverage because they are exempt.

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

Answer:

- The Minister, while reviewing the WCB panel report, looked at legislative, policy and operational recommendations. Legislative changes have been proposed through Bill 30. Implementation of policy and operational recommendations are proposed to be delegated to the WCB and Appeals Commission respectively.

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

Answer:

- Over the last two years, employment and wages improved in industries and occupations that employ the majority of minimum wage earners in Alberta.
- Employment in minimum wage industries has been increasing over the last two years.
 - Between August 2016 to 2017 employment grew in: Retail Trade by 0.2 per cent; Accommodation and Food Services by 6.4 per cent.
 - Between August 2015 to 2017 employment grew in: Retail Trade by 2.8 per cent; Accommodation and Food Services by 4.6 per cent.
- Unemployment rates in minimum wage industries have consistently been lower than the provincial average since 2016.
 - In August 2017, the seasonally unadjusted unemployment rates for Accommodation and Food Services was 3.0 per cent; Retail Trade was 4.3 per cent; and Other Services (except public administration), was 7.0 per cent - all below the provincial unemployment rate.
 - Since October 2016, the unemployment rates for these three industries have continually been lower than the provincial rate.
- Wages in Accommodation and Food Services have increased faster than the provincial average over the past year.
 - Between August 2016 and August 2017, average hourly wages in Accommodation and Food Services grew by 6.6 per cent. This increase was higher than the overall industry wage growth of 3.1 per cent over the same period.
 - Between August 2016 and August 2017, median wages in Accommodation and Food Services grew by four per cent.
- Wages in minimum wage occupations have increased in the past year.
 - Between August 2016 and August 2017, average hourly wages in the Sales and service occupations increased by 2.4 per cent.
 - Median hourly wages in this occupation increased by 6.7 per cent over the same period.

Transcript Page Reference: PA-577

Mr. Gotfried: This is going to be a big, multibillion-dollar issue going forward. We're moving from medical marijuana to recreational marijuana and, obviously, some significant distribution everywhere in the province. Do you feel that that's a strong enough complement?

Answer:

- Labour has identified the issue of impairment from recreational cannabis and will be conducting further work in 2018 to address cannabis in the workplace.

Transcript Page Reference: PA-580

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

Answer:

- Our closest workers' compensation appeals tribunal comparators are British Columbia and Ontario.
- We are well above British Columbia in terms of total percentage of post-decision reviews being upheld.
- Ontario does not publish reconsideration results, but had zero Ombudsman complaints and 100 per cent upheld at court.

Ontario's Workplace Safety and Insurance Appeals Tribunal (WSIAT)

2016 Annual Report stats are:

- Judicial Reviews: 13 concluded – 100 per cent upheld
- Ombudsman complaints: 0
- Reconsiderations: 111 concluded – no stats on denied/accepted
- Percentage Upheld Total: **100 per cent / Unknown**

B.C.'s Workers' Compensation Appeal Tribunal (WCAT)

2016 Annual Report stats are:

- Judicial reviews: 13 concluded / 6 set aside – 53.8 per cent upheld
- Ombudsman complaints: not tracked
- Reconsiderations: 58 concluded / 7 reconsidered – 87.9 per cent upheld
- Percentage Upheld Total: **81.7 per cent**

Mrs. Littlewood: Under outcome 5 you talk about 10,000 Albertans being trained through the federally funded Canada job program. I know that in Fort Saskatchewan they utilized \$221,000 worth in '16-17, so I'm just wondering how you are evaluating the program and feedback that you get from participants and employers.

Answer:

- As part of the Canada-Alberta Job Fund Agreement, a full evaluation of the Canada-Alberta Job Grant (CAJG) is underway. The evaluation will assist the department in determining if CAJG:
 - increased labour market attachment of participants;
 - improved employment situation of participants;
 - increased investment/involvement of employers in skills training; and
 - addressed employer and/or provincial needs.
- The evaluation and feedback from participants and employers will be used to make future program improvements.
- The evaluation is expected to be complete by March 2018.

Transcript Page Reference: PA-581

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

Answer:

- The 2016/2017 target was set by the former Ministry of Human Services. This measure moved to Labour and Advanced Education after the 2016/2017 mandate realignment where a number of programs moved from the former Human Services ministry (Community and Social Services). Up until last year, the measure covered programs delivered by three ministries: Labour, Advanced Education and Community and Social Services.
- Beginning in the 2017-2020 business plan, Labour replaced this measure with a similar measure that includes only training for work programs delivered by Labour to more accurately assess the ministry's performance.
- The increased number of unemployed Albertans, due to the economic climate, made it difficult for many Albertans to find work.
- Many of these training and employment programs targeted multi-barriered Albertans. For example, people with low education, limited work history and other barriers which made it difficult for them to find work without training and employment support.

- Many of these programs were developed many years ago during times of high oil prices.
- To better meet local labour market needs while adjusting to economic circumstances, Alberta Labour made changes to their employment and training programs in the latter part of 2016/2017 which will not see results until the 2017/2018 fiscal year. This shift saw increases to the services helping recent unemployed labour market attached Albertans reconnect to the labour market. Specific examples include:
 - Tailoring programs to serve Albertans who were in receipt of or eligible for Employment Insurance benefits;
 - Increased services to underserved rural communities;
 - Increased training seats for the recently unemployed, targeting in-demand occupations; and
 - new employment services to assist unemployed professionals and other occupations connect to jobs through wrap-around supports that incorporates transferability of skills from one sector to another.

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

Answer:

- The Employer Liaison Service is a pilot project with the Government of Canada. It is based on the Refusal to Process List, which is a list of occupations deemed to have a sufficient supply of labour in Alberta based on methodology which includes numerous labour market indicators. Applications to the federal government for Labour Market Impact Assessments for occupations on the refusal to process list will not be assessed and will instead be referred to the service.
- The Employer Liaison Service works with employers to connect them to local labour pools. This is achieved by assessing the employer's situation and connecting them with resources such as effective sources for advertising positions, government employment services/resources, training providers and educational institutions.
- We regularly review the effectiveness and efficiency of all of our programs to ensure they are achieving intended results.

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

Answer:

- No. Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) legislation addresses health and safety not how Albertans may purchase cannabis.
- Under OHS laws, employers must ensure their workers are fit to perform their work. This includes being free from impairment.
- Worker impairment is a workplace hazard and could be caused by the use of prescription drugs, alcohol, drugs such as marijuana, fatigue or stress.