The Honest Jobs Reporting Act

A proposal to make governments report job creation honestly: short-term jobs, long-term jobs, and long-term jobs that actually pay enough to live on.

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DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE | LABOUR MARKET & EMPLOYMENT POLICY

Civic Sketches is a series of draft policy proposals by Lawrence Nault — an independent researcher and policy writer based in Alberta's Badlands. These proposals are working drafts, not party platforms or final answers. They are intended to invite discussion, challenge, and refinement across all levels of government and the broader public.

Governments love job numbers.

A project is announced, a subsidy is justified, a ribbon is cut, and the public is told that hundreds or thousands of jobs will be created. But too often, that number hides more than it reveals.

Are those jobs temporary or long-term? Full-time or part-time? Local or imported? Direct or estimated? Do they pay enough for workers to live in the region where the project is being built?

This proposal is about making job creation claims honest.

The Honest Jobs Reporting Act would require governments to report job numbers in a clear public format: short-term positions, long-term positions, and living-wage long-term full-time-equivalent jobs. Because "1,000 jobs" means very little if only a few dozen remain after construction, and even less if those jobs do not pay enough for people to live where they work.

1. Purpose

Governments frequently announce job creation numbers connected to new developments, public subsidies, infrastructure projects, industrial approvals, corporate investments, and economic development programs.

Too often, those numbers are presented in ways that are more promotional than factual.

A project may be described as creating "1,000 jobs" even if most of those jobs are temporary construction jobs, short-term launch jobs, indirect estimates, part-time positions, contractor positions, or jobs that do not pay enough for workers to live in the region where the project is located.

The public deserves better than headline numbers that hide the real employment impact.

The purpose of this policy is to create a clear, standardized, and publicly verifiable method for reporting job creation numbers at all levels of government.

Governments should not be allowed to claim jobs without clearly disclosing what kind of jobs they are.

2. Core Principle

A job creation number should not be treated as meaningful unless the public can understand:

- How many jobs are temporary.
- How many jobs are long-term.
- How many jobs are full-time.
- How many jobs are part-time.
- How many jobs are direct.
- How many jobs are indirect, induced, or estimated.
- How many jobs pay at or above the regional cost-of-living wage.
- How long the jobs are expected to last.
- Whether public money, tax incentives, discounted land, utility subsidies, loan guarantees, or infrastructure supports are being used to create them.

The most important number is not the largest number.

The most important number is the number of long-term, full-time-equivalent jobs that pay enough for workers to live in the region where the project is located.

3. Application

This policy should apply to any job creation claim made by:

- Federal governments.
- Provincial, state, territorial, or regional governments.
- Municipal governments.
- Public agencies.
- Economic development authorities.
- Crown corporations or publicly owned entities.

- Public-private partnerships.
- Government-supported investment offices.

It should apply whenever job creation numbers are used in relation to:

- Project approvals.
- Public subsidies.
- Tax incentives.
- Land sales or leases.
- Infrastructure commitments.
- Utility approvals.
- Rezoning.
- Environmental assessment.
- Procurement.
- Economic development announcements.
- Public funding agreements.
- Loan guarantees.
- Public benefit claims.

This policy is intended to be adaptable to the appropriate level of government. In some cases, it would work best federally. In others, it would be most effective at the provincial, state, territorial, regional, or municipal level. In many cases, the strongest version would involve cooperation between multiple levels of government.

4. Existing Practice and the Policy Gap

Full-time-equivalent reporting already exists in many government, statistical, grant, and program contexts.

The issue is not that governments are incapable of reporting jobs more accurately.

The issue is that public announcements do not consistently require that accuracy.

A government may use careful job definitions inside an application form, funding agreement, or internal report, while still allowing public-facing announcements to use broad, inflated, or incomplete job claims.

This policy would close that gap.

It would require the same honesty expected in internal reporting to appear in public-facing job claims, media releases, subsidy announcements, project summaries, approval notices, and political communication.

5. Standard Public Job Reporting Label

To prevent job creation claims from being inflated, shortened, or selectively reported, every government job creation announcement must include a standard public job reporting label.

The required format is:

Jobs Reported: Short-Term / Long-Term / Living-Wage Long-Term FTE

For example:
Jobs Reported: 1,200 short-term positions / 85 long-term positions / 36 living-wage long-term FTE

This three-part label must appear in the first public-facing summary of the project, including:

- News releases.
- Approval notices.
- Funding announcements.
- Public advertisements.
- Media kits.
- Project webpages.
- Public speeches.
- Social media graphics.
- Government backgrounders.
- Legislative or council briefings.

The three numbers must appear together wherever possible.

A government may not report only the largest number if the smaller long-term or living-wage long-term number is known or reasonably estimable.

6. Definitions

Short-Term Positions

Short-term positions include jobs connected to construction, launch, commissioning, site preparation, installation, testing, buildout, and other temporary project phases.

These jobs are real work and should be reported.

However, they must not be presented as permanent employment.

Short-term jobs must be reported with their expected duration.

Long-Term Positions

Long-term positions are jobs expected to continue after the project reaches stable operation.

Long-term positions may include full-time, part-time, seasonal, or ongoing contract positions, but they must be clearly identified by type.

Long-term positions should not include construction jobs, launch jobs, temporary installation jobs, or indirect economic estimates.

Living-Wage Long-Term FTE

Living-wage long-term FTE means the number of long-term full-time-equivalent jobs that pay at or above the regional cost-of-living wage.

This should be the primary public accountability number.

It measures not only whether a project creates work, but whether that work is stable and pays enough for workers to live in the region where the project is located.

7. Full-Time and Part-Time Job Reporting

This policy does not exclude part-time jobs from job creation reporting .

Part-time jobs are real work and should be reported. However, part-time positions must not be used to inflate public job creation claims.

Governments must report both:

- The number of positions created.
- The number of full-time-equivalent jobs created.

A full-time-equivalent job, or FTE, measures the actual amount of work created rather than only the number of people employed.

- For example:

One full-time job equals 1.0 FTE.

Two half-time jobs equal 1.0 FTE.

Four quarter-time jobs equal 1.0 FTE.

A full-time job lasting six months equals 0.5 annual FTE.

A part-time job lasting six months equals the appropriate fraction of annual FTE.

This prevents governments from announcing ten part-time jobs as though they provide the same employment benefit as ten full-time jobs.

8. Standard Formula

Every project must report job creation using the following standardized categories.

A. Total Announced Positions

This is the broadest number and may include construction, launch, direct, indirect, induced, temporary, part-time, and estimated jobs.

This number may be published, but it must not be used as the primary headline number unless all categories are shown beside it.

B. Short-Term Positions

Short-Term Positions = Construction Positions + Launch Positions + Other Temporary Project Positions

These must be reported with expected duration.

C. Long-Term Direct Positions

Long-Term Direct Positions = Permanent Full-Time Positions + Permanent Part-Time Positions + Permanent Seasonal Positions + Ongoing Contract Operational Positions

These must be reported separately from temporary project jobs.

D. Long-Term FTE

Long-Term FTE = Total Annual Hours Worked in Long-Term Positions / Standard Full-Time Annual Hours

This converts full-time, part-time, seasonal, and ongoing contract work into a comparable employment measure.

E. Living-Wage Long-Term Positions

Living-Wage Long-Term Positions = Long-Term Positions Paying At or Above the Regional Cost-of-Living Wage

This shows how many long-term positions actually pay enough for workers to live in the region.

F. Living-Wage Long-Term FTE

Living-Wage Long-Term FTE = Annual Hours Worked in Long-Term Jobs Paying At or Above the Regional Cost-of-Living Wage / Standard Full-Time Annual Hours

This should be the primary public accountability number.

9. Required Public Format

Every public job creation claim must use the following format:

Jobs Reported: [short-term positions] short-term positions / [long-term positions] long-term positions / [living-wage long-term FTE] living-wage long-term FTE

Example:

Jobs Reported: 1,200 short-term positions / 85 long-term positions / 36 living-wage long-term FTE

A government may not announce: This project will create 1,200 jobs, if the more accurate statement is: Jobs Reported: 1,200 short-term positions / 85 long-term positions / 36 living-wage long-term FTE.

The larger number may still be reported, but it must not be allowed to obscure the smaller and more meaningful long-term employment numbers.

10. Construction Job Reporting

Construction jobs are often the largest number attached to a project. They are also often temporary.

Construction jobs must be reported separately from long-term employment.

Required disclosures:

- Estimated number of construction positions.

- Average expected duration.
- Number of construction FTEs.
- Number expected to be local.
- Number expected to be non-local or rotational.
- Number expected to be unionized, where applicable.
- Number expected to pay at or above the regional cost-of-living wage.
- Whether the jobs are direct, subcontracted, or indirect.

Construction jobs may not be merged with permanent operational jobs in the headline number.

11. Launch and Transition Job Reporting

Some projects create short-term jobs during launch, commissioning, testing, training, or transition into operation.

These jobs must be reported separately.

- Required disclosures:
- Estimated number of launch-phase positions.
- Expected duration of the launch phase.
- Number of launch jobs expected to continue into long-term operation.
- Number of launch jobs expected to end after launch.
- Number paying at or above the regional cost-of-living wage.

Launch jobs may not be presented as permanent jobs unless they are expected to continue after the project reaches stable operation.

12. Long-Term Direct Job Reporting

Long-term direct jobs are the jobs that remain after the project reaches stable operation.

Required disclosures:

- Number of permanent full-time positions.
- Number of permanent part-time positions.
- Number of seasonal positions.
- Number of ongoing contract positions.
- Number of temporary recurring positions.
- Total long-term FTE.

- Number of living-wage long-term positions.
- Number of living-wage long-term FTE.
- Number of jobs below the regional cost-of-living wage.
- Number of jobs expected to be local hires.
- Number of jobs expected to require relocation or outside recruitment.

These numbers must be reported separately from construction, launch, indirect, and induced jobs.

13. Indirect and Induced Jobs

Indirect and induced jobs may be reported, but they must never be included in the headline job creation number.

Indirect jobs include supplier, service, maintenance, transportation, and support jobs created outside the direct project workforce.

Induced jobs include jobs estimated to result from worker spending in the broader economy.

Required disclosures:

- Method used to estimate indirect jobs.
- Method used to estimate induced jobs.
- Geographic region used in the calculation.
- Whether the estimate is independently verified.
- Whether the estimate includes jobs displaced from other sectors.
- Whether the estimate includes public-sector jobs created to service the project.
- Whether the estimate is gross or net.

Indirect and induced jobs must be clearly labelled as estimates.

They must not be blended with direct project employment.

14. Regional Cost-of-Living Wage Standard

Every job claim must disclose how many jobs pay at or above the regional cost-of-living wage.

A regional cost-of-living wage should be calculated based on the real cost of living in the community or region where the job is located, including:

- Housing.

- Utilities.
- Food.
- Transportation.
- Child care.
- Health costs not covered publicly.
- Taxes and payroll deductions.
- Basic communications.
- Insurance.
- Debt-neutral household necessities.
- Modest emergency savings.

The regional cost-of-living wage must be updated at least annually.

Where a credible living wage calculation already exists, governments may use that figure. Where no such calculation exists, the government must publish the methodology used.

A job that does not pay enough to live in the region should not be treated as a full public benefit.

15. Job Quality Reporting

Job reporting must include basic job quality measures.

These should include:

- Wage range.
- Median wage.
- Benefits.
- Pension or retirement contributions.
- Paid sick leave.
- Scheduling stability.
- Full-time or part-time status.
- Temporary or permanent status.
- Contractor or employee status.
- Union coverage, where applicable.
- Health and safety risk category.
- Required education, certification, or training.
- Whether training is publicly funded.
- Whether workers can realistically live in the region on the wage offered.

The purpose is not only to count jobs, but to identify what kind of jobs are being created.

16. Local Employment Reporting

Governments must disclose how many jobs are expected to be filled by workers living in the affected region.

Required categories:

- Local workers.
- Regional workers.
- Out-of-region workers.
- Temporary rotational workers.
- Relocated workers.
- Remote workers.

A project should not be presented as a strong local employment benefit if most jobs are expected to be filled from outside the community.

Where local hiring commitments are made, they must be measurable and subject to annual reporting.

17. Displacement and Replacement Rule

Governments must disclose whether claimed jobs are genuinely new or whether they may replace existing jobs.

A job should not be counted as new if it is primarily:

- Relocated from another region.
- Shifted from another facility.
- Reclassified from contractor to employee or employee to contractor without net new work.
- Created by closing or reducing employment elsewhere.
- Created through public outsourcing of existing public-sector work.
- Created by replacing local businesses that already provided similar employment.

Where displacement is possible, governments must publish a net job estimate.

A gross job number should not be presented as a net public benefit.

18. Automation and Job Reduction Disclosure

For highly automated projects, governments must disclose whether employment is expected to decline over time.

This is especially important for projects such as:

- Data centres.
- Warehousing and logistics facilities.
- Manufacturing plants.
- Resource extraction projects.
- Large-scale agricultural processing.
- AI-enabled service operations.
- Automated retail or distribution systems.

If a project creates many short-term construction jobs but few long-term jobs because of automation, that must be made clear.

If the number of jobs is expected to decline after construction, launch, or early operation, that decline must be reported.

19. Public Subsidy Reporting

Where public money or public support is involved, the government must also report the public cost per job.

Public support should include:

- Direct grants.
- Tax holidays.
- Tax credits.
- Discounted land.
- Public infrastructure.
- Utility upgrades.
- Loan guarantees.
- Public insurance.
- Below-market leases.
- Training subsidies.
- Publicly funded road, water, sewer, grid, or broadband expansion.
- Any other public contribution.

Required calculations:

- Public Cost Per Announced Position
- Total Public Support / Total Announced Positions
- Public Cost Per Long-Term Direct Position
- Total Public Support / Long-Term Direct Positions
- Public Cost Per Long-Term FTE
- Total Public Support / Long-Term FTE
- Public Cost Per Living-Wage Long-Term FTE
- Total Public Support / Living-Wage Long-Term FTE

The final number should be treated as the primary public accountability figure.

20. Required Subsidy Label

Where public support is involved, the standard job reporting label must include the public cost per living-wage long-term FTE.

Example:

Jobs Reported: 1,200 short-term positions / 85 long-term positions / 36 living-wage long-term FTE. Public cost: $2.1 million per living-wage long-term FTE.

This allows the public to evaluate whether the government is receiving a reasonable return for the support provided.

21. Independent Verification

Any project receiving public support above a defined threshold must have its job creation claims independently reviewed.

The review should verify:

- Job categories.
- Wage assumptions.
- Duration assumptions.
- FTE calculations.
- Living-wage calculations.
- Public cost per job.
- Local hiring assumptions.

- Indirect job methodology.
- Whether claims are gross or net.
- Whether jobs are direct, indirect, or induced.
- Whether jobs meet the regional cost-of-living standard.

The independent review must be published before final approval of major subsidies, tax incentives, or public benefits.

22. Annual Reporting

For projects receiving public support, job creation reports must be updated annually for at least ten years or for the duration of the public benefit, whichever is longer.

Annual reports must disclose:

- Jobs promised.
- Jobs actually created.
- Jobs retained.
- Jobs lost.
- Short-term positions created.
- Long-term positions created.
- Long-term FTE created.
- Living-wage long-term FTE created.
- Average wages.
- Median wages.
- Local hiring rates.
- Public money received to date.
- Public cost per actual long-term job.
- Public cost per actual living-wage long-term FTE.
- Any clawbacks triggered.

The public should be able to compare promised jobs with actual jobs.

23. Public Registry

Each jurisdiction should maintain a public job creation registry.

The registry should include:

- Project name.
- Company name.
- Location.
- Public support provided.
- Jobs promised.
- Jobs created.
- Jobs retained.
- Short-term positions.
- Long-term positions.
- Long-term FTE.
- Living-wage long-term FTE.
- Public cost per living-wage long-term FTE.
- Reporting status.
- Clawbacks applied.
- Compliance history.

The registry should be searchable, downloadable, and updated at least annually.

24. Plain-Language Public Disclosure

All job reporting must be published in plain language.

The public should not need to understand economic modelling, subsidy law, or labour statistics to know what is being promised.

Each project must include a public job summary answering:

- How many jobs are temporary?
- How many jobs are long-term?
- How many are full-time?
- How many are part-time?
- How many are direct?
- How many are estimates?
- How many pay enough to live in the region?
- How many are expected to be local?
- How much public money is being spent?
- What is the public cost per real long-term job?
- What happens if the jobs do not materialize?

25. Media and Public Communication Rule

Because media outlets, headlines, social media posts, and public summaries often shorten government announcements, the three-number label must be treated as the minimum public reporting standard.

The three numbers must appear together and in the same sentence wherever possible.

The short-term number may not be separated from the long-term and living-wage long-term numbers in a way that misleads the public about the actual employment benefit.

The preferred public format is:

Jobs Reported: Short-Term Positions / Long-Term Positions / Living-Wage Long-Term FTE

Example:

Jobs Reported: 1,200 short-term positions / 85 long-term positions / 36 living-wage long-term FTE

This format allows media, governments, and the public to discuss job creation without stripping away the most important context.

26. Prohibited Reporting Practices

Governments should not be allowed to:

- Report short-term jobs as though they are permanent.
- Merge construction jobs with long-term operational jobs without disclosure.
- Use indirect or induced jobs as the headline number.
- Count part-time jobs as full jobs without FTE conversion.
- Announce jobs without disclosing expected duration.
- Announce jobs without disclosing whether they pay a regional cost-of-living wage.
- Count relocated jobs as newly created jobs.
- Count jobs displaced from other local employers as net new jobs.
- Use "up to" job numbers without publishing the assumptions behind them.
- Use public money to support job claims without reporting public cost per actual job.

27. Clawbacks and Penalties

If a company receives public support based on job creation claims and fails to meet those claims, clawbacks should apply.

Clawbacks may be triggered by:

- Failure to create promised long-term jobs.
- Failure to maintain jobs for the required period.
- Misclassification of temporary jobs as permanent jobs.
- Misrepresentation of wage levels.
- Failure to meet cost-of-living wage commitments.
- Failure to meet local hiring commitments.
- Failure to submit annual reports.
- Use of public funds for jobs relocated from elsewhere rather than newly created.
- Repeated failure to provide accurate employment data.

Penalties should be proportional to the public benefit received and the size of the shortfall.

Where misrepresentation is deliberate, additional penalties should apply.

28. Public Right to Challenge

Members of the public, journalists, unions, community organizations, local governments, Indigenous governments, and affected workers should be able to challenge job creation claims.

A challenge process should allow the public to request:

- The assumptions behind job numbers.
- Wage information by job category.
- FTE calculations.
- Duration estimates.
- Local hiring projections.
- Public subsidy calculations.
- Actual job creation reports.
- Independent verification documents.

Governments should be required to respond within a defined period.

29. Implementation

This policy could be implemented through:

- Federal legislation.
- Provincial, state, territorial, or regional legislation.
- Municipal bylaws.
- Treasury board directives.
- Public funding rules.
- Economic development agency requirements.
- Procurement standards.
- Subsidy agreements.
- Infrastructure funding conditions.
- Public-private partnership agreements.

The standard should apply wherever public authority is used to approve, promote, fund, subsidize, or justify a project on the basis of job creation.

30. Summary

Governments should not be allowed to turn temporary, part-time, low-wage, indirect, or speculative employment into inflated headlines.

A project that creates thousands of short-term construction jobs but only a few dozen permanent living-wage jobs should be reported honestly.

The public deserves job numbers that distinguish between a pay cheque, a promise, and a press release.

Every public job claim should answer three basic questions:

- How many jobs are short-term?
- How many jobs are long-term?
- How many long-term jobs actually pay enough to live there?

The standard public label should be:

Jobs Reported: Short-Term Positions / Long-Term Positions / Living-Wage Long-Term FTE

This policy does not prevent governments from celebrating economic development. It simply requires them to tell the truth about it.

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About the Author

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