STANDING COMMITTEE ON INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS AND JUSTICE

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS AND JUSTICE

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[The committee met at 17:00.]

Chair B. McLeod: — And good evening, or I guess it's afternoon still. Good afternoon. My name is Blaine McLeod, and welcome to the Standing Committee on Intergovernmental Affairs and Justice.

I'm going to introduce the members around the table and work to my right and come back around. We have Megan Patterson and we have Jamie Martens, and then substituting tonight for Racquel Hilbert is David Chan. And around the table we have as well Darcy Warrington substituting for Leroy . . . No, for Betty, right?

Darcy Warrington: — Correct.

Chair B. McLeod: — Correct. And then we have Jacqueline Roy, and substituting tonight for Leroy is Brittney Senger. And so that's the group of us as committee members tonight, and we look forward to some really great conversation around the table. We have a little bit smaller crowd than last week with Intergovernmental Affairs and Justice, but we look forward to some really engaging conversation tonight.

General Revenue Fund
Parks, Culture and Sport
Vote 27

Subvote (PC01)

Chair B. McLeod: — So today we are going to be considering the estimates for Parks, Culture and Sport until 8:30, where we'll take a really quick break. But if you need to take a break in between, feel free to do that. Just don't all leave us at the same time. We need to keep quorum here in the building. So Parks, Culture and Sport until 8:30, and Tourism Saskatchewan from 8:30 to 10:30. So buckle up. It's going to be a long, long evening.

We'll begin with the estimates for vote 27, Parks, Culture and Sport, central management and services, subvote (PC01). Minister Ross — welcome — is here with officials from the ministry. And I would ask that any of our officials please introduce themselves before they speak for the first time. And please do not touch the microphones; the Hansard operator will turn them on for you when you speak.

So, Minister, if I could ask you to please introduce your officials, and I'll invite you to make your opening comments as well. Thank you.

Hon. Alana Ross: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Let me first begin by acknowledging the land on which we are gathered today is Treaty 4 territory and homeland of the Métis people.

I am very pleased to be here this evening and this afternoon to discuss the ministry's estimates for the year. I look forward to our discussion and providing details on the work we do in Parks, Culture and Sport and how we make lives better for people in Saskatchewan.

I am joined this evening by my officials. To my right I have Deputy Minister Greg Gettle. To my left I have assistant deputy minister of parks division Paul Johnson. Behind me we have assistant deputy minister of stewardship division Dan French. We have Pam Herbert, executive director of strategic and corporate services; Tracy Morey, executive director of sport, culture, and recreation; Bernadet Hamill, executive director of the Status of Women office; Jessica Jackson, director of corporate services; and my chief of staff, Elias Nelson.

This is my first year as Minister of Parks, Culture and Sport. The work we do and the work I will talk to you about today is possible due to the dedication of this team that I have introduced to you and everyone who works with them in the ministry — staff from across the province who are so deeply committed to their work out in the field.

I am very grateful for the experience and knowledge of this fine team at Parks, Culture and Sport and the information that they bring and experience that they are able to bring to this table tonight. Their guidance has been invaluable and deeply appreciated in these first few months I have had the honour of being minister of this portfolio.

These have not been easy times for our province or our country. A nation that was once a close trading partner has changed, creating challenges here at home and around the world. We are all concerned about the impact of these actions, and our government is working closely with other provinces and the federal government on a way forward.

This is a time when we are all sharply focused on the future and what can we do as individuals, communities, and leaders to support our nation and our people. It is a time when it's even more important for government to provide stability and assurance, which is what we have done in budget 2025.

Our plan delivers new and expanded programs, provides record spending on health care, makes life more affordable, and invests in our future. In short, the 2025 provincial budget delivers on our commitments, provides security for today, and the opportunity for continued growth and a strong, sustainable future. The theme for the provincial budget is *Delivering for You*. It's a perfect theme, as that is what we do every day in Parks, Culture and Sport.

Before I get into the details of what we do, I am going to take a step back and talk about our purpose, about why this ministry is here and what we offer to the people of Saskatchewan. The Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport has a clear mandate. We offer remarkable experiences that make our province a great place to live, work, and raise a family. We protect our natural and cultural resources, and we contribute to Saskatchewan's economic growth. And we do this through a wonderfully diverse portfolio.

Our work encompasses museums, provincial parks, French language, and culture. We protect heritage and our environment. We strengthen sports, culture, arts, and recreation programs in our communities. We support small business and community groups, deliver programs that help make life more affordable, and we help women live safe, healthy, and prosperous lives.

Now all of these touch on different needs, and at first you may not see the connections, as the programs and the people they

serve are quite different. Yet they all have one thing in common: they contribute to our amazing quality of life here in Saskatchewan. With such a diverse portfolio, there is a lot to talk about. I'm going to focus on just a few programs that we deliver and provide an overview that can serve as a foundation for our discussions here today.

Our provincial parks. Since camping reservations open today, I will start with our provincial parks. With more than 6,500 nightly campsites available in our provincial parks, we have something to offer for everyone.

Our front-country campsites range from a small plot of land where you can pitch a tent to full-service sites where you can park an RV [recreational vehicle] and get water, sewer, and electricity — a place with all the comforts of home. You can find backcountry locations where you can hike into the campsite. There are no services and often no cell service. You are completely off the grid, immersed in nature.

We also offer Camp-Easy. These are yurts that come with all the equipment you need to enjoy a night at the park. There are beds and cooking gear, even chairs by the campfire. You just bring sleeping bags and food. And we have 879 seasonal sites, service campsites that can be leased for the entire summer from May through September.

While the sites, locations, landscapes, and services are different, they all have one thing in common: these are the most affordable vacation options you will find. Whether it's three nights or three months, camping is affordable, accessible, and a wonderful way to connect with family, friends, and with nature.

There is nothing more relaxing than a night around the campfire, looking up at the sky and seeing the stars and the Milky Way, unobstructed by city lights. There is also hiking, boating, canoeing, kayaking, fishing, and a day at the beach. We have parks that offer golf, inflatable parks, bike trails, and zip lines. And we offer events and programming like guided hikes and opportunities to learn about the plants and animals that live in the parks.

For the price of a campsite, you can create an entire vacation with endless things to do for you and your family. And if you aren't into camping, there are many other ways to stay. We have resorts, cabins, and glamping options available in many of the parks.

Now many people don't realize that we have a dual mandate for the parks system. One is recreation, which includes all the activities I mentioned. And our mandate also includes conservation. We protect 1.4 million hectares of land across 36 provincial parks and 104 recreation areas throughout the province. They have different ecosystems; different species; different environments from sand dunes to grasslands to lodgepole pine and boreal forests. There are lakes, rivers, grazing pastures, fens, and bogs, and a wide variety of flora and fauna. Our parks are home to many different species.

And yes, we even have bison at our Buffalo Pound Provincial Park, which is just west of here. They were reintroduced to the park in 1972, largely as a tribute to the land where it is located and the bison that once lived there. Today staff from the ministries of Parks, Culture and Sport as well as Agriculture help manage the herd, carefully monitoring their health and grazing patterns, knowledge that helps us better understand these magnificent animals.

The landscape protection unit, a team within the parks division, is the primary steward of our parklands. They are experts in their fields, and their work encompasses a wide range of ecological activities, from forest health and renewal to restoring native and prairie grasslands. They help preserve species at risk and control invasive species which threaten the entire ecosystem.

Last year the team was recognized by the Canadian Parks Council for developing an assessment tool to monitor the health of the natural environment. It's called the park ecosystem health index, and it measures different elements within the natural environment to provide an overall score for each park. We have just started using the PEHI [park ecosystem health index], as it's known, and you will hear more about it in the next few months. Later this spring we will be sharing information publicly on the tool, our scores, and the work the team does to continue protecting these valued lands.

Delivering on our mandate, on the responsibilities we have for these public lands, is largely paid through park revenues, primarily from camping and park entry fees. Our lessees also pay fees as do cottagers. We also sell parks merchandise, which is a great way to show your park pride for our parks. The parks division regularly reviews and adjusts the fees, as visitors have told us they prefer small incremental increases rather than large increases less often.

More importantly, all fees are invested 100 per cent back into the parks. They help maintain campsites, facilities, and roads. They support hiking trails, beaches, events and programming, and recreational activities. They allow us to deliver great services to our visitors and help pay for conservation work so our parks can be enjoyed today and by future generations.

[17:15]

Of course affordability is always top of mind when we look at the rates. And while our costs have gone up, we didn't just automatically pass that on to all visitors. This year camping fees increased only to higher-end nightly and seasonal sites and group camping sites. Yet even with these new rates, camping at a provincial park remains one of the most affordable and exciting vacations available. So if you have never been camping or visited one of our provincial parks, I invite you all to visit. See for yourself why so many people get up at 7 a.m. for reservation launch to secure their favourite site and begin planning for the next summer adventure.

Next is the Status of Women office, which is responsible for matters that advance the status of women. Their mandate is to support women, to lead and coordinate strategic initiatives that support women to live safe, healthy, and prosperous lives, and through their work they deliver on this commitment.

A little less that two years ago the office worked across government to establish Saskatchewan's implementation of the national action plan on gender-based violence. Since then we have invested millions of new dollars in programs and services that prevent violence, support victims, and help break the cycle

of violence and provide safe spaces where people can begin to heal and build a new life.

The office launched a partnership with Shoppers Drug Mart to distribute millions of period products to schools and shelters throughout Saskatchewan. And they provide grants to community organizations that work in three areas: prevention of interpersonal violence and abuse, support for women's health and well-being, and improving women's participation in the economy.

Grants last year include funding to Family Service Regina to help purchase a van for their young parents' program; sponsorship for a community event to raise awareness of human trafficking; an expansion of interpersonal violence prevention programs in North Battleford, Moose Jaw, and Prince Albert; and funding to WESK [Women Entrepreneurs Saskatchewan] and the Black Canadian Women in Action society to increase support for women entrepreneurs.

Now with a newly minted strategic plan, the team is expanding their efforts to women and the economy, specifically a focus on initiatives that help women contribute to the economy as entrepreneurs and as business owners and explore careers in STEAM — science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics.

The Status of Women office leads work at a national level. They work closely with community organizations and government ministries to make certain women are represented and have more opportunities to contribute to Saskatchewan's economic growth.

The Royal Saskatchewan Museum is a jewel in our province, visited by more than 130,000 people last year. It is home to Scotty, the world's largest T. rex; an Indigenous gallery that helps us understand our shared history with the First Nations and Métis people; and exhibits that expand our knowledge of natural history from prehistoric times to today.

And of course the Royal Saskatchewan Museum is more than a museum; it is a leading education and research institution. The museum's curators are adjunct professors at the Saskatchewan universities. They develop research programs that attract grants and collaborations from researchers around the world. They help to create school programming and classroom resources that enhance our K to 12 [kindergarten to grade 12] curriculums, and as experts in their respective fields, their work is published regularly in scientific journals.

Stable funding for arts and culture continues with budget 2025. Government invests close to $30 million into these sectors and another 18 million through SaskCulture from lottery funds. In the last three years, we have invested $41 million into Creative Saskatchewan's feature film and television production grant. And we will invest a further $10 million this year, funding that supports a thriving and growing sector, Saskatchewan's film and television industry.

In the last few weeks I have had the opportunity to attend a few industry events in the province. One was screening for a show from HalterMedia called *Flat Out Food*. We all know that Saskatchewan produces food for the world. Agriculture is in our DNA. *Flat Out Food* explores another part of the story. We are also small-scale farmers and processors, chefs and creators. People are turning our rich agricultural roots into local food success stories. More and more of the bounty we create is staying right here.

I think that most people watching *Flat Out Food* are surprised by the size and the diversity of Saskatchewan's remarkable foodie culture. And this production was possible because this government has provided substantial investment into the film and television industry over the last few years. Personally I'm looking forward to more screenings over the next year and seeing new productions supported through the grant.

I will wrap up with three commitments that we will deliver this year through the funding announced in budget 2025. Combined they will send millions of dollars to families and communities. First is the active families benefit. This is a tax credit that helps families reduce costs for children's sport, culture, and recreation activities. Starting this year the benefit will double from 150 to $300 per year per child, or up to $400 a year for children with a disability. The amount that a family can earn to be eligible will also double from $60,000 to $120,000 annually.

It is estimated that close to 69,000 Saskatchewan families will qualify for the credit in 2025. Participating in community activities supports children's mental and physical health and has long-term benefits as well. Kids who are active in their community do better in school, and it helps them thrive later in life. Community inclusion is so important for children, and expanding this benefit helps keep these vital activities affordable for more families.

The second program that will double this year is the community rinks affordability grant. Around 580 grants are provided to communities both large and small each year. The funds help communities buy equipment and pay operational costs for these facilities, which are often at the centre of community life.

This year the grant will double, increasing from 2,500 to $5,000 per indoor ice surface. Overall government funding for this program will jump to $3.2 million this year. Applications for the increased grant will open in the winter later this year.

And finally, with $3.75 million in annual funding, we are launching a new program to fund school playgrounds. Eligible projects can receive up to $50,000 in matched funding, and we anticipate around 75 projects will receive funding each year.

Parents and schools work hard to build safe, accessible playgrounds for their kids. This funding will help make their job a little easier and get projects completed sooner, and I look forward to seeing the impact all of these changes will have on our communities.

Now I've only touched on a few areas where this ministry works, and there is much, much more. Our government remains focused on delivering well-being and a high quality of life for everyone who calls Saskatchewan home. These new investments in the 2025-26 budget will deliver on our government's commitment to support strong families and vibrant communities, and they will continue to make life more affordable for people in our province. And I am honoured to be part of this legacy.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, everyone, for taking the time to hear about our programs. And I would welcome any questions that you may have for us.

Chair B. McLeod: — Thank you, Minister Ross. Appreciate those comments. And I will now open the floor to questions. MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] Darcy Warrington.

Darcy Warrington: — Thank you, Minister Ross. It's a pleasure for us all to be here today, as you said, on Treaty 4 territory. Appreciated that acknowledgement.

So I've been teaching for 17 years, phys ed and band and music, so this ministry is really important to me on numerous levels. I've seen the benefit of the arts on so many lives, giving them enjoyment, giving them reasons to go to school, and the same can be said within sports. You know, some people don't have a lot of other options outside of school to be active, so it's always great whenever we can encourage that sort of activity. And as you said through, you know, projects like the rink affordability and the playgrounds, these are all good places to place our funding and our resources.

As we go through today, first off thank you to all the ministerial officials that are here today. We really appreciate all the work that you do. And to the Chair, thank you for leading this meeting. We would ask that if there's any questions that it's foreseen to take upwards of four or five minutes that the information requested be tabled and provided at an agreed-upon time later on.

And when possible, if there's concrete questions involving numbers or readily available data, if it could be responded to in a timely fashion. And if the information is immediately known not to be available, please indicate so at the earliest moment, and that will allow us to get through our questions. I know all three of us have so many that we're trying to cut them down and make sure that we have time to explore everything within the ministry. So again thank you for having us today. I'm going to cede my time to Ms. Senger.

Chair B. McLeod: — MLA Senger.

Brittney Senger: — Thank you so much. And truly I'm really grateful for the opportunity to be here today. Thank you so much. Just echoing what Darcy said to the minister and to all the staff that are here today. You really do incredible work, and really so grateful for everything that you do.

So with that, I'm going to get into my first question, and forgive me if it's a bit stupid. I'm just wondering why the Status of Women department is under Parks, Culture and Sport?

Hon. Alana Ross: — So thank you for that question. So my understanding is that it follows the minister. And it has been under Parks, Culture and Sport for the last few years, the last six years approximately, but it doesn't mean to say if the position wasn't attached to a different minister that it wouldn't move into a different ministry.

Brittney Senger: — Great, thank you so much. Now, Minister, I wanted to say also thank you so much for your response to my letter about the WAGE [Women and Gender Equality Canada] department. I really appreciated that. Noticed that there was a decrease in funding from the 2024-2025 fiscal year. How does the Status of Women department plan to offset additional costs that may arise since there is no federal WAGE minister?

[17:30]

Hon. Alana Ross: — Thank you, and thank you for the question. This is a difference that is on paper only. It reflects the fact that certain expenses under the Status of Women office had previously been overestimated. Under the free menstrual products program, SaskBuilds provides storage and employee time on an in-kind basis, meaning that they basically do it for free.

These program delivery costs were previously overestimated and are now more accurately reflected in this budget appropriation. No actual change has been made to the Status of Women office, and we are committed to supporting the Status of Women office into the future. And I will let Bernadet Hamill offer you more detailed information.

Bernadet Hamill: — Thanks. Bernadet Hamill, executive director, Status of Women office. And I apologize, I'm dealing with some laryngitis. So if you can't hear me I will try to go on as best as I can.

So yeah, so the minister is correct. There's been zero change to the structure or operations of the Status of Women office, and it's through the outwork that we do with our partners through the Ministry of SaskBuilds and Procurement, as the minister mentioned, who provides in-kind services to help us distribute the products across the province to schools, transition houses, women's shelters. In fact we expanded the program this past year to include post-secondary schools and adult vocational schools.

And it was always a goal of the program to ensure that it is, you know, delivered in a way that is in a very fiscally responsible manner. So we really appreciate the work that SaskBuilds has been able to do to find those savings, and so we didn't have to ask for as much money to deliver the program this year. So our budget is really a small change. It's a decrease of $16,000 from last year.

Brittney Senger: — Great. Thank you so much. I guess on that note I will move into some questions that I have about the partnership. So first of all, what menstrual products are being distributed under the partnership? Is it only pads and tampons? Does it include menstrual cups? Are there junior sizes or just ones aimed at adults?

Bernadet Hamill: — So thank you for the question. And when we entered the partnership with Shoppers, you know, the products are free. And so they are able to give us products that they provide to us which included a mix of different products. So that included tampons . . . Forgive me. I'm not schooled into what all the products are, but it was a mix of different products to be dispersed to different age groups within that school-age category. So I think they can range from like nighttime-type products to daytime products to different sizes, from my understanding. So it's quite a mix of products.

Brittney Senger: — Thank you. Would you be able to look into that further and table that information for me?

Bernadet Hamill: — I think I just answered your question. But like to have the inventory breakdown, they're free. So Shoppers Drug Mart provides us with those. It's actually the Shoppers Foundation for Women's Health.

Brittney Senger: — So, sorry, it's all products that are available at Shoppers? Am I understanding that correctly?

Bernadet Hamill: — I guess the Foundation for Women's Health, they're the ones that provide the products to us.

Brittney Senger: — Okay.

Hon. Alana Ross: — Yes, so thank you for the question. My understanding is that the Shoppers Drug Mart supplies all of the products. So they choose the products that they are supplying, and we weren't part of that decision making. What was the name of the foundation?

Bernadet Hamill: — The Shoppers Foundation for Women's Health.

Brittney Senger: — Okay. Can you table a list of organizations that are distributing these products? And how did you decide on the locations? Is there anything in northern communities?

Bernadet Hamill: — So I'm able to provide you with that information. So we work with school divisions who work with the schools. So the school divisions work with the schools to understand the unique needs of each school within their division, and then they work to provide those numbers through the Ministry of Education.

So officials from the Ministry of Education who have that relationship with school divisions set that in motion. And so every school in Saskatchewan — both public and separate, I think, the Catholic schools and other schools — can participate in the program. And it's through the division that that happens.

We work with the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General to determine the locations of transition houses, from my understanding, all transition houses that are funded through the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General — and I think a couple of others as well that maybe are not necessarily funded by them — as well as through the Ministry of Social Services to identify the shelters.

And we worked with the Ministry of Advanced Education, who identified the adult vocational schools and other post-secondary schools. And yes, they go to the northern schools.

Brittney Senger: — Okay. Can you break down the cost that you're taking on versus the cost that the Shoppers Foundation for Women's Health is taking on?

Bernadet Hamill: — So Shoppers Drug Mart provides the products free, and when we entered the agreement with them, the value that was set at that was about $5 million. The province does not pay for any of the products. They come to us. They are delivered to us by the Shoppers Foundation for Women's Health. As I mentioned, we work with school divisions and the transition houses and shelters and other schools to then distribute the products out.

So our costs are the cost to send the products to places. So it would be the cost of courier, Canada Post, that the Ministry of SaskBuilds and Procurement uses to send the products out. They come in big pallets. They're pulled apart. So they go where they need to go, and that's the cost that we pay for.

Brittney Senger: — Is there a dollar amount?

Bernadet Hamill: — I don't have because we're in the process of annual reporting, and so we don't have that number with us here today.

Brittney Senger: — Okay, and can you provide me that number or table that number once you do have it?

Bernadet Hamill: — So for this particular question we're just going to have to wait for the annual reporting process to happen so that we can understand that. So we would have to take this under advisement.

Brittney Senger: — Okay, and will Shoppers, will the Shoppers women's foundation receive any sort of benefit, whether it's recognition anywhere or a tax credit, in exchange for this deal?

Greg Gettle: — Hi. Greg Gettle, deputy minister with the Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport. Thank you for the question. As far as the ministry is aware, there is no tax credit or charitable credit provided to the Shoppers foundation as a result of their donations to the program.

Brittney Senger: — Great, thank you. Okay, I was very happy to see the release of the DVDR [domestic violence death review] report. I'm thrilled that the ministry moved forward with that. I'm wondering what funds are allocated towards implementing those recommendations.

[17:45]

Bernadet Hamill: — So your question is . . . It was the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General that released the report, and so any questions that you have related to that, I would defer you to ask the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General.

Brittney Senger: — Okay. Okay, so as we all know, Saskatchewan has the highest rate of gender-based violence in all of Canada. It's more than double the national average. What funds are being allocated from the Status of Women department this fiscal year to implement the national action plan to end gender-based violence? And how much of that funding is coming from WAGE?

Bernadet Hamill: — So thank you for your question. So the national action plan dollar amount for Saskatchewan is $20.3 million over the course of four years, and it is a matched funding contribution agreement. So Saskatchewan has to match the federal funds, which we more than match it. So those funds are distributed to ministries across the Government of Saskatchewan through the budget process.

Brittney Senger: — Great. And then just for some clarification here. So of the 20.3 million, so you said that the Status of Women department is more than matching it. How much is the Status of Women department distributing across the various ministries

towards the plan, the national action plan to end gender-based violence?

Bernadet Hamill: — Sorry, I may have been . . . Maybe I didn't clearly speak.

Chair B. McLeod: — Let's just get the question repeated again because of the noise and interference.

Brittney Senger: — Oh, sorry.

Chair B. McLeod: — That's fine. And we'll get it looked after. Yeah.

Brittney Senger: — Okay. So, sorry, just for clarification — and I'll try and phrase this properly — so the 20.3 million from WAGE, how much of that is being spent this year? And if the Status of Women department is more than matching it, how much is the Status of Women department contributing? And which ministries is it being distributed to?

Bernadet Hamill: — So the match is the Government of Saskatchewan's match. It's not necessarily from the Status of Women office. I really wish we had $20 million for our budget. No, it's matched throughout, across the Government of Saskatchewan and the respective ministries that are participating, by expanding programs and services and different initiatives. And I can certainly share with you who they all are. I'd be happy to.

So in this year is the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General; the Ministry of Health; Ministry of Government Relations; the Ministry of Highways; the Ministry of Corrections, Policing and Public Safety; the Ministry of Immigration and Career Training; and through a partnership with the Ministry of Justice, also the Ministry of Social Services; and newly added this year is the Ministry of Education.

Brittney Senger: — Thank you very much. Would it be possible to table a list of how much each department is contributing?

And sorry, I just wanted to circle back to my previous question. Of the 20.3 million that the federal government is providing to the Saskatchewan government, how much of that is being spent this year?

Bernadet Hamill: — So I can say what we're to get for this year, for '25-26. We are to get 5.658 million from the federal government. And it's up to each ministry to set their budget and their plans. And I can't speak for those ministries because, as I mentioned, through the treasury board process and through the provincial budget, they get their annual budgets set.

Brittney Senger: — Okay. So as we know, Saskatchewan has the third-highest rates of human trafficking in all of Canada, and we also know that the age of grooming women is now trending towards 11 years old from 13 years old. Education is one of the most effective steps, if not the most effective step, to preventing human trafficking, gender-based violence, interpersonal violence, and sexual violence towards women and girls.

What steps is the Status of Women department taking to educate youth on early signs of human trafficking, gender-based violence, and interpersonal violence?

Bernadet Hamill: — So thanks for that question. This past May the Status of Women office collaborated and partnered with the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General, in which period of time there was the development and implementation of an extensive public awareness campaign to raise awareness and provide a general education. And this campaign was extremely thoughtfully developed with extensive engagement with subject matter experts, front-line providers, survivors, including those who are delivering those services and regularly engaging with individuals who are targeted, which we know is a range of age, and it's very unfortunate.

And so through that campaign, we focused on three main themes to speak to the survivors, those who are being targeted, those who are living in it.

And part of the research and unfortunate realities of having . . . and including having met with some of the survivors myself who tell us, you know, that they don't even realize that this is what's happening to them. It's just really hard to even fathom that this is occurring to them, that it's not always a stranger situation where somebody is kidnapped off the streets. They are subjected to this through trusted relationships with intimate partners — could be spouses, could be family members, could be friends — and other trusted members within their circle group who they would trust.

So we know that in order to educate, we start with awareness because that's the key to really starting to grab people to even be able to massage this idea that it's even happening. And especially in our province where I think it's easy to say, no, that happens in really big cities and in faraway places.

So our campaign included three posters that were crafted specifically to speak to the survivors, and they're available free to download on the Status of Women office website. And so the one poster is, "We see you, we believe you." And it's through the consultation with organizations that support survivors that we heard that people being trafficked often feel invisible, and they may not seek help because they're afraid no one will believe them. So "We see you, we believe you" attempts to remove that barrier to let people know that there is help available and people who care that will believe.

A secondary poster was created to say, "The life wasn't your choice." Stakeholders identified the language people often use to describe sex trafficking are terms like "the life" or "the hustle." The message "The life wasn't your choice" is more likely to resonate with the audience of those age groups particularly so they can connect with supports through 211 Saskatchewan. The image used reflects the fact that people are often transported from one community to another in a car, and I have an example of the posters if you'd like to see them.

Brittney Senger: — I'm happy to access them online as well. That's okay.

Bernadet Hamill: — What's that?

Brittney Senger: — I can always access them online.

Bernadet Hamill: — Oh, I don't mind because it's actually quite . . . it's helpful to see the visuals. So the first one, "We believe you, we see you," is an image depicting a young woman, a woman looking out a window. And as you can see at the bottom, it was to call and connect with 211 Saskatchewan. The Status of Women office provided extra funding to 211 Saskatchewan to create a human trafficking-specific button where survivors or family members or friends can connect there to even start to get more education. Because sometimes the barrier is understanding these pieces.

And "The life wasn't your choice" depicts, as you can see, a younger person often who's being taken to a location. And again these images were drawn from that extensive engagement that was conducted with people. I have a little bit more too. Sorry, I have to flip back.

[18:00]

And the third poster was, "It started with attention, now it's control." We know that traffickers often target vulnerable women and girls. This poster captures how human trafficking can begin through being showered with gifts and attention. It's called the Romeo scenario. Some folks even call it the friendship scenario. What starts out with kindness and care evolves into a relationship of control and exploitation.

It's a visual story that's intended to resonate, and this is the poster there. And often that's what we've heard was the Romeo effect or the friendship effect was through giving of gifts, particularly to those that maybe can't afford brand-name clothing or brand-name jewellery or . . . I haven't had teenagers for a long time, so sometimes I'm really out of the trends, but that's what they told us.

And it's through that poster campaign that also select spaces across Saskatchewan were chosen. So through that research was — forgive the term — high-traffic areas. Gas stations, restaurants, places like that, including the Craven Country Thunder had over 500 posters in every washroom at the music festival. As well as this was supported with police services, RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police], those that work in those departments.

Brittney Senger: — Thank you. Those are very well-designed and beautiful posters. I appreciate you taking the time to share those.

You touched on a couple of things that I wanted to follow up on. You know, you talked about how these are oftentimes existing relationships that women and girls already have, and you've said that, you know, really it typically does affect vulnerable women and girls. I appreciate that you shared the posters in gas stations and restaurants, but when we're talking about girls that may be trafficked, that may be experiencing violence, they're probably not going to go to a gas station and get gas if they're under 16. And if they are 16, you know, they may not be the one filling up their tank. So I wanted to see if third parties are going to be allowed in schools to educate youth on healthy relationships.

Bernadet Hamill: — Can I just speak to what you just mentioned there about the under 16 in the gas stations and why that was chosen? It was chosen because that's where traffickers take victims. And often they'll ask to go to a washroom, and it's the only space where a younger girl or woman can be alone. So it wasn't designed to be in gas stations or restaurants because of an age-specific or thinking of only females being, or the victims being, or survivors being drivers. It was actually because that's where traffickers stop.

Brittney Senger: — Okay, thank you. Again, revisiting the existing relationships and talking about how it is typically somebody in their own life. Will third parties be allowed in schools to provide education on healthy relationships to help prevent IPV [intimate partner violence], GBV [gender-based violence], sexual violence, and human trafficking?

Chair B. McLeod: — I'm going to intervene here at this point in time, and I'm just going to say that the work of this committee is to go to what's on paper here. That's a political decision that the government has made, and I don't believe it enters into any of the estimates in regards to Status of Women or sports, culture, and recreation. Ask another question, please.

Brittney Senger: — Okay. How much usage has the crisis line increased this past year?

Bernadet Hamill: — So thank you for the question. Because that initiative is managed through the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General, I don't have a lot of statistics for you. But what I can share with you is that the program is delivered by United Way Regina who is providing confidential 30-minute intervention counselling. This includes support callers in developing safety plans to prevent violence and abuse. This service is provided in over 175 languages, 17 of which are Indigenous, and it's available through text, email, and online chat.

Brittney Senger: — Okay, thank you. What funding will the government spend to compensate the groups that were . . . How much was spent on the development of the posters that were shared?

Bernadet Hamill: — So we collaborate with the Ministry of Justice on the human trafficking poster campaign, but the budget to allocate the funds to pay for that with the developer sits with the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General. So I'm not able to speak to that.

Brittney Senger: — Okay. What funding is the government using to recreate what has been previously provided to schools for free by third-party vendors around healthy relationships?

Hon. Alana Ross: — I will speak to that. That is not something we can answer at this table because we're not part of the education. And as Mr. Chair pointed out, that was a decision made by government.

Chair B. McLeod: — And I would just reaffirm that position. We're talking about summary of appropriation and expense related to the vote that's in front of us. And so the Minister is correct and I will not entertain those questions.

Brittney Senger: — Okay, thank you. And sorry, forgive me. It's my first time in estimates. I don't really know what I'm doing here, but I am going to continue with my questions. Apologies.

How is the Status of Women department or the government measuring the effectiveness of the initiatives that have been put forward to end gender-based violence and interpersonal violence?

Bernadet Hamill: — So thank you for that question. And part of the work that we do across government to manage the agreement with the federal government includes data collection to meet the reporting requirements that we work with the federal government to provide to them.

Brittney Senger: — Can you speak a little bit more about what those requirements are?

Bernadet Hamill: — So I don't have the expected results framework. I apologize; I thought I had printed out everything I could. But Women and Gender Equality Canada have Saskatchewan's . . . The expected results framework that was developed with the provinces and territories through the collaborative process, and the expected results framework is indicated there right on the Women and Gender Equality's website.

Brittney Senger: — Okay, great. And so I will certainly have a look at that. If you have any other information measuring the success of where things are right now or how things have progressed, I would appreciate it if you could table that and provide me with that information.

Bernadet Hamill: — Again, I'll go back to the provincial budget process. Every ministry is required to do their own annual reporting. So in addition to what we collect from the ministries participating in the implementation of the national action plan to end gender-based violence, each ministry does their own individual reporting. So they provide their own additional performance measures through their annual reports. That's worked with the Ministry of Finance. But I did locate, you know . . . I can go over some of the . . . I did find the performance indicators for the expected results, so I can kind of go over them for you right now if you would like.

Brittney Senger: — Great.

Bernadet Hamill: — Sure. So they look at short- and medium- and shared long-term outcomes for the national action plan. So some of the short-term indicators are, you know, looking at intended audiences that have access to resources and programs and support. So an example of the performance indicator for that one is the number of individuals accessing resources and programs and supports provided by provinces' and territories' funding.

And another indicator that they look at is at a percentage of projects serving Indigenous partners that reported delivering resources, programs, and supports that were culturally appropriate, and the percentage of projects funded through the national action plan to end gender-based violence that are Indigenous-led.

So some of the medium-term outcomes and performance indicators are, individuals have a mindset to prevent and address gender-based violence. So the indicator for that one is the percentage of individuals reporting . . . and/or disagreement with positive attitude and behaviour statements related to gender-based violence. For that one the Government of Canada is providing through StatsCan.

[18:15]

So it's a partnership of different . . . Another one is, intended audiences' gender-based violence-related awareness to prevent and address gender-based violence is increased. So again they're looking at the percentage of stakeholders reporting that their gender-based violence-related awareness has increased as a result of new initiatives. And I should stop and say these indicators aren't static.

So the federal government from time to time will be assessing this to see, you know, are these the right performance indicators to be looking at? Is there other indicators? And so they have an evaluator that works for Women and Gender Equality Canada that works with all the provinces and territories, including ourselves. We have our staff work to roll that information and engage with the federal government to understand, you know, what is the best indicator. And those discussions happen at that national level with other provincial and territorial counterparts as well. Do you want me to continue?

Brittney Senger: — No, I think that that's okay. I've got a few more questions to get through, and I know I'm running short on time. I'm sorry.

You know, Statistics Canada has been thrown out there. Justice has been thrown out there, Finance. So the metrics that you're referring to, I'm sorry, where would I find those exact metrics that you're referencing right now, the results for Saskatchewan?

Bernadet Hamill: — So because it's a national action plan, the federal government has rolled up all the information provided up through the provinces and territories, and they provide a national report-out available again on the Women and Gender Equality Canada's website.

Brittney Senger: — Great. So I'll be able to find Saskatchewan statistics on the WAGE website.

Bernadet Hamill: — So Saskatchewan's information is included within the national report-up by the federal government.

Brittney Senger: — Okay. I'm going to jump around a little bit here. So in the budget it was announced that CBOs [community-based organization] will receive a 3 per cent increase of funding. I just want to confirm that the Status of Women department will increase the funding that they already provide to CBOs by 3 per cent.

Greg Gettle: — Thank you. Sorry, it took us a little bit of time because we were trying to figure what 3 per cent CBO lift you were referring to. And the reason why we couldn't figure it out is because the funding that is provided through the Status of Women office is project-based funding, not an ongoing relationship funding. And so we believe that the 3 per cent CBO lift you're referring to is based on that ongoing relationships, which is not applicable to the funding that's provided through the Status of Women office.

Brittney Senger: — Okay. Thank you. That's helpful. Okay, I'm going to try and wrap things up pretty quickly here. The federal government is reviewing the funding model for shelters. Will the provincial government do something similar to what the federal government is doing or commit to adopting their recommendation?

Chair B. McLeod: — I'd like that question to come back to what we're dealing with, if at all possible, in terms of this summary that we're speaking to. But if the minister wants to add a remark, I'm happy to hear.

Hon. Alana Ross: — It's just, to add to what you're saying, that would be Justice because it is Justice, their budget who supports the shelters.

Brittney Senger: — Okay. Thank you. I appreciate that clarification. And again, thank you for your guidance through this.

Chair B. McLeod: — That's why I'm here.

Brittney Senger: — Okay. Just the last couple questions before I pass things over. This is in regards to the economic side of the budget and the work that the Status of Women department is doing. So I wanted to ask, has the increase in women's pay in the last year kept up with inflation?

Bernadet Hamill: — So thank you for your question. And what I can share with you is that over the past 10 years the average weekly wage for women in Saskatchewan has increased by $250.17. And this information comes from the Ministry of Immigration and Career Training, who hold the labour force, workforce statistical information and where we get our information from.

What we do know is the most recent increase is reflecting that women are earning an average of $30.18 an hour, which is an increase up over the last 12 months.

Brittney Senger: — Okay. And then is this pay increase the same rate as a man's, or has the gap widened or narrowed?

Bernadet Hamill: — I'm sorry, I can't answer that. I don't have those comparables.

Brittney Senger: — Is it possible to get them?

Bernadet Hamill: — I'm going to defer to the Ministry of Immigration and Career Training. They're the ones that do the labour force statistics.

Brittney Senger: — Okay. And then, sorry, just my very last question. I know that the Status of Women department is doing some great work around STEAM. I'm very happy with that. We all know that there need to be more women in science, technology, engineering, math, and arts. You know, and as you mentioned, you don't have the statistics around women's pay versus men's pay and the wage gap. I'm just wondering if there is a plan to develop some sort of legislation around ending the wage gap to support those industries.

Bernadet Hamill: — Okay, so just to answer your question. So Status of Women office has been undertaking leading a provincial working group, working with other ministries to develop a current-state analysis for Saskatchewan to look at women's under-representation. As you just mentioned, it's still below 30 per cent. And I don't have the actual numbers in front of me, but they haven't deviated too far from in and around that over the last several years.

So one of the things that we're doing, and this year it's part of our business plan, is to look at that information and conduct an analysis, a gap analysis, and determine what we can do to develop some recommendations.

Brittney Senger: — Thank you.

Chair B. McLeod: — MLA Warrington, please. Your questions.

Darcy Warrington: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you so much for all of your responses. We're heartened that we've been able to get through in sort of the time that we budgeted for ourselves for Ms. Senger. So we really appreciate how prompt all of your responses have been.

So I'll apologize in advance. This line of questioning that I have here might jump around a little bit because I'm going to maybe circle back to certain questions at the end if we have enough time to come back to them. So my apologies if I'm jumping from topic to topic.

In my introduction I didn't really mention how much I enjoy our provincial parks. I go up to Battlefords Provincial Park on a regular basis. And I've been around to various . . . I'm a golfer so when you were mentioning that we have golf courses on the provincial parks, I've been to many of them.

So I'm going to start my line of questioning with some parks, but also an overarching question about tariffs. So obviously everything that we're doing right now, we're really focused on tariffs. And how has this ministry, Minister Ross, accounted for tariffs within the ministry? For example, to keep the topic more specific — it's a very general question — but what portions of the ministry will be more likely to be affected by current, proposed, or speculated tariffs, and which areas within the ministry might be more tariff-proof?

Paul Johnson: — Good afternoon, evening. Paul Johnson. I'm the assistant deputy minister for parks division. Thank you for the question.

We've been thinking a lot about tariffs. And I think I'll start from a good news perspective with tariffs, and that is that we believe that the current geopolitical situation caused by tariffs and resulting in exchange rate differentials, that our provincial parks are going to have a fantastic summer. We're going to see very, very high levels of visitation and participation in our activities. And we believe that Saskatchewan people and other Canadian residents as well will choose Saskatchewan parks for their vacations. So we're quite excited about that.

[18:30]

We've also been looking at the tariff impacts on the costs of providing the services we do in parks. As you're aware, we have

a capital program that invests in our infrastructure in parks — that is buildings, that is water and sewage pipelines, electrical, all the infrastructure that we have. And with our capital program we provide funding to maintain, to upgrade, to repair all that infrastructure.

We believe that the tariffs may have some impact on our capital program in terms of having higher costs. If we're using, for instance, products in the capital program that originate from the United States, or even Canadian products like steel, the costs may be higher. But our '25-26 capital program has not yet launched. We are still in planning and preparation, so it's too soon to say whether or not that will actually result in higher costs.

A third area, and that is supplies, supplies that we use to keep our parks beautiful. Things like cleaning supplies, tissue paper, soap — those things that we use on a daily basis in parks. Again some of those supplies may originate from the United States and may also be subject to tariffs. So those are the areas that I think we anticipate may be impacted.

Darcy Warrington: — Thank you, assistant to the deputy minister. Sorry, Mr. Johnson, was it?

Paul Johnson: — Yes.

Darcy Warrington: — Okay. So thank you for your response. As I said, I'll circle back to tariffs in various points. We'll continue the focus on the provincial parks though.

How many full-time staff worked in the provincial parks in each of the last two budget years, plus how many are projected for this budget year?

Paul Johnson: — Thank you for the question. Again lots of different numbers and breakdowns, and I'm trying to just get the answer to your question correctly. I can say best to refer to our budget numbers. So in the provincial parks program, in '23-24 the actual FTEs [full-time equivalent] that were utilized were 317.7, and the number for '24-25 budget was 311.3. That is total number of FTEs used for each of those last two fiscal years in the parks.

Darcy Warrington: — And is there a projected number for this year or is that unknown?

Paul Johnson: — I think we are projecting the '25-26 budget number for FTEs in the revolving fund is 311.3, virtually the same as it was last year.

Darcy Warrington: — Okay. And if it's readily available and easy to find, the same question but for part-time staff.

Paul Johnson: — I think it's useful to sort of describe how things work in parks. Of course during the busy summer season our labour force ramps up significantly because we add quite a number of students that work in our parks. And we also have a classification of employees called labour service, and they are full-time employees but they are only for a portion of the year, and they're recallable employees every year.

With that of course we have a number of permanent full-time employees that work in every park, which is a very small number in the winter season. And it grows somewhat again in the summer, in the busy summer student.

I can give you a little bit of a breakdown on that FTE. And I should also just clarify how FTEs are counted in a park. Like an FTE is one person working full-time for 365 days. But as you can imagine, when we have summer students working for two or three months, one summer student could be .25 or .3 of an FTE, and it would take three or four to make up one FTE. So it's a bit complicated that way.

Darcy Warrington: — Could I interject just for a second then, only to make your job easier, hopefully. So the initial numbers that you provided, those aren't necessarily year-round. Those are seasonal, yeah? Okay.

Paul Johnson: — Correct.

Darcy Warrington: — So then, yeah, comparatively whatever numbers you would have for part-time staff — or we could refer to them as summer staff, summer students — what would that range of numbers look like from 2023 to 2024, 2024 to 2025, and this year's projected budget?

Paul Johnson: — I'll give you the number that we have for '24-25, the year we're most currently finished. And it won't have varied very much from year to year. We may have an extra part-time student here or there.

But I can tell you that out of the 311 FTE, approximately 75 of that FTE is students that we hire every summer across our provincial parks and recreation sites. And 187 of that number would be more of those labour service employees, the ones that are there for a good portion of the year but are hired, recalled in the spring, and then laid off again at the end of the busy season. So that would be a proportional breakdown, and it would be representative of the last two or three years in Parks as well.

Darcy Warrington: — Okay. And my apologies. Is there a portion . . . And I'll plead the same argument that Brittney made; I'm new here. Do you have a non-full-time-employed breakdown of the numbers from 2023 to now? So part-time could often be considered 15 to, say, 25 hours a week. Do you have any numbers like that?

Chair B. McLeod: — And just before you answer the question, I just would welcome the MLA Leroy Laliberte, he who is a member of our committee. Welcome to Intergovernmental Affairs and Justice. Good to have you here. Now the answer.

Greg Gettle: — Thank you. Mr. Warrington, could you just clarify? And it's only because part-time is really not a common term for Parks. And the reason why is because we have such a seasonal nature of our staff.

And so even if you were to look at part-time — because as we were trying to figure like what would we report on for part-time — even our students, that we would kind of consider part-time because they're only with us for some of the season, actually work full-time throughout the summer. And so you might say, well that's not part-time. That's full-time. So if you could clarify what you're thinking in part-time, that may help guide our answer.

Darcy Warrington: — Sure. So my question. It appears maybe, when you're looking at the 317.7, 311.3, 311.3 over the last three years, that this is encompassing all employees whether they're full-time or part-time. Is that correct?

Greg Gettle: — Correct, yes. And let me clarify, that's FTEs. And so sometimes people don't necessarily understand the difference.

Darcy Warrington: — I do.

Greg Gettle: — Okay, good.

Darcy Warrington: — I was just wondering if there was a separate set of numbers for . . .

Greg Gettle: — No, that's the total roll-up budgeted numbers, yes.

Darcy Warrington: — Okay. All right, thank you. Sorry for the confusion. My next question would be to be tabled because I don't think that you could provide all of this information in under four minutes. But could you please table all of the private business operations that were approved or contracted in provincial parks in 2024-2025?

Chair B. McLeod: — If that information is available, I'm not worried about four minutes in terms of timeline. If it's available and here and can be presented today, let's do it.

[18:45]

Paul Johnson: — Thank you. As you indicated, there are quite a few businesses in parks, and actually we love having businesses operating in parks because it gives our visitors, our guests, things to do in parks, experiences to enjoy, different ways to get out and experience nature and the park itself. So we love the businesses. We're open for business. We're constantly working to attract new business opportunities into our parks, again to give our visitors additional things to do and experience at the parks.

I can tell you that there are 184 businesses currently operating in Saskatchewan parks, 149 of those are commercial lessees. These are ones where we have a commercially based lease with, an agreement with. There are 19 institutional groups. This would be camps, church camps, Scouts, etc.

And then we have a handful of businesses that are operating under permits or business operating licence agreements which are very, very short term in nature. And we offer the last category for people that want to try something out before they enter into a commercial lease with us. Maybe it's a one-year permit to try out the business to see how it succeeds within a park. So that's a very high-level breakdown of the businesses that we love to have in parks.

Darcy Warrington: — Thank you. That is a very good generalization of all of those businesses, and as I noted in my apologies to the Chair, I figured it would be as many as that. I guess what I'm asking is, can we get a list of those businesses?

Hon. Alana Ross: — So because we're discussing the 2025-26 estimates, yes, this is not a part of what those estimates are, so I would decline.

Darcy Warrington: — And I appreciate the response. My next question was going to be can you please list all of the 2025-2026 private business operations that are contracted out, that are going to be a part of the 36 provincial parks in our province through your budget? That could be tabled as well, as I understand it's a couple hundred businesses.

Greg Gettle: — So because your question is for the 2025-26 year, we actually don't know all of the business lessees that would be operating in parks this year. It varies from year to year, and we haven't really gotten into our busy summer season. And so we don't exactly know who might be operating in its entire list at this stage.

Darcy Warrington: — So to be clear, we can't request the businesses from last year, and we're not privy to the information this year either? Is that what you're saying, Deputy Minister?

Greg Gettle: — For this year we don't even have the list yet because it will change as the year progresses. Some of those businesses that would have operated last year don't necessarily have to operate this year. And so they apply on an annual basis, and that's why we don't have the list yet for '25-26 because we haven't gotten into that season yet.

Darcy Warrington: — And when could such a list for this year's businesses be provided?

Greg Gettle: — So we could certainly provide the list in the fall of all the businesses that operated in the summer.

Darcy Warrington: — Just for a firmer date, so could we say September 1st?

Greg Gettle: — Based on that date, yes, absolutely. Up to that date.

Darcy Warrington: — Thank you. And just for frame of reference, the reason that I was asking about '23-24, '24-25 in relation to this year's budget is so that we can get an understanding of whether it's going up in the spending, or whether it's going down, or whether it's flatlined. So for frame of reference, if any of my questions go that route it's to compare and contrast. If you believe that information is publicly available to us, then just suggest so and then we can go from there.

And to that point also, since there is a list that would be available on September 1st for this year's budget, is there publicly available information that I could, you know, a link or a publication that would allow us to look at the businesses that were employed last year?

Paul Johnson: — Yes. Yes, we can point you to the ministry website where most of the businesses that operated last season will be listed on that website. Again it's a point in time. Businesses come and businesses go, so it's a bit of a moving target. But we try and maintain an online list of businesses on our website for our visitors to understand what they can do and enjoy when they go to the parks.

Darcy Warrington: — So you would be okay if I reach out to

you via email for that information, Mr. Johnson?

Paul Johnson: — Yes, or I could point you straight to the saskparks.com website where they would be listed.

Darcy Warrington: — Sometimes there's multiple tabs and things, but yes, sure, you can point me in that direction.

Okay. So with the tariffs and wanting to know if we are giving all of the opportunities that we can to Canadian companies, Saskatchewan companies, in terms of the '25-26 budget it's relevant to ask what is the mechanism or process used to bring private business operations into the provincial parks? And is this the mechanism that was used for all of the new private business operations coming into the provincial parks last year and this year?

I can repeat that question. It was a mouthful. What is the mechanism or process used to bring private business operations into the provincial parks? And is this the mechanism that was used for all of the new private business operations coming into our parks last budget year and this budget year?

Paul Johnson: — I'm happy to answer that one on the business development mechanisms that we use in parks. So for quite a few years actually, we haven't changed it significantly. We use what's called a business development framework to look at what businesses we have in parks and what we need in parks.

So the business development framework is essentially a compilation of business needs in parks. We, in many of the parks, have park advisory groups that consist of local stakeholders, cottagers, other users of the parks and the communities around the parks that look at, you know, what types of business would be beneficial to the parks. The business development framework also looks at what's already there. We don't want to add competition in parks to businesses that are already serving a certain demographic.

So we have a tool called the business development framework. When we bring that together, and we identify a certain type of business that we would like to have operate in a park, we do a request for proposals. We seek out new operators to come and provide that type of business that our stakeholders and communities have asked for within the park.

We also receive unsolicited business proposals from the private sector, and we review those again with the same framework in mind, the business development framework. Do we have people already operating that type of business in the park? Is it conducive to that type of park? Does it fit within the environment of that park? So there's a number of factors that go into the business development framework that we use, and that has not changed for a number of years.

Now we will be reviewing this year all new business proposals, again along the same lines as procurement and other questions, to make sure the businesses that we are attracting and entering into a commercial lease licence for in parks are preferred Saskatchewan or Canadian providers of that business.

[19:00]

Darcy Warrington: — Thank you for the response. I'm glad to hear it. So now I'll go into . . . Actually I'm going to maybe change my response here. One moment. I might adjust my question later, but is the ministry making any payments for services to an organization called Aspira Connect? If so, how much — through our contract that was discussed in question period today by one of the ministers — how much are we scheduled to pay them before their contract expires?

Chair B. McLeod: — And I would just caution that might be proprietary knowledge in that regard because it did go through a request for proposal, if it has. And so I would just very much caution the answer that would come in that regard.

Darcy Warrington: — I just want to be clear, Mr. Chair. You're cautioning that we're asking for the amount of money, not that we're asking about Aspira Connect? Because the members on the other side have publicly mentioned Aspira Connect over the last several . . . So I'm just trying to be clear which part you take issue with.

Chair B. McLeod: — I just want to be sure that, in terms of privacy, that we respect what's out there — and they will know better than I in that regard — but the privacy aspect of contracts that are awarded.

Darcy Warrington: — Okay.

Chair B. McLeod: — Yes. Thank you.

Paul Johnson: — Thank you for the question. Yeah, Aspira . . . I'll back up a little bit. This dates back to 2020 when we did a request for proposal. And at the time the request for proposal was for a five-year contract to provide the campground management reservation service. And in 2020, Aspira was the company that was successful in that open and public tender process. So we've been working with Aspira. And good news, we had a reservation launch this morning for seasonal campsites, and it went off fantastic. We filled 822 of the 879 seasonal campsites in minutes this morning with our online reservation system.

So the question specifically, I think, was regarding the fees. So the campground reservation and management system that is provided by Aspira is a user-pay model where the user fees cover the full cost and is not subsidized at all by the taxpayer. So for every reservation transaction, there is a transaction fee that the user pays, not the Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport.

Darcy Warrington: — Okay. So is each transaction the same amount regardless of how long they're staying?

Paul Johnson: — Yes, there's a transaction fee for every reservation you make, regardless of length of the reservation. It's one fee, and that is the same.

Darcy Warrington: — And how much is that fee?

Paul Johnson: — As the contract expires in September, we will be taking that back out for procurement for a new five-year contract. That is proprietary information that we have in the contract between the Ministry . . . it's SaskBuilds, sorry, between SaskBuilds and Aspira. The ministry doesn't own the contract; SaskBuilds does.

Darcy Warrington: — I could go online a book a site, and I could probably figure it out. Would you say that that's the case?

Paul Johnson: — Yes.

Darcy Warrington: — Okay.

Paul Johnson: — It's very transparent.

Chair B. McLeod: — Just before you continue — I'm not stopping you — I just wanted to mention that Leroy Laliberte had to leave for pressing matters. And we welcome Don McBean, who's been fully vetted as well with this sheet right in my hands. So welcome, Don, Don McBean, to the Intergovernmental Affairs and Justice Committee. Please, go ahead.

Darcy Warrington: — Good to see you, Mr. McBean. Sorry, I make fun of him all the time, Mr. McLeod. No one can pronounce his name right because his family spelled it wrong a long time ago, I think.

Chair B. McLeod: — Oh goodness, I'm sorry. McBean.

Don McBean: — Just like the McLeans.

Darcy Warrington: — So how many reservations did we book last year and are projected to book this year?

Paul Johnson: — As I talked about a few moments ago, the reservation system is very active, particularly this week and into next week as we get into launch. And I gave some numbers a few minutes ago about this morning's reservation launch for seasonal campsites. Very highly successful.

Starting tomorrow we turn on the nightly reservations, and it includes a number of parks over about the next nine-day period. We batch them together, different regions, so people can manage their vacation planning accordingly.

And so for that next period of time between April 8th and 15th, we will average about 7,000 bookings per day. And over the year in 2024 there were approximately 80,000 bookings.

Darcy Warrington: — Wonderful, thank you very much. We talked briefly, actually Minister Ross mentioned it today, that the contract ends in September. Is that correct?

Paul Johnson: — Correct.

Darcy Warrington: — Okay. So will there be a publicly tendered competition for the next contract?

Paul Johnson: — Yeah, thank you again for the question. You are correct. The current five-year contract with Aspira ends in September of 2025, and I can say that several months ago we started to work with SaskBuilds and Procurement on a process for a new service contract that would begin as soon as we could.

Darcy Warrington: — Okay. And my apologies, sometimes people are giving me other ideas. Are there, to your knowledge, any Saskatchewan companies or Canadian companies that do this work in Canada at the moment?

Paul Johnson: — So the last time we took the integrated reservation and camping management system out for tender, in 2020, there were no Saskatchewan companies that entered that tender process. Things may have evolved over the last five years, four and a half years. We don't know if there are Saskatchewan companies that are currently able to provide the service that we need for our reservation system. As we work with SaskBuilds to look at a new process for a new service contract, we will learn if there's more companies that can provide this level of service.

Darcy Warrington: — And with that work with SaskBuilds and investigating maybe new procurement procedures, is it within your ministry's mandate to seek out privately other . . . seek out domestically other companies that can do the work that are not American?

[19:15]

Paul Johnson: — So as we've discussed, SaskBuilds and Procurement will be leading the process for a new service contract this fall. We, as the Ministry of Parks, would be very active in setting our business needs. What do we need for a reservation and camping system? We would provide that into SaskBuilds, and then they would initiate the process for procurement. And we would definitely follow the procurement rules set by SaskBuilds at that time as we go to tender the contract.

Darcy Warrington: — Thank you for your response. I'll try to be more specific. With the commitment of this government through the budget and through the recent motion that passed unanimously in the legislature, it was indicated that the government was going to take every opportunity there is to employ Saskatchewan companies, to employ Canadian companies.

My question is, when we have American companies that are doing the work, and we want to see less American investment from our government towards those businesses, will your ministry reach out to Canadian businesses and seek them out even if they don't apply?

Paul Johnson: — Thank you. I think the answer is simple on this one, is that we will continue to follow the rules of procurement set out by SaskBuilds at the time of the tender process.

Darcy Warrington: — Thank you for your response. I need to go back a little bit. You've given us some ideas how we can figure out the fee that's being charged. Is the information for what fee was being charged at our parks for the electronic transaction bookings, is that publicly available from last season to see if there's been any fluctuation?

Paul Johnson: — I can confirm that the fee has not changed since last year. The transaction fee has not changed in the last year.

Darcy Warrington: — Okay, great. Thank you very much. Minister, is the ministry making any payments for services to an organization called Fresh Air Educators in the 2025-2026 budget? If so, how much are they scheduled to be paid for their contracted service? Fresh Air Educators.

Paul Johnson: — Thank you for the question. To my knowledge I'm not aware of any payments or programs to that, a company by that name.

Darcy Warrington: — So is this ministry responsible for snowmobile courses?

Paul Johnson: — No. We are not at all responsible for that.

Darcy Warrington: — Is this ministry responsible for hunter safety programs?

Hon. Alana Ross: — No, we aren't.

Darcy Warrington: — Which ministry? Justice?

Hon. Alana Ross: — I just know it's not Parks, Culture and Sport.

Darcy Warrington: — Environment? Okay. Thank you. And I'll ask one more question. Then whatever time we have left, Ms. Roy and I will collaborate on a few additional questions.

But I'll jump over to Creative Saskatchewan. I wish I had the forecast in front of me, but the estimate I believe was roughly what was forecast in the previous budget. It was 18.125 million, and now it's 16.125 million. My first question is, what went into the decision making to reduce their budget by $2 million, an 11 per cent reduction?

Hon. Alana Ross: — Thank you for the question. The 2025-26 budget for the Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport delivers a number of new affordability measures that our government committed to: doubling the active families benefit, doubling the community rink affordability grant, and introducing the new school playground equipment grant. Two million dollars was reallocated from the film and TV production grant so that we could deliver on these affordability measures while maintaining fiscal responsibility.

This year our government is investing $10 million in the film and TV production grant program through Creative Saskatchewan, and it is important to recognize that the level of funding provided is very significant. Ten million dollars is a 400 per cent increase in funding since 2021-22.

Darcy Warrington: — And what would the increase be from 2012 to 2020? Mr. Chair, I'll withdraw my question. It's not necessary for us to know that far back.

I'm going to turn my time over to Ms. Roy now, but if there is some time in the last few minutes, I'd like to return and ask a couple more as we close. Thank you. Ms. Roy.

Chair B. McLeod: — Thank you. Just go ahead.

Jacqueline Roy: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, hon. members opposite, and everyone here tonight. I appreciate the hour is late, so I will be as efficient and effective as possible. First question I need to know, am I answering and asking in English or in French?

Hon. Alana Ross: — In English please.

Jacqueline Roy: — Okay. Thank you. The francophone advisory committee recommended — as you would well know, Minister Ross — that we consult with several ministries together when coming up with a budget, as obviously the budget is across several ministries. Has that process taken place and exactly which ministries were consulted?

[19:30]

Dan French: — Hello, I'm Dan French, assistant deputy minister with the Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport stewardship division. So the advisory committee on the francophone affairs, they do have strategic planning, and they plan annually on topics that is relevant from feedback from the communities and from conversations from within our ministry as well.

So we're not aware of any budget discussions with the advisory committee on developing any of the budgets for the Government of Saskatchewan.

Jacqueline Roy: — Thank you, Mr. French. And Mr. French, what specific portfolio does your area encompass, please?

Dan French: — My area?

Jacqueline Roy: — Yes.

Dan French: — Francophone affairs, the Royal Saskatchewan Museum, the heritage conservation branch, and the sports, culture, and recreation branch.

Jacqueline Roy: — Thank you, Mr. French. So when we look at the rapport du comité consultatif [Translation: advisory committee report], which is the consultative report that comes out in January of every year that makes recommendations which will then be sent to the budget, we have things in education, health, immigration, post-secondary, policing and justice, SaskBuilds, jobs and economy, and seniors.

Is it my understanding therefore that none of those groups were consulted during the making of this budget?

Dan French: — Yes. Thank you for the question. We confirm we haven't consulted specifically with the Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport. And we are not privy to any other conversations that the communities have or the reports have with the other ministries and other ministers.

Jacqueline Roy: — So just to confirm, Mr. French, you are not privy to any of the information any of the other ministries had in coming up with this budget line that belongs to francophone affairs?

Hon. Alana Ross: — So thank you for your question. The federal amount that we receive is conditional on the province spending an equivalent amount on French-language services. The Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport works in collaboration with other ministries, government agencies, and Crown corporations to ensure all investments in French-language services are accounted for to help us leverage the entire envelope that we receive. And we are responsible to do the roll-up at the end of the year.

Jacqueline Roy: — So if I get that correctly, you are responsible for doing the roll-up at the end of the year, correct? That's just a yes or no I need.

Hon. Alana Ross: — Yeah. And that is correct. Other ministries consult with the French community independently from our . . .

Jacqueline Roy: — Independently entirely from your . . .

Hon. Alana Ross: — From Parks, Culture and Sport. Right.

Jacqueline Roy: — Okay. Thank you. Minister Ross, when you articulated in January 2025 in the report that Saskatchewan would be inspiring itself from Alberta using bilateral agreements going forward when it came to health care and meeting the needs of the francophone community, has any progress been made as per that recommendation of yours? And was that included in this budget?

Hon. Alana Ross: — Thank you. That would not be something that would be part of our budget. You would have to have a conversation with Health in order to get that information.

Jacqueline Roy: — Thank you for that. But, Minister Ross, it's my understanding in that report that was issued that it was issued under your name, which is why I'm asking how it fits into the budget.

Hon. Alana Ross: — Thank you for the question. Once we put forward the recommendation, it is deferred back to Health to follow through.

Jacqueline Roy: — Minister Ross, it is my understanding that you referred specifically to Collège Mathieu, which is an entirely French organization within the purview of francophone affairs alone, about possible funding in post-secondary in that report. Can we get an update as to where that post-secondary funding is, given that it is Collège Mathieu, which is specifically francophone affairs and only secondly education as per the article 23 of the Charter of Canadian rights.

Dan French: — Yeah, if I understand the question correctly, you're referring to the funding that we provide Collège Mathieu. It's only for services for French-language training. Does that make sense?

Jacqueline Roy: — Actually it doesn't make sense. And this is very hard on me and disappointing for me because as a member of the francophone community who understands what francophone affairs are and the way estimates work for francophone affairs, that question needs to be answered.

So I will perhaps rephrase it in a way that we could possibly answer it. It is my understanding that Collège Mathieu has been twice denied money for the bilingual training of LPNs [licensed practical nurse] for example, via Sask Polytech. Yet in the report issued by francophone affairs, they said they would be inspiring themselves of a program that Alberta was using to have 50/50 money.

Dan French: — And the question, sorry?

Jacqueline Roy: — Could you explain?

Dan French: — What we understand is Advanced Education funds Collège Mathieu. And so we provide funding specifically for French-language service training for government employees through francophone affairs.

Jacqueline Roy: — I guess to the minister: francophone affairs encompasses procedural issues with the budget, health issues with the budget, education issues with the budget, and cultural issues with the budget as per the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which is why I'm asking these questions.

I'm not trying to be difficult, I promise. Could I just get an honest answer here to clarify what questions am I allowed to ask tonight then?

Chair B. McLeod: — I would submit that the officials seated before us are trying to provide the answers that you're asking. And suggesting that they're not providing an honest answer is highly inappropriate. So I would just encourage you ask questions that relate to the estimates that are before us. And I'll ask the minister to respond here, and then we're going to move on.

Jacqueline Roy: — Am I allowed to reply to that?

Chair B. McLeod: — At this point, I'm going to wait for the minister's answer.

Hon. Alana Ross: — This may help: the advisory committee, it's not government. The committee is external to government, if that helps.

Jacqueline Roy: — Minister Ross, am I allowed to ask any questions regarding procedural, health, education, and cultural elements of the francophone portfolio tonight?

[19:45]

Dan French: — Okay. Perhaps it would be helpful if I can give an overview of francophone affairs branch.

Jacqueline Roy: — No thank you, that's not what I asked.

Chair B. McLeod: — I'll allow that response because I think it goes to answering the questions in the manner that have been asked. And I will allow you to respond here.

Dan French: — Okay. So the francophone affairs branch is the management of the French-language service centre. They're responsible for translations for government and Crown agencies. They liaison with the francophone community, including the advisory committee on francophone affairs. And then they are the management of the Canada-Saskatchewan agreement between Canada and the federal government, specifically the roll-up of how Saskatchewan spends that money.

Jacqueline Roy: — Thank you for that. I do appreciate that, especially being first-language francophone, having only learned to read and write formally in grade 4 in English.

Moving on from that. As I am highly disturbed that my comments were deemed highly inappropriate, I will continue along simply the line of the liaison to the francophone community. And so

when we liaison to the francophone community, that includes several different branches dealing with health and culture. I will limit my questions specifically to culture at this time so that there's no confusion.

Is it possible to have in the budget, and was this put in the budget for this year, a translation of the budget? There seems to be some confusion in the francophone community because when ads appear as per funded by the francophone money that we have, for example in *l'Eau vive*, the ad is in French but at the bottom it says "English only available" for the budget. The rest of the ad is French. It says "English only available" for budget.

Was there no money this year in the budget for translation of the budget?

Dan French: — If I understood the question, we translated the speech but not the technical documents.

Jacqueline Roy: — Okay, so the speech was translated but not the technical documentation that went out.

Dan French: — Yes.

Jacqueline Roy: — Okay, thank you for that. I appreciate that. I guess the one area that we do often look at when it comes to translation services and parks, culture, recreation, and sport is plaques — definitely, for sure. And the advisory committee has definitely recommended that certain places have their plaques translated. I think that that's actually quite a simple win. I was wondering, was that included in this year's budget or is that still something we have to look forward to in the future?

Dan French: — Okay, so as for the budget, we do have the budget. Like we do have the budget for translation. So when it comes to plaques there's certainly possibilities, and it's typically the program areas. I will give you an example. The Royal Saskatchewan Museum, any new information, any new exhibits are in bilingual English and French, and in some cases Cree for an example. So we provide that service directly from our francophone affairs branch.

Jacqueline Roy: — So the museum in question . . . Sorry, who has to make that initial ask? Because the plaques I was referencing here are the Sask parks, Sask heritage, and heritage historical sites as controlled per the minister. I was asking if those, if we have money in the budget to translate those.

Dan French: — Yes, we'd have money to translate those. As for the casting of the plaques itself, it would have to come from the program area, from the heritage conservation branch for an example. But yes, we would have the ability and the funds to translate those.

Jacqueline Roy: — So the ability and the funds are there to translate it, but . . . I'm just trying to figure out which question I have to ask of the other department. Would that be SaskBuilds that I would have to ask about the actual plaque? Is that what you're implying?

Dan French: — No. No, it would all just depend on what's the plaque for. Are you talking about like a current plaque that's already, say, on a historic building?

Jacqueline Roy: — Yes, that's a very good question. What I'm referring to is what the francophone advisory committee recommended, which was the plaques across Saskatchewan which definitely have a francophone-heavy heritage behind them and are mostly about French issues. They had recommended those be translated at Saskatchewan historic sites, at Saskatchewan historic registry places, and at Saskatchewan parks, for example, Roche Percee and such places.

Dan French: — I couldn't say for certain, but I would say if there's a new replacement out there, translation certainly would be looked at. But as for the current that are in place, I couldn't say if those are going to be replaced simply to add a language, for example.

Jacqueline Roy: — Okay, thank you. So if I understand correctly, we might only consider adding French or Dene or Cree or Michif if the plaque needed to be replaced due to damage purposes, etc.?

Hon. Alana Ross: — Madame, may I just ask? I think we're having a little difficulty. You're not talking about plaque replacements, are you? You're talking about for . . . Just please correct me. My understanding is you want to know about sites that have specific interest or meaning to French people? You want the additional plaque in the French language at that site. Is that correct?

Jacqueline Roy: — Correct. I'm wondering if the recommendation has been taken and is in this budget for that type of translation. Yes.

Hon. Alana Ross: — Okay, thank you.

[20:00]

Dan French: — Sorry for the late response. We're just trying to gather . . . making sure we have all the information here. So there's certainly . . . the francophone affairs branch has funding for translation, so they don't do plaques. So they just have funding to help with translation. So if somebody wants to designate an area, then they would work through heritage, another branch. And then pending on if there is a strong French connection there, there certainly would be some support to translate the wording on marking that heritage property, if that makes sense.

Jacqueline Roy: — Thank you. I'm sure the community would be very happy to hear that. And I guess one of the reasons I am asking that question here is just to make the link with the minister also being responsible for that heritage area, right. So yeah, thank you.

So we know the advisory committee did recommend better co-operation between francophone affairs and Creative Sask branch to which the minister referred earlier, for the purposes of better understanding the cultural scene, some translation of documents, and some better understanding of the needs of the francophone community as related to jury adjudication and translation of those documents. Has that taken place? Is that part of this year's budget?

Dan French: — As you may know, Creative Saskatchewan is a

separate organization and so we couldn't confirm where they're at with that, know that status right now. But I can tell you they were very supportive of that recommendation as they were at that table and they were very supportive at that time. So I just couldn't comment on where they're at at this moment.

Jacqueline Roy: — That's great, and I appreciate that so much. I guess one of the reasons I did bring it up is because funding for Creative Sask was in the budget and is under Minister Ross's purview, so I thought that perhaps since she does both of that perhaps she could answer.

Dan French: — Like I said, they're a separate entity with a separate board and of course a CEO [chief executive officer], so we provide their funding and then they do their strategic planning and they do their operational planning separately from government.

Jacqueline Roy: — Okay, thank you. I do believe the community will be very happy to hear that there's some hope in that area. In that cultural vein, are we contributing any funding to the ACF's [l'Assemblée communautaire fransaskoise] Maison de la Francophonie, the francophone house project?

Dan French: — To answer the question, the answer is no. And no formal ask has been made.

Jacqueline Roy: — No formal ask has been made for francophone affairs to . . . Okay, so there's been no denial of an application?

Dan French: — Yeah. We're not aware of an application.

Jacqueline Roy: — Okay, so we're not aware of an application. Okay, thank you.

So we did sign that co-operative agreement with the Quebec government in 2017 to fund co-operations between Fransaskois and Québécois organizations. Could we possibly table a list of all the projects that are funded so far? I'm not sure if you would have that list here tonight.

Dan French: — Since 2017?

Jacqueline Roy: — Pardon me?

Dan French: — Since 2017?

Jacqueline Roy: — That would be useful. And I understand that might be too much to ask for tonight. And I guess where I am kind of going with this question is I'm just wondering, going forward in this budget, if we would know if it's sort of the same organizations being funded or discrete organizations that have not been funded before under that 2017 agreement.

Dan French: — So to answer your question, so for '25-26 we have one project that is being supported thus far, and currently the agreement is being drafted. And it's a new recipient. It's a new project.

Jacqueline Roy: — One project being funded so far for this new fiscal year upcoming?

Dan French: — Correct, '25-26.

Jacqueline Roy: — Okay, and who might that be with?

Dan French: — It's currently drafted. So until it's finalized we wouldn't share that information.

Jacqueline Roy: — Okay, so it's protected information until the draft is complete, correct?

Dan French: — Correct.

Jacqueline Roy: — Okay. Looking a little bit into the translation services and the request that's been made to the Ministry of Health. Is any francophone affairs funding going towards assisting the Ministry of Health in increasing that accessibility to medical services in French?

Hon. Alana Ross: — Thank you for the question. We're very new into this new fiscal year. We do know that through the new Canada-Saskatchewan Agreement on French-language Services, FAB [francophone affairs branch] is funding two health projects: a mental health support line in French, Tel-Aide; and a patient accompaniment service for people with limited English language skills. And we haven't had any further requests that we are aware of at this time. But we're very new into the fiscal year.

Jacqueline Roy: — Thank you. And just in that vein of being a liaison with the francophone community, what sort of consultation has been done with the francophone community regarding increasing access to the French-language health services perhaps just outside of those two areas?

Hon. Alana Ross: — So that is not information that I have. You would need to confer with the Ministry of Health — that's who provides the services — to get that information.

Jacqueline Roy: — Okay, so it would be my understanding then that the reason we had information on mental health is because those services, it's the health care system getting back to your bureau. Would that be correct?

Hon. Alana Ross: — Correct.

Jacqueline Roy: — Thank you. Okay. One thing I was very optimistic to learn about tonight was something that affects Entr'Elles, which is the francophone group that is interested in women affairs.

Education has been added to the group of ministries that are being provided with financing that were not being provided with financing last year, which I think is great. I am just wondering what initiatives from the Status of Women portfolio are under way in that Education portfolio for this upcoming year. How much money is associated with them, and of course since it's me, whether those services will be available in French.

Bernadet Hamill: — So I don't know if I need to restate my name, but Bernadet Hamill, executive director Status of Women office. And thank you for your question. As I mentioned earlier, one of the ministries that is participating in Saskatchewan's implementation of the national action plan to end gender-based violence is the Ministry of Education.

And with respect to the program, I'd have to defer to the ministry itself. I have to be conscientious of the terms of our agreement with Women and Gender Equality of the Government of Canada which includes . . . We're unable to say publicly amounts over a certain amount. It's $100,000. We're not allowed to provide any kind of a public announcement or what could be termed as public announcement according to the Government of Canada.

What I can say is through the provincial budget process, just like all the other ministries, the Ministry of Education has had their funding set through that way. And I would have to defer the question to the Ministry of Education who would be able to help answer that question better for you.

Jacqueline Roy: — Okay. So just so I have it correctly, once we hit the number 100,000, if it's funded by the federal government, that program can't be released. Is that fair to say?

Bernadet Hamill: — So what the agreement says . . . And it's match funding right, so the federal government is providing a contribution amount within the agreement that we have with them. Anything above 100,000 or greater requires us to provide notice to the Government of Canada that there is a desire to make an announcement for that particular initiative attached to the funding that's matched with the funding that comes through from Canada.

Jacqueline Roy: — Okay. Then would it be safe to assume that this project is under 100,000, given that disclosure agreement?

[20:15]

Bernadet Hamill: — So once again it's a budget question, and I will defer to the Ministry of Education for you to ask them that, because I can't speak to their budget.

Jacqueline Roy: — Okay. So I would have to ask the Ministry of Education whether the action plan to ask about gender-based violence, whether that is a match funding over or under $100,000. The Status of Women ministry can't answer that. The Education department needs to answer that or the Ministry of Education?

Bernadet Hamill: — Yes, each ministry is responsible for their annual budget.

Jacqueline Roy: — Okay. So that disclosure has to come from the Ministry of Education for any of the policies in any of those areas. Correct?

Bernadet Hamill: — That's correct.

Jacqueline Roy: — Thank you. Those are all the questions I have tonight. Thank you very much for answering them to the best of your abilities. And I hand it back to Darcy.

Chair B. McLeod: — I'm just going to intervene for just a moment. Thank you very much for the questions and the answers. Sometimes a deep, good breath is needed in the occasion and what I was referring to is the fact that the statement that "I want an honest answer" was precluding the fact that you weren't receiving it, and that's not parliamentary language that's acceptable. That would have been called in the House. We operate a little looser and a little bit more in a manner of good back-and-forth banter, but we need to keep our language appropriate at all times. So that's what I was referring to.

MLA Warrington.

Darcy Warrington: — Thank you to the Chair. I have about nine minutes. I missed a lot of stuff. Maybe I can just email you all later my questions or have a phone call. I'm just kidding.

Okay. So earlier, Minister, I can't remember who said it — someone said that Saskatchewan companies did not make any proposals for the parks booking systems. I meant to follow up with this question. Could you outline if any Canadian companies made proposals when Aspira Connect was initially awarded the contract?

Paul Johnson: — Thank you for the question. As I think I referenced earlier, the tender process in 2000 was administered by SaskBuilds and Procurement. And that ministry would be in a better position to advise what they can share in terms of which companies bid on a project. I can share that Aspira was successful because we've been working with them, but the Ministry of SaskBuilds would be in a better position to determine if they can share the names of the companies that bid.

Darcy Warrington: — So I'm just confused. Earlier you freely offered to me that no Saskatchewan companies bid on the process, but now you're telling me it should be posed to SaskBuilds whether they're Canadian or not?

Paul Johnson: — Yes, I did confirm, and I'll reiterate: there were no Saskatchewan companies that bid in 2000. That's information that we are party to. But I think it would be . . . Because the contract and the tender process was managed by SaskBuilds, they would be the ministry to respond to, if they can, the names of the organizations that bid on a contract.

Darcy Warrington: — Thank you for your response. I said I'm a band teacher and a phys ed teacher, and then I know 90 per cent or more of the ministry involves parks, so I'm just going to slide over to culture and sport for a second. So the community sport, culture, and recreation program is receiving a 172 per cent increase in funding, which is great. Can you identify what that extra money is going to be used for, who will receive it, and how can it be applied for? For the sake of time, the how might be less important.

Hon. Alana Ross: — Thank you for the question. So within that allocation there was a $3.75 million increase for the new school playground equipment grant, which was a platform commitment. And there was also a $1.6 million increase for the community rink affordability grant. So the total funding for that would be $3.200 million.

Darcy Warrington: — Great, thank you for that. That covered a couple of other questions, so that's good news. For my constituents and also for other constituents in particular around P3 [public-private partnership] schools, there's not a lot of . . . there's not enough opportunities for playgrounds, so I appreciate that the funding is there for additional playgrounds or upgrades. I wonder, is there any limits to if those playground funds can be used for school-adjacent property that might be handled by a

municipality instead?

Hon. Alana Ross: — Thank you for the question. So the announcement was for school playground . . . It was for a school playground equipment grant. The details have not been released at this time, and we're looking forward to seeing more detail and can answer your question better at that time.

Darcy Warrington: — Do we know when those details will be available, Minister Ross?

Hon. Alana Ross: — The programs will be rolled out by the fall of this year.

Darcy Warrington: — So the program's going to be rolled out for the fall. It's within this year's budget. So am I then to understand that there is no playground grant available to be utilized prior to the fall?

Hon. Alana Ross: — Thank you for the question. So we're currently defining the application process. The program applications will be available in the fall, and it's going to be available for four years. The program will be ongoing for four years.

Darcy Warrington: — Great, thank you for your response. Just as a teacher and a dad and someone who is very close to some of these P3s that are very crowded, there's not enough playground space. So I would think it would be exorbitantly cheaper for the government to consider allowing additional playgrounds to be zoned just off school property.

But outside of that, I'll also say I only have time for maybe one more question, but I don't think I'm going to get a chance to ask a question in this regard. So I'm just going to say, I think the same could be said for the rinks. I think that some of that funding should be available to outdoor rinks. I don't know if there's a way that the . . . As you're developing your process for your playgrounds, perhaps that process could be expanded to consider some of the outdoor rinks. Yeah, I won't ask my question regarding the rinks though.

My final question is a larger one. I'm waiting for the big one at the end. Can you provide a breakdown by major program areas of the budget allocations for 2025-2026 major programs? And I can be more specific, or it can be broad like that.

I'll read it again. Can you provide a breakdown by major program areas of the budget allocations for 2025-26 by major program?

Hon. Alana Ross: — Mr. Warrington, can I ask, do you have specific programs in mind?

[20:30]

Darcy Warrington: — Yeah, so you mentioned playgrounds. You mentioned the outdoor rinks, perhaps some initiatives similar to that within the parks budget. It could be, you know, rebuilding gazebos or it could be, you know, underground irrigation for a golf course — though I don't know if that's necessarily something that we do.

But just any of your larger projects, could you outline . . . And again, I'll read it again. Can you provide a breakdown by major program areas of the budget allocations for 2025-26 by major program?

Chair B. McLeod: — That is a very broad question. I understand what you're asking for; I do. Just be advised it's going to lessen the time available for the final element.

Darcy Warrington: — That was my final question.

Chair B. McLeod: — Yeah, that's fine. Yeah.

Greg Gettle: — Thank you for the question. I think we've got two public documents that would likely help and hopefully answer the question you have. So on budget day we would have released our 2025-26 business plan. As well we released the '25-26 public estimates document. Those can both be found if you go on Saskatchewan.ca and look up the Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport. And within both of those documents we list out most, if not all, of the major programs that we have funding for in this current fiscal year.

Darcy Warrington: — Okay, so as specifically as the playgrounds, the outdoor rink funding — and my apologies; I mean, I have looked at it — but it's that itemized?

Greg Gettle: — It goes into that level of detail, yes, and then the other parts of the ministry as well.

Darcy Warrington: — Okay, thank you.

Chair B. McLeod: — All right, having reached then our agreed-upon time for consideration of estimates — and actually gone even longer — for Parks, Culture and Sport, we are now going to adjourn consideration of these estimates. And, Minister Ross, do you have any closing comments?

Hon. Alana Ross: — No. I do thank you so very much to the committee for your questions, for everyone in attendance here tonight. Thank you very much to my officials for the hard work that they have done on our behalf. And thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chair B. McLeod: — And I will also ask our opposition members if any comments for closing.

Darcy Warrington: — Yeah, so thank you, Mr. Chair. We appreciate your guidance throughout this. We apologize to our counterparts across that didn't get to ask any questions from Yorkton or Martensville or Moose Jaw. But that being said, the work that you all do is so important. It's still somewhat mysterious to us. No, I'm just kidding. I don't know if you get my *Severance* reference. But I really appreciate everything that you all do including you, Minister Ross. I've talked to stakeholders who have a very good impression of you, so I'm more than happy to say that I appreciate what you all do. So thank you all, and thank you to the staff as well.

Chair B. McLeod: — Thanks so much, everyone. We are going to take a brief recess. Oh I'm sorry, was there . . .

Jacqueline Roy: — Oh, just and a thank you to Hansard up there as well.

Chair B. McLeod: — Thank you so much. I should have been looking, but thank you for pointing that out, Minister Ross.

So a brief recess. We're going to switch officials here. And I think we need . . . Let's come back right at nine-forty . . . 8:45. 9:45 sounds better, but 8:45. Ten minutes. Thank you, everyone. Thank you for your attention.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

[20:45]

Chair B. McLeod: — Thank you, everyone, for being back now. And we'll resume after a very brief recess. Just so you know, we will proceed another 10 minutes longer to get the time in that we were allotted for the evening, so we will conclude at 10:40.

General Revenue Fund
Tourism Saskatchewan
Vote 88

Subvote (TR01)

Chair B. McLeod: — We're going to move on now to consideration of estimates for vote 88, Tourism Saskatchewan, subvote (TR01). Minister Ross is here with officials from Tourism Saskatchewan. Welcome. And I would ask that the officials please introduce themselves before they speak for the first time and please don't touch the microphones. The Hansard operator will turn them on for you when you speak.

And I'll just also mention as well that joining us here again tonight, Raquel Hilbert, a regular member of Intergovernmental Affairs and Justice. So welcome, Raquel.

Minister, please introduce your officials and make your opening comments, please.

Hon. Alana Ross: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And good evening, everyone. It is my pleasure to speak to the work of Tourism Saskatchewan and highlight some of the activities that will build a thriving visitor economy and enrich the province's tourism experiences and destinations.

I'll begin by introducing our CEO, Jonathan Potts. Jonathan is joined by colleagues Amy McInnis, vice-president of marketing and communications; Tracy Breher, vice-president of destination and workforce development; and Cindy Mak, director of finance and administration. And I would also like to introduce my chief of staff, Elias Nelson, who will also be joining us.

Saskatchewan's Growth Plan sets an ambitious goal of a 50 per cent increase in tourist expenditures by 2030, a jump from 2.4 billion to $3.6 billion annually. Tourism Saskatchewan has solid strategies in place to achieve this goal and grow a robust industry that plays an even bigger role in Saskatchewan's economy.

These strategies include attracting high-spending travellers by investing in targeted advertising and partnership opportunities, increasing visitation and spending by United States anglers and hunters, providing industry supports to increase the number and competitiveness of the Saskatchewan tourism experiences and products, attracting large-scale events and business travel, supporting new direct access air routes through inbound marketing and airline partnerships, and developing training programs and awareness campaigns to address industry-wide labour challenges.

Travel intentions were relatively stable in 2024 despite high inflation and lower consumer confidence. Travel spending reached $2.8 billion in 2023, an increase from 2022 levels of $2.4 billion. Although Statistics Canada has yet to release the final tourism statistics for 2024, data from the first three-quarters of the year suggest that Saskatchewan has reached similar levels of visitor spending as compared to 2023.

Tourism employment ranged from 54,700 to 67,000 full- and part-time positions in 2024, fluctuating seasonally and down from the 2023 levels, as operators struggled with the impacts of labour shortage. Hotel occupancy rates across the province continued to increase in 2024. Revenue per available room, a key measure for the hotel industry, exceeded historic levels in 2024, reaching $83,250 compared to 65,980 in 2019. Sales in the restaurant subsector increased by 4 per cent in 2024 compared to the previous year. Sales in this sector have gone up by 28 per cent in 2019. A significant portion of this spending is tied to rising food prices.

With the reintroduction of the direct flight between Minneapolis and Saskatoon in June of 2023 and a new Minneapolis-to-Regina route introduced in April of 2024, total US [United States] air arrivals increased by 25 per cent in 2024. Cross-border vehicle traffic from the US continued to increase in 2024, with a 1.8 per cent uptick in 2024 over 2023.

Uncertainty around tariffs impacts traveller sentiment and booking intentions. However with Canadians showing more interest in domestic travel, positive US traveller sentiment, and improving overseas market sentiment for Canada, there is an opportunity to enhance inbound marketing efforts to boost tourism in Saskatchewan.

Destination Canada and Tourism Saskatchewan are tracking key travel metrics to understand how best to support tourism operators and inform marketing decisions. Saskatchewan's tourism markets are diversified with strong resident travel and steady visitation from both domestic and international visitors. The resident market is our strongest, making up approximately 60 per cent of visitor spending. Canadian travellers make up 26 per cent of the domestic market, whereas the United States compromises just over 9 per cent and overseas visitors account for nearly 5 per cent of our province's tourism markets.

To mitigate the situation, Tourism Saskatchewan remains committed to its long-term marketing and advertising strategy, which focuses on market expansion and targeted efforts rather than reacting to shifting political dynamics. Efforts continue to concentrate on niche, high-spending traveller segments such as hunters and anglers. These travellers are less influenced by political tensions and more motivated by their passion for the activities Saskatchewan offers.

Tourism Saskatchewan will continue to showcase the province's unique offerings, highlighting local operators and authentic experiences that make Saskatchewan a compelling and more

memorable destination. Tourism Saskatchewan's marketing strategy is focused on growing visitation and expenditures from new, long-haul, high-spending markets. Residents and short-haul markets are strong, but there is little room for additional growth. Attracting higher spending, long-haul travellers from domestic and international markets as well as niche-market travellers will drive future growth.

Tourism Saskatchewan is continuing to implement its refreshed brand and a new market development strategy with increased investments in the domestic market for 2025-26. Marketing is focused on strengthening the province's reputation and competitive advantage through compelling storytelling, delivering consumer-focused content that inspires travellers, and applying research and evaluation tools to refine and adapt tactics to better target potential visitors.

In 2024-25, Tourism Saskatchewan partnered with Matador Network, the world's largest independent traveller publisher, to highlight Saskatchewan's niche experiences. The snowmobiling campaign earned 754,000 impressions, nearly 10,000 page views, and over 3,000 social engagements. The astrophotography campaign was even more successful, with 1.3 million impressions, over 16,000 page views, and nearly 14,000 social engagements. Matador's network social team noted the overwhelmingly positive engagement.

In June of 2025, Tourism Saskatchewan and Discover Saskatoon are co-hosting the Travel Media Association of Canada's conference, bringing together top Canadian travel media and industry professionals. To showcase the province, Tourism Saskatchewan is offering 10 pre- and post-conference familiarization tours, which will generate significant unpaid media exposure.

A new global marketing strategy will be delivered in June of 2025 to inform priorities and tactics, targets, and key actions across travel trade and travel media channels to grow international visitation.

Also in June, Tourism Saskatchewan will launch a redeveloped consumer-facing website. The site will focus on the tourism brand through storytelling and content, promoting niche experiences and highlighting the regional travel zones. A visually appealing design, web accessibility practices, and personalization will enhance the user experience.

US anglers and hunters represent a lucrative market for Saskatchewan's outfitting industry, generating over $144 million annually in operational impact, which includes revenue and operator capital spending. Tourism Saskatchewan actively targets the US market to generate awareness and demand for outfitted hunting and angling experiences. Growing new markets for the future is a priority.

An annual fishing and hunting campaign was conducted in a two-phase approach, starting with awareness, followed by specific details promoting travel to Saskatchewan using direct flights from Denver or Minneapolis. Their overall investment was $890,000 and the campaign delivered a total of 36 million impressions and drove more than 31,000 website visits.

Saskatchewan's outdoor experiences appear through earned and paid media on every major outdoor network in the United States and routinely outperform other destinations. Tourism Saskatchewan's support brought 40 outdoor media projects here last year. Leveraging the influence and reach of popular outdoor hosts and programs is a fundamental influence to influence anglers and hunters to choose Saskatchewan for their next adventure.

In 2024-25 Tourism Saskatchewan partnered with Travel Manitoba and Destination Canada on the third and final year of prairie angling program to stimulate the market recovery. Tourism Saskatchewan invested $250,000 which was matched by Destination Canada. The campaign ran in three phases that featured fly-in, drive-in, and ice fishing experiences, resulting in 43 million impressions and nearly 300,000 website visits.

Attracting new events to the province is a key strategic action to support increasing visitor spending to $3.6 billion by 2030. Events boost the local economy through visitor spending while enhancing the province's global reputation as an attractive and innovative destination. Tourism Saskatchewan prioritizes and incentivizes events that increase tourism revenues and drives significant overnight visitation to the province.

Tourism Saskatchewan provided $300,000 to secure the 2025 BKT tires World Men's Curling Championship in Moose Jaw from March 29th to April 6th, 2025. Bid partners included the Temple Gardens Centre or the Moose Jaw Events Centre, the city of Moose Jaw, and Visit Moose Jaw. The estimated event impact of the championships is $11.7 million to the province.

Tourism Saskatchewan is implementing a new event strategy that focuses support on growing business events aligned with the province's sectors of strength, enhancing Saskatchewan's reputation as a major event host, and increasing the economic impact of investments. The strategy supports the development and expansion of events, conventions, and trade shows, particularly business events and incentive travel in alignment with Saskatchewan's sectors of strength, including advanced manufacturing, agriculture, life sciences, technology, and natural resources. The tourism development program supports established tourism businesses to expand and diversify their operations by supporting the development of new experiences, expanding seasonal operations, and increasing core business capacity.

[21:00]

Funding support of up to $40,000 per business is provided through an application-based adjudicated process. Since its inception in 2019, Tourism Saskatchewan has provided over $4 million in financial support to 135 successful applicants through this program. In 2024-25 a total of 32 applicants were received with 18 tourism businesses funded for a total investment of $683,650.

An additional $320,000 was provided by Tourism Saskatchewan to eight tourism businesses to support the tourism growth program administered through PrairiesCan [Prairies Economic Development Canada]. Total project investment including funding from businesses, PrairiesCan, and Tourism Saskatchewan was just under $3.8 million.

Tourism Saskatchewan supports smaller cities and rural communities by providing research, marketing programs, training, and consulting assistance. Depending on community interest and local and regional tourism assets, Tourism Saskatchewan offers customized services for a specific area.

Tourism Saskatchewan recognizes the importance of Indigenous tourism in the province and works closely with Indigenous Destinations Saskatchewan, an Indigenous tourism association founded in 2023 to develop and promote Indigenous tourism experiences in the province. Authentic Indigenous tourism experiences contribute to reconciliation by promoting economic autonomy for Indigenous communities and creating platforms for social revitalization.

Tourism Saskatchewan provides support to Indigenous tourism businesses through the development of new markets and experiences, training, export readiness capacity, content development, and funding for experimental development and co-operative marketing projects.

Tourism Saskatchewan provides training and education in tourism throughout the province for businesses and individuals. Tourism Saskatchewan trained more than 16,000 people last year in courses that enhanced capacity and skills. Building a strong and well-trained and motivated tourism workforce is fundamental to delivering on the brand promise made to visitors and improving destination competitiveness.

Labour shortages within the tourism sector continue to challenge business growth, especially in rural and remote areas. To help industry address these shortages, Tourism Saskatchewan delivers programming to increase awareness of tourism careers, particularly among high school students.

Tourism Saskatchewan has partnered with the Saskatchewan Distance Learning Centre to develop tourism 30 online high school curriculum and make it accessible to rural communities as well as an accompanying work placement. Additional career resources have been developed for middle year students across the province in partnership with Saskatchewan industry education council.

A new work readiness pilot program funded by the Ministry of Immigration and Career Training was launched in the fall to continue the legacy of the Ready to Work program. The project works with businesses and employment agencies to offer entry-level tourism training to under-represented groups. The goal is to train and provide follow-up support to 100 participants by September 2025.

Tourism Saskatchewan is partnering with Tourism HR Canada in a pan-Canadian training initiative to increase awareness and access for people with disabilities to enter the tourism workforce. A series of training sessions will be held to reach 40 businesses within Saskatchewan by the end of 2026.

Tourism Saskatchewan hosted a series of free, online webinars and workshops to address a range of important topics, from digital marketing and front-line sales to employee recruitment tips. These resources help businesses learn ways to market and sell their products, meet customer expectation, and recruit and retain staff.

In June of 2024 Tourism Saskatchewan introduced a new workforce development strategy. This five-year strategy focuses on seven strategic priorities to help the tourism sector recruit, train, and retain qualified workers. A skilled and competitive workforce enhances visitor experience and improves destination competitiveness. Combined with training initiatives and tourism career promotion, these efforts support a vibrant tourism industry in the province.

I appreciate the time that has been afforded to discussing Tourism Saskatchewan's leadership and work. Thank you for your attention.

Chair B. McLeod: — Thank you, Minister. And I'm going to open . . . Apologize for my loss of my notes here, but I have it now. Thank you so much for those opening comments, Minister Ross. And I will now open the floor to questions and I will invite MLA McBean . . . Good man. All right. The floor is yours.

Don McBean: — Well thank you very much, Minister Ross. That's very impressive. Two-thirds of the way through I thought we should be done, like we can all go home. No, you've covered an incredible amount of what it is that Tourism Saskatchewan is about. We do have a number of questions. I'm renowned for being rather random and chaotic about the delivery of lots of what it is that I bring to bear on whoever happens to be in the room with me, but we'll try to keep it somewhat sequential.

Nice to meet you, Mr. Potts, who seems to be a long-standing driver behind Tourism Saskatchewan. And I'm very much looking forward . . . This is my first evening in committee. As my colleague said earlier, you know, we're newbies. You'll be patient with us. I look forward to this evening just to be such a great learning experience for me to understand.

I've been given this portfolio of tourism at the shadow cabinet for the opposition, and when I received it, I said, oh, well that's not too bad. I think I know how to be a tourist. Obviously it's a lot more involved than that. When I first started asking some questions, I was told, you know, hunting and fishing, and I said, "Well, even better." I happened to work as a fishing guide at Wollaston Lake Lodge for five summers putting myself through university and the such. So that's, again, a little bit specific at one lake. I can take you fishing on Wollaston Lake. That's about it.

But I get the idea that Saskatchewan does have a brand — a question that we'll come back to in a bit — of hunting and fishing. And I've got my scribble notes and all sorts of questions, but you know, I think I want to start with the first one.

The dollar value of Tourism Saskatchewan this year is reduced from last year, which was reduced from the year previous. And I'm just curious how that fits into, you know, with all other inflationary pressures, etc., how does that fit and how does that dollar value become determined in the creation of the budget? Do you have a specific amount? Maybe even the numbers. You know the numbers.

Hon. Alana Ross: — Yeah, thank you for the question. I'll start with a statement, and then I'll turn it over to Mr. Potts to elaborate. So Tourism Saskatchewan made a number of operational changes that enabled us to contribute $325,000 in savings to the government's overall financial target. As a result

of these efforts, budget 2025-26 has an overall surplus of $12 million. So I'll let Mr. Potts . . .

Jonathan Potts: — Okay and thank you. Jonathan Potts, CEO Tourism Saskatchewan. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you both tonight and meet everyone on the committee. And I apologize to Mr. McBean. I know you seemed to imply you might be loquacious. Normally I am too. I've had laryngitis all weekend so I'm going to see how long I last here tonight. So I might be calling on some of the other officials too.

So a few things. In addition to what the minister just said, we looked at our budget and found ways to meet the target. So from a destination development side, we offer something called an AWEshop. There are a number of AWEshops in a given year. Those are advance experience development training for tourism businesses, and something we've been offering for a number of years now.

Typically we offer them related to a specific focus. So it might be Indigenous tourism. It might be outfitting. It might be, you know, any number of different things. So we try to have them themed. This year we are just going to combine two of our intended groups into one. That saves us $50,000 right there. So you know, we were able to find efficiencies.

Also moving towards the 325,000, in our destination development program we also have special projects — tourism growth projects, growth partnership projects. The federal tourism growth program is going into the third year of a three-year program, so this was something that was offered sort of coming out of COVID. And Tourism Saskatchewan has partnered with the federal government to support businesses through this program, but it is decreasing our investment as the federal investment is decreasing over the current fiscal year as well. So it's a matching program, so with declining federal support, we also are declining our support.

We are also in destination and workforce development. We have a business site, or what we call a business hub for the industry to come and get data, statistics, information about the tourism industry. And we had intended to do a content strategy with a consultant in the coming year. What we've done is realign our resources internally to allow for us to do the work ourselves and not utilize the services of a consultant.

Also on workforce development, we do career awareness, as the minister mentioned. So we've developed promotional videos and advertising in that vein. We had notionally intended to do about $25,000 worth of content development there. Frankly we've got a lot of content we've developed over the last couple of years, so we're just going to reuse what we have. We haven't saturated the market with it or anything. So it's just being a little bit lean in our approach.

[21:15]

One last piece is systems consulting, so reducing our budget for systems consulting in a workforce development area. This allows that we're still able to do the work we need to do. It's just using research and recommendations from our workforce development strategy to prioritize new training developed over the fiscal year. We're just reducing the amount of training development, but we've got a lot in the hopper already. So you know, it's a little bit of a hit to the workforce development program, but one that we can manage.

Don McBean: — Great. Near the beginning of that, you said something to the effect of recognizing efficiencies of operational changes to hit the target. I'm curious: the dollar value came first, and then you fit that? And maybe that goes to what I think I understood from Minister Ross, that some of the savings . . . I heard the number, the $12 million surplus that created a balanced budget. Are those ideas overlapping somewhere?

First of all the $12 million, I'm thinking maybe I heard that Tourism shrunk in order to allow a bit of a surplus in the overall budget. And then the second one is, Mr. Potts, that there . . . Do I call you Deputy Minister Potts or CEO Potts?

Jonathan Potts: — You can just call me Mr. Potts.

Don McBean: — Mr. Potts. Okay, we'll go with Mr. Potts. The dollar target came first and then you discovered the efficiencies that could allow that. Okay? I'll let you see if you can understand my question.

Hon. Alana Ross: — Thank you for the question. So as a result of these efficiencies that we were able to create, we were able to contribute to the surplus. And I just felt it was very important to share that information and that you had this information tonight. Mr. Potts, do you have anything to add?

Jonathan Potts: — Yeah, I think from our perspective, you know, we're always looking for operational efficiencies. You know, even if our budget had remained the same or increased, we would be looking for efficiencies. So this is normal course of business for us to find efficiencies within our work.

Don McBean: — Okay. I certainly have no qualms with do-it-yourself, doing something in-house. We tend to, you know, to reach out for experts all the time when we had the experts right with us, so that makes sense. But again — and this is me just trying to understand how the whole budget gets created — is the budget the result of the demand? Or is the budget the result of, here's a dollar value; now make it work? If that's not too vague a question.

Jonathan Potts: — Yeah, and thank you again, Mr. McBean, for your question. I'll maybe reiterate and expand upon what I said previously.

You know, every year we look for efficiencies in what we're doing. We knew that this year we wanted to find some efficiencies, particularly in our workforce development area. When I mentioned the content strategy . . . And like you said, you know, reaching out and getting a consultant to do work, you know, we do that for different projects in every fiscal year.

A number of years ago, we developed a content strategy for our consumer website, so for the website that any visitor would want to go to. So we have a lot of that in-house expertise. So you know, when we looked at it this year and said, if we were finding efficiencies where would we find them, that was a good opportunity. And we looked for how we could realign some of our internal human resources and so forth to make that happen.

And thankfully, I think, through some great work from our management team and our in-scope team as well, we were able to do that. So like I say, it's fairly normal course of business for us to do that and to realize those efficiencies.

Don McBean: — Okay. Once more and then I'll let go of this. You may or may not know — I've broadcast it far and wide — I come out of public education. I was a principal starting in 2017. I learned how to run a school with less and less money every year. Are you doing Tourism Saskatchewan because you have less money available? I think that's . . . yeah, that's going to be my question. You've been assigned less money so you make it work.

Jonathan Potts: — I think it works two ways. So I think we always look for efficiencies and if money's tight, we'll always try and meet any target or any goal that we'd want, that we're asked to do. But in this case, we very much were looking for efficiencies.

Don McBean: — Okay. I'll leave it there. I'm a little curious if I go to the expense side, the efficiencies, you know, the nice little pie chart. Marketing and communications, 51 per cent. That makes sense. That's kind of what tourism is about is advertising and getting your name out there. The workforce development makes sense.

Executive office and corporate services. And maybe I just didn't know where to look, but 29 per cent of the overall budget. Is there a breakdown on that? Is some sort of breakdown available? What it is that, you know, the salary ranges of various members, the executive, etc. Is that an available breakdown?

Jonathan Potts: — Again, thank you, Mr. McBean, for the question. So going to the pie chart that you referenced, you're right, marketing is the thing that we're most well known for, and obviously that's our greatest expense or area of expenditure.

In terms of what executive office and corporate services covers, so obviously my small area, which is myself and executive assistant or director of corporate office, but also includes our IT [information technology] area which, in Tourism Saskatchewan, we call e-business and technology. So we're very — and I'll touch on this in a second — we're very data-driven, and we have a lot of sort of IT operating behind the curtains, if you will. So our IT, our platforms that we use, you know, and licensing those platforms is a considerable expense.

Research, something I'm always proud to say — and I'm sure we'll touch on a little bit more later — you know, of any province and territory in this country, I'd say we have the best research team in the country by far and are recognized for that. So we try to make data-driven decisions and, you know, always strategize based on where the numbers lead us.

Finance, obviously our finance team, finance and accounting team is in there. Corporate services, you know, standard corporate services you would expect. And then things like rent and operational expenses are also included in there.

I think you also asked about salary ranges. So Public Accounts will have all out-of-scope salaries, which, you know, I would leave to you to look at. And then our collective bargaining agreement, which is up for renegotiation in the current fiscal, is where our in-scope salaries can be found. And obviously there's a bit of a relationship between the two, such that in-scope salaries and out-of-scope salaries tend to move a little bit in relation to each other.

Don McBean: — So 29 per cent of, what is it? I've lost the number. 19 million? No, sorry, 20,095,000. I do the math on that, a third of this, so 6 million — let's call it 6.5 — will be going to the departments. The focuses that you articulated there. Okay.

[21:30]

You directed me to find some of the salary things. You talked up the IT and the research. Is there a place where these are broken down? Salary, IT, research, corporate services, rent?

Jonathan Potts: — I don't have those numbers with me tonight, sir. Certainly I can speak to some of the numbers. Overtimes, things like what we spend on licensing IT platforms, and so forth. But I don't have that, salaries broken out by area.

Don McBean: — But it could be available if we made the request?

Jonathan Potts: — Again thank you for the question. I don't have it at my fingertips, but I've just conferred with our other officials, and we can get that answer to you before the end of the evening.

Don McBean: — Fantastic. So does it need to be requested to be tabled, or if it's coming that quickly, I don't think it's tabled, is it?

Hon. Alana Ross: — No.

Don McBean: — There we go. I'm learning some of this. The other pie chart I'm a little curious, the other is . . . What does that make it? $70,000? So there's a revenue of $70,000 coming from some place. And I was just curious what that even means, and if it's an area that could be exploited or expanded or how . . .

And I get that tourism is really a government expenditure more than anything, but that the money is there and has a little sliver of 1 per cent, I'm curious about that if you could explain what that is.

And I'm sorry. Partnership revenue, not the other. I was looking at the wrong line, but while we're at it, maybe the other as well.

Jonathan Potts: — All right. So in terms of partnership revenue, it's a great question because this is one I ask my team all the time. Reality with partnership revenue is we've lost some federal funding in the last year or so because federal transfers, our federal support for certain programs has gone away.

So if I look at our federal partner, Destination Canada, their budget has been greatly reduced I think from about 105 million to 65 million, something like that. Please don't quote me on the number. But a lot of their partnership program dollars went away.

So the minister in her opening remarks mentioned the prairie angling partnership, something we did with Travel Manitoba and Destination Canada. That was $250,000 that we had access to

each of the last three years, but that program came to an end. And believe me, we tried very hard to get that to continue because we see the value in it. But we were unable to maintain that.

We also had some federal support also go away in the workforce development area. So that also led to a reduction. So we're always looking for partnership revenue, and you know, it just so happens that this year is probably one of the thinnest years in terms of partnership revenue that we've been able to budget for.

In terms of other revenue, you know, that's things like interest on our operating surplus and so forth, which is a little higher this year than it might have been in years past just given interest rates and so forth. That is not one that we could really expect to grow, but our partnership revenue is the one we would want to focus on.

Don McBean: — There you go. You clarified for me. When I see partnership I wasn't thinking of anything so obvious as partnering with federal or other provinces. I guess I was thinking of private partnerships, which is probably rather a sort of tangential part of that.

Okay, there's a fairly straightforward question — and I think, Minister Ross, you spelled this out but I didn't scribble it down fast enough — sort of the geographical focus of Tourism Saskatchewan, the marketing campaign. I had made the note to myself, you know, what is intra-Saskatchewan? What is, you know, Canada-wide? And I think that you gave some of those numbers, but if you wouldn't mind.

And is there a focus, especially given the current geopolitical situation there? It took us 20 minutes before we started talking about that. Is there a focus this year in particular? Maybe first a breakdown of inter-Saskatchewan, Canadian, or however it is that you delineate it.

Hon. Alana Ross: — Can I ask, Mr. McBean, are you looking for just geographical breakdown? Or dollars? Or what data are you looking for?

Don McBean: — Well I think in your opening remarks you talked about a percentage. I scribbled down 40 per cent. So if you . . . Did you not? Something to the effect of 40 per cent of the tourism dollars coming in were within Saskatchewan. Is that what you mean?

Hon. Alana Ross: — Yeah, thank you.

Don McBean: — Yeah. Sorry.

Jonathan Potts: — Again thanks for the question. So like most provinces, the only exception being Prince Edward Island, our resident market is our strongest market. So it's about 60 per cent of visitor spending — 70 per cent of visits, 60 per cent of visitor spending. Canadian travellers, or other Canadian travellers if you will, make up 26 per cent of our market, and also a little bit less in terms of the revenue component. United States visitors make up 9 per cent of our visitation. And again that's primarily driven by outfitted fishing and hunting. So Wollaston Lake Lodge is a great example there. And nearly 5 per cent of our market is overseas.

Don McBean: — The other breakdowns you gave as sort of volume and then dollar.

Jonathan Potts: — Yeah.

Don McBean: — Now you've made me curious about the 9 per cent American. That would be the volume of people?

Jonathan Potts: — That is the volume, yes. Or sorry. Pardon me. That's visitor spending. I apologize. So 60 per cent visitor spending in Saskatchewan, 26 per cent visitor spending is Canadian market. I misspoke there, so I misled you. Nine per cent is US, and 5 per cent is overseas.

Don McBean: — Okay, yeah. Well it doesn't matter which way the question went. One of the things that I highlighted two or three times as I was going through and trying to figure out what it is that we're looking at here is the high-value tourism. And that's I think obviously some of the hunting and fishing, for many of the reasons that you already . . . Are there other high-value tourists that we're targeting, that we're looking for? Markets that we're trying to develop?

Jonathan Potts: — One hundred per cent. And I would start with sort of an umbrella statement, that we're looking for quality over quantity, if you will. So when we talk about a high-value guest, you know, we're . . . Saskatchewan is Saskatchewan, and we're a fantastic destination but we're not Disneyland, right. We're not a place that's going to attract millions and millions and millions of people. What we want are the people that can come here for the things that we do best.

So fishing and hunting is one of those things. We have a reputation across North America, especially in the US, on those two topics. So we know that when we market down there, when we do good work down there, we'll continue to see people coming up here and spending lots of money.

So we view that as a niche market. And we talk about our niche market strategy. But beyond that we want to develop more niche markets. So Saskatchewan is also — it's no surprise — we're the Land of Living Skies. Astrotourism is a big, growing area for us and that really took off over COVID. It was already starting, but it took off over COVID.

So you know, Saskatchewan is home to two dark sky preserves: Cypress Hills and Grasslands National Park. And frankly you can go to most parts of Saskatchewan and get pretty good night sky viewing, right, especially if you go north too. So you know, that's something that we're working with the industry to develop in terms of a saleable experience, is there's operators that do that already. But we want to see that become more and more of an experience that Saskatchewan offers and we can capitalize on as a province.

So we used to have a colleague, who's since retired, who called . . . He was a bird hunter, so he called bird hunting "armed ecotourism." But we also want to encourage unarmed ecotourism as it relates to birding. So you know, we're on the central flyway, central bird flyway. We are home at different points in the year to one of the most diverse array of bird species on the continent, you know. And you can think of iconic species like whooping cranes, for example. So there's a real opportunity there for

Saskatchewan. And again that's a real growing segment, real opportunity for Saskatchewan to do better on something that just naturally exists within the province.

In terms of some other areas too, I think the minister touched on, you know, business travel. And that's something that we really want to support Regina and Saskatoon in. And you know, I might leave some of the details on that until later, but suffice to say that we've invested more and more support into that area to help the two cities attract more business travel — more business events, conferences, conventions, that type of thing — which we see as having long-term benefit for the province.

So attracting people to, you know, conferences may be related to research that goes on at the U of S [University of Saskatchewan], things like mining, oil and gas, agriculture, and so forth, things that we do very well in the province. Those present not just an opportunity to get people in hotels and restaurants but also to grow industry in the longer term by creating connections there.

[21:45]

Don McBean: — You're setting up my next question every time. Because I had written down, you know, whether explicitly or implicitly, is tourism sort of part of that bigger business plan? Is tourism part of the sweetener? Is it like a loss leader sometimes? You're talking about having conventions. Is there an overlap or an interlacing of the tourism efforts with business, business development?

Jonathan Potts: — I was a little worried when you said I was setting up your next question that it was a trick. That was going to be a good thing or a bad thing, but that turned out to be a good thing in this case.

There's a number of different things that business travel does for Saskatchewan, you know. Like I alluded to that exchange of ideas, that exchange of talent in some cases. I think you're from Saskatoon. I'll use that as an example. So with the synchrotron, you know, there's been a number of conferences, and I know . . . I go back 20-odd years to when I was a consultant living in Saskatoon. I think I worked on the first strategy for trying to attract conferences and conventions related to that asset.

But having business events also increases knowledge of the province. So it increases potentially again talking about interlacing potential investment for the province. So you think of . . . You're bringing investors and leaders in particular industries here and they see the opportunities to invest. You know, ideally that can lead to . . . Whether it's a Canadian investment, foreign direct investment, and so on is a good thing.

In our events strategy we are looking for, you know, alignment with some of Saskatchewan's key areas of strength, like agriculture, life sciences. You think of VIDO [Vaccine and Infectious Disease Organization] again at the U of S, you know, technology and natural resources, and so forth.

We have also in the last few years contracted a European-based lead generator to secure qualified leads for international business events for the province. That's particularly again for Regina and Saskatoon. So that's a firm that's based there, has connections throughout Europe, you know, has a foot on the ground and can make those connections to events that we might otherwise not see here in the province.

So since June 2023, that lead generator has produced 64 qualified business leads for the province for those two cities. And that's ahead of the target that we had set for that company when we hired them. So 30 per cent of those leads are in the life sciences sector, so again a real area of strength for the province.

So just when I talk about qualified leads, just in case that's not clear what I mean, this isn't just saying, here's some random event that Saskatchewan could go after. This is something where they work with local people here to ensure that there's alignment between the event itself, the resource or alignment here, and then ideally someone that can lead it from a local committee.

One other thing I should mention with that too is, you know, I mentioned that funding from Destination Canada has actually been decreasing. But they did introduce a new international convention attraction fund in 2024, and it provides financial support to incentivize bids for major cities throughout the country. We're working closely with Discover Saskatoon and Tourism Regina to help them meet the threshold for events that would qualify for that funding. And typically what that is is an event that sells out the city from a hotel perspective, so it's basically selling all the beds in the city for that event.

Don McBean: — And maybe I just misheard, but there was an acronym. You said an international or a European company. Would it be "dree" or . . .

Jonathan Potts: — Sorry.

Don McBean: — You said when you introduced the European company that has provided 64 leads, etc., was there a name to that?

Jonathan Potts: — Sorry, I didn't provide the name.

Don McBean: — Oh.

Jonathan Potts: — Yeah, I said international lead generator is what the term . . .

Don McBean: — Oh, I heard "leads" and thought that was the name. Sorry.

Jonathan Potts: — No, they are from England. They're close to Leeds but not Leeds.

Don McBean: — And they're not American.

Jonathan Potts: — Not American.

Don McBean: — Which is important.

Jonathan Potts: — Yeah.

Don McBean: — Well so sort of that question came out of questions that had been provided in terms of . . . And so maybe I'll just ask them specifically.

You know, the idea that Tourism Saskatchewan is out marketing,

providing, and receiving free products, services from stakeholders, and things like that. Is that something that we track? Is that something that we know about? Providing free services for anyone other than the government and their minister, or is . . . Yeah.

Is the question not clear? It's usually not. What is the policy regarding Tourism Saskatchewan providing free services or products to other stakeholders and individuals outside the corporation? Does Tourism Saskatchewan provide any free products or services for anyone in the government other than the minister? Policy regarding staff of tourism accepting free products.

I took all of those and sort of . . . I took all of those and put them into the lost lead, pot-sweetening idea. But I'm curious if there are specific regulations and direction in those regards.

Jonathan Potts: — So first of all, yeah, we have policies around accepting gifts, free services, that kind of thing. We don't do it. And we report on anything that, you know, might qualify for that. That's part of our policy.

In terms of providing free services, which is the part I was a little bit hung up on there at the start, that's part of our mandate, essentially to provide . . . You know, there's over 3,000 tourism attractions, businesses, and events in the province.

So you know, when I talk about our research team, we look at our marketing team, our workforce development team, and so forth. You know, we're part of government but we exist to serve our industry and to serve the workforce and potential workforce that's coming into the industry. So in terms of providing free services, you know, that's the bulk of what we do.

Don McBean: — Okay. If I might then, just because you made a point of talking about the data collection and the research team. What is it that sets Saskatchewan apart in that sense compared to other provinces?

Jonathan Potts: — Sure. I think, if you will, when you're the little guy, you have to fight a little harder sometimes and you have to be a little bit smarter. So we've put a real emphasis on having a robust research team. So just to speak to . . . I'm really talking about two or three individuals.

So you know, the head of that team is the Chair of Destination Canada's national research committee, is on sort of the association that looks after research across Canada and the US — TTRA [Travel and Tourism Research Association], tourism and travel research association — is on the board.

Other individual is . . . We use an economic impact calculator when we look at the value of potential events, bringing events to the province, and also assessing events after they have occurred. So when you hear numbers like the minister mentioned for the BKT tires curling event that just concluded in Moose Jaw, our team has expertise in that.

So our person that looks after doing that economic impact calculation is one of three "superusers" in Canada, as designated by the organization that develops that calculator. We've modified it for Saskatchewan's usage, but . . . and also has presented at conferences in the United States on how to use the model and on economic impact calculation. So you know, for Saskatchewan, if you think of 13 provinces and territories and 50 states, we punch pretty hard in that area.

We also integrate our research and data into — and this is something that we're continually improving upon — but into business intelligence. So I know she's watching, and I know she's going to reprimand me when I get this wrong. But you go from sort of being able to predict an outcome to being able to not just predict but actually, like, know very well what the outcome is going to be with the research in terms of if you take a certain course of action, spend a certain amount of money, and expect a certain result. So you know, that's an area that combines some of that, the IT and the e-business knowledge on our team.

So we're constantly looking at if we do digital marketing, you can kind of do an A/B test and try two different looks at a piece of advertising or content. And then if one is performing better, or performing better with a certain demographic, you can continue to use that one instead of the other one and get better bang for your buck, if you will.

Don McBean: — Okay. Well congratulations, I'm sure. And again, when I was looking through all these documents, there are — if I find the same page — you know, there's the current and then there's the targeted. And I'm curious, you know, on the performance measures of the various goals. They've been broken down. I'm certainly not about to go through these in any sort of detail, but it's probably more of a general question.

[22:00]

Obviously you're not going to target a decrease ever. But if I pick angling and hunting licences and you're going up 800 licences, does that number just get picked from somewhere, or is that driven by data research? You know, you're going to boost scores of relevancy in training or the number of individuals. I'm curious if that's part of what you talk about as your data-driven research and development, yeah.

Jonathan Potts: — So I'll touch on those because there's two separate pages there, I think, you're looking at, if I'm not mistaken, right?

Don McBean: — There are four pages of goals. I just picked some as an example.

Jonathan Potts: — Yeah, so I just want to respond to the example. So typically, yes, those are data-driven. All those are data-driven. They can also be strategy-driven, informed by data, so a little less direct from data itself, if you will. So data informs the strategy. Strategy informs the targets.

And you know, you touched on geopolitics before, and when we set the targets for '25-26 for angling and hunting licences that hadn't come into play. But certainly I think as we look at that number now, it probably comes into play a little bit more even. So you know, we look at what the data tells us and then we look at any other sort of environmental factors if you will — and by environment, I mean that type of environment — that can impact the numbers.

So what we've seen is solid increases in that US hunting and angling licence sales, so about 5 per cent between '23 and '24, I believe. But we also know that the curve has slowed down a bit. Again coming out of . . . It took a massive hit after 9/11 and took many, many years — I'd say probably 15 to 20 years — to come back. And it still hasn't really hit the levels that it was at, at that time.

It took another swoon 2008-2009 in the housing affordability crisis, or the mortgage crisis in the US, and then COVID again. So you know, we've done some dips and doodles with those licence sales, but we feel this number is pretty solid. And again based on trending, based on data, but also based on some of the sort of geopolitical realities as well.

With regards to some of the workforce measures that you pulled out, you know, things like the training relevancy score, you know, that one's sitting at a 4.59 out of 9 so we don't feel it can get too terribly much higher. Number of people trained annually, that's again part of the workforce development strategy as I mentioned. That was informed by data and then targets were set in that strategy based on that data, so our growth target for this year is based on strategy which is based on data, if that makes sense.

Don McBean: — It does. And probably I'm only asking the question because, even though I was a schoolteacher and a school administrator, I wasn't much of a data guy. So I'm curious more than anything.

Because it's so late and my brain is shutting down, I'm going to invite Madame Roy, who was just bringing to my attention some of the things. And I invite her to take the lead on that for a moment.

Jacqueline Roy: — Sure. So thanks again. Just a few clarification points. We can definitely find those salaries from Public Accounts, and thanks for referencing that. It's not a problem. Just wondering however about a list of . . . or what percentage of the executive team receives a bonus, and if so, what would be the amount of the bonus they received last year versus what we're expected to give them this year? Does that make sense?

Jonathan Potts: — Yeah, and it's an easy answer: zero and zero. So we don't have a bonus structure within our organization.

Jacqueline Roy: — Okay, so that's such a great news. No incentive structure whatsoever?

Jonathan Potts: — In our organization, and I think across government, there's a performance increase that you can look at that would roll into your salary for the following year. But there's not a bonus per se.

Jacqueline Roy: — So would I be correct in . . . Like, you'd be referencing how some of the other kind of off-spins have a performance-based incentive number, correct?

Jonathan Potts: — Sorry, I just missed . . . Did you say "off-spin"? I missed that word there.

Jacqueline Roy: — So a lot of things like Crown corporations will have that performance-based incentive number yearly.

Jonathan Potts: — I couldn't speak for them, to be honest. I can just speak for what we do.

Jacqueline Roy: — Okay. I'm just trying to understand, when you say a performance-based review, is there an incentive or is there a monetary amount attached to that?

Jonathan Potts: — It's a salary increase tied to performance.

Jacqueline Roy: — Salary increase tied to performance. Okay. Thank you. And about what percentage is the salary increase tied to performance, of the Public Accounts figure?

Jonathan Potts: — Yeah so, again, thank you for the question. And just trying to make sure I answer this properly. But again, it's a performance increase tied to salary. So definitely no bonus. It all shows up in Public Accounts. There's a salary range for each out-of-scope position, so at a certain point a person maxes out or potentially maxes out in theory. You know, the range of increase is . . . I won't say relatively small, but it's not large either. You're talking single digits, and lower single digits typically.

It's a fairly straightforward process, but it's the same structure — it's part of what I was just conferring on — across government in ministries and so forth.

Jacqueline Roy: — Okay, thanks for that. That does sort of clarify where I'm going. And I guess the other point I was going to make is . . . We can definitely draw from Public Accounts the salary, but I was wondering, as you pointed to, that there still is an out-of-scope grid there. What is the cap on the CEO and on the vice-president's salary grids? Like what's the top end amount on those grids?

Jonathan Potts: — That's a great question. I don't know. I'm not there, so I haven't really . . .

Jacqueline Roy: — Would it be possible to get just those grids maybe tabled? Would a week be fair to say? Or by the end of the session?

Jonathan Potts: — I think so.

Jacqueline Roy: — Okay.

Hon. Alana Ross: — Hi. We do have the ranges here. So if you're looking at a vice-president, a vice-president's salary will range from 121,425 to 182,137. The executive director is 102,693 to 154,040.

Jacqueline Roy: — 102,693. Sorry I didn't catch the rest.

Hon. Alana Ross: — 102,693 to 154,040.

Jacqueline Roy: — And then for the CEO?

Hon. Alana Ross: — It's set by the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

Jacqueline Roy: — So set by the Lieutenant Governor. Would

it be possible for us to get that information just for a week from now?

[22:15]

Jonathan Potts: — So two things in response to that. So first of all the CEO's salary is set as a deputy minister equivalent range, so we don't set it within Tourism Saskatchewan. Our board doesn't set it, but it is determined based on, you know, equivalent roles within government. So then the numbers, it's a range of 164 to 214,000.

Jacqueline Roy: — Okay, perfect. Thank you for that. And would the travel allowance be the same as other areas around government where there's sort of two options? It's either paid out per kilometre or there is a monthly travel allowance for your private vehicle just handed over sort of monthly. Which one is in this budget? Does that make sense?

Jonathan Potts: — For me personally?

Jacqueline Roy: — For any of the executive team and the executive team's assistants. Yeah.

Jonathan Potts: — It's the former rather than the latter.

Jacqueline Roy: — Okay. Per kilometre?

Jonathan Potts: — Per kilometre.

Jacqueline Roy: — Okay, awesome. Thank you. Are there any non-monetary benefits provided to members of the senior executive team that you can think of?

Jonathan Potts: — No.

Jacqueline Roy: — Okay. Thank you. Just clarifying for now. Yeah.

Just circling back a little bit to Matador Network, and nothing against Matador Network in particular, just some concern because my understanding is it's an American-based company headquartered in San Francisco, California. And I know the government has directed to look at other alternatives.

Wondering if the budget considered looking at places like Narcity in Montreal or even . . . I know Destination Canada offers a lot of that fantastic stuff. I mean there's quite a few examples we could cite. Is there an explanation as to why the Matador Network is the one that we're going with right now?

Jonathan Potts: — Yeah, and again great question, and I understand where it's coming from certainly. You know, what I would say is we've been working with that company for a number of years now. It is the largest tourism publishing network in the world. So we've talked about our niche strategies and going after things like astrotourism before. So the market we're trying to reach isn't necessarily within Canada. It can be, and certainly Matador Network reaches Canadians as well as it does Americans or people overseas, but it's probably superior to, you know, some of the Canadian options.

I think you mentioned Narcity out of Montreal. That one is more Canadian focused. Again that's great, but it doesn't achieve what we need it to achieve in this situation. So if you think of Matador Network as something like . . . We also work with Nat Geo, like National Geographic, and so forth. There's certain niche publications and publishers, you know, they work with niche content creators as well that we have access to that then come to Saskatchewan to create great content for us. So it really helps us reach our markets and achieve some of the visitor expenditure targets that we're trying to achieve.

Jacqueline Roy: — And understandably so. These are difficult questions for a lot of us when we're in the middle of this and sort of this moral dilemma of where to invest versus obviously capacity.

The Matador contract, when does it expire or when does it renew next?

Jonathan Potts: — So it's not a contract, per se. It's an ad buy for us, so it's sort of on a one-off basis that we look at an opportunity and invest in that opportunity.

Jacqueline Roy: — And how much was the last ad buy with Matador?

Jonathan Potts: — So the last ad buy was about $300,000 — just over — and it was for astrotourism like I mentioned, and also for snowmobiling.

Jacqueline Roy: — Okay. And how much was the last ad buy for National Geographic?

Jonathan Potts: — Yeah, sorry, we don't have a current buy with National Geographic, so we haven't . . . We didn't have one last year, so I couldn't tell you the number off the top of my head. And I don't think we have that data available.

Jacqueline Roy: — Would it be fair to say that you'd be considering National Geographic going forward?

Jonathan Potts: — We'd have to look at the strategic implications of any ad buy, right?

Jacqueline Roy: — Right. Okay. Thank you for that. I'm a bit of a tech geek myself, so I just have some questions around the servers. When it comes to tourism I know a lot is involved with the servers and where they go.

When it comes to servers where data is stored, and when it comes to clouds where data is stored, can I be reassured that those are Canadian servers? Or do we still have some data in the United States?

Jonathan Potts: — We didn't bring our tech expert here tonight, and I'm definitely not one. So I just want to try and get the best answer I could for you there.

Jacqueline Roy: — For sure. Yeah.

Jonathan Potts: — I do know that we use cloud-based servers, so that's the first part of my answer. In terms of really sensitive information, the most we've determined . . . And we look at, you know, our risk strategy. The most sensitive information we have

is for our training programs, so you know, that's where personal information might be stored. All of that is held within Canada for people that go through our workforce development programs.

Jacqueline Roy: — Okay, so is any information stored on servers or clouds in the USA [United States of America]?

Jonathan Potts: — I can tell you they're Microsoft cloud-based servers.

Jacqueline Roy: — Okay.

Jonathan Potts: — So that's . . .

Jacqueline Roy: — Yeah, that helps. Thanks. Okay, just have a few more questions, and then that's it from me. In terms of private partnerships, so obviously we have Matador. Are there any other American companies with which we have contracts in last year's budget that were with American companies that will be intended to be renewed here?

Jonathan Potts: — So we have a number of different American vendors that we use. So if you think of . . . Again coming back to fishing and hunting just as an example because I probably want to delineate a couple different areas here. But if you think of niche markets like fishing and hunting, you know, absolutely we use some American-based vendors and publishers to reach American markets. You know, there's Heartland Waterfowl in Missouri, just as an example, right. It's reaching who we're trying to get to. So that's sort of one category.

A second category would be some of the big players that you would expect. So I think of Meta and Google as examples. So again we use them because that's where the market is, right. The penetration of Meta, you know, whether it's Facebook, Instagram, into . . . You know, I look around the room, and I'm guessing pretty much everybody has those types of accounts. So it's the best way to reach people and really drive advertising or content to them.

[22:30]

We don't do it on a contract basis though, just to be clear. We do it, you know, as we are developing campaigns. When we work with our agency of record, Phoenix Group here in Regina, we purchase space with, for example, Facebook on an ongoing basis, just not as a contract.

Jacqueline Roy: — Okay. And understanding definitely the need . . . Understanding the rationale because it's fishing and hunting and outfitting and that, still what is sort of the total that we're spending on ad buys in the United States when it comes to the categories of fishing and hunting?

Jonathan Potts: — Yes, so our advertising buy in the US has been fairly stable the last few years around $1.5 million. Part of that is aligned as well with WestJet and going forward probably United with the Denver connection here to Regina. When I say, "tied into that," it's when we're promoting a fishing experience to somebody in Colorado or maybe Nebraska that would use the Denver International airport, we just let them know that there's a direct flight using that airline, right? So I'm not saying that we're spending money with United, just that we make sure that people know there is a flight.

Jacqueline Roy: — Yeah, just that consumer awareness. In terms of the other way around, what percentage are we spending on marketing those American flights to Canadians?

Jonathan Potts: — We do not spend any . . .

Jacqueline Roy: — We do not . . . okay.

Jonathan Potts: — Yeah. Yeah.

Jacqueline Roy: — I thought that was the answer. Just double-checking. Okay.

Jonathan Potts: — Yeah. We'll leave that to travel agents and our counterparts in the US.

Jacqueline Roy: — That would be . . . that would be something else for . . . okay. That's the end of my questions. Thank you for your time. And handing it back to Don.

Don McBean: — So with the opportunity to look through my scribble notes, there were a couple of points, and they almost fall together under the same hat. And it's just sort of, maybe for my understanding, how involved Tourism Saskatchewan can be in local events. For example, the Regina Folk Fest, which is now on pause again. Or maybe it's officially been disbanded. I know they didn't have the event. So that's one sort of event.

Then there's also the construction of the Centre in downtown Saskatoon, which has been . . . And I recognize that's a big municipal thing, but I think the province is quite involved with it as well. And would that even come under Tourism Saskatchewan? And then the airline was sort of also, you know . . . What reach does Tourism Saskatchewan have? So I just sort of had these ideas of, how big a player can Tourism Saskatchewan be in these sorts of situations?

Jonathan Potts: — So I've got sort of three different questions there that I'll try and answer. How involved in local events? So from the monetary side, we do provide significant funding to local events. So you know, you could name almost anything that would come to mind that has a tourism component; we've probably funded it over the years. So that's the extent of our involvement.

We don't typically get involved with the planning or organizational level. You know, if requested, we certainly provide data. We can provide, you know, other services, when I was mentioning free services previously. But we don't really get involved in the planning, co-ordination, that kind of thing. We leave that to the committees involved.

In terms of the DEED [Downtown Event and Entertainment District], the downtown entertainment district, that's not our purview. I just want to be clear about that. That's a much sort of broader issue than what we would get involved in.

And then lastly with airlines, our focus again is on bringing those American customers up to Canada, getting them to spend their money here, as opposed to letting anybody in Canada know about those flights. So I would say too, just maybe to add to that, that

the Minneapolis flight to Saskatoon, the largest identifiable market segment using that flight is Americans coming up to fish and hunt.

Don McBean: — Okay. Again this is part of my learning of what Tourism Saskatchewan is and can do, and so I do appreciate very much your clear and quick responses to those sorts of things.

I guess just because the Regina Folk Fest is such a favourite event, it's sad to see it going down the way it is.

Chair B. McLeod: — I'll just acknowledge Mr. Potts again.

Jonathan Potts: — Yeah, just coming back to a question you had previously. We got the answer a few minutes ago, so I wanted to get that in before the end of the evening here. So that was the executive office and corporate services budget expense breakdown by department. So administration, 1.97 million. So that includes things like rent and so forth. Executive office, 0.654 million; HR [human resources], 0.401; e-business and technology, 2.083; and planning and research, 0.803 for a total of 5.911.

Don McBean: — Which would represent 29 per cent of the total budget. I'll count on your good math skills.

Jonathan Potts: — Count on Cindy's, to be honest.

Don McBean: — Yeah. Someone back there is doing the math.

Well then that leaves me to maybe the final question, depending on how enthusiastically you want to . . . I like asking the question of the waving the magic wand, you know. If there was something that Tourism Saskatchewan could affect, not a ridiculous wish, but what direction do you see going forward? What is the area? I know you've been talking about all the data and research that you do to that, but where do you see Tourism Saskatchewan orienting themselves? As a final question.

Jonathan Potts: — I'm going to do this one. Do you want to confer on this one or do you want . . . I'd be in big trouble if I didn't check in with the folks behind me on these questions.

So you know, I mentioned the niche strategies throughout the evening. That's really where we want to go, you know, positioning Saskatchewan as a destination. We want to be well known. We are well known for fishing and hunting. We want to be top of mind across the world for astrotourism, for birding, for across North America for snowmobiling and so forth. So we talked about our arrows pointing in the same direction. So from a destination development side, so investing in businesses and working with businesses to reach those targets, we want to be assisting them in getting to that in that direction. Same with our workforce development.

And then lastly I would say, again I would come back to events and especially business events. You know, we know we can do a good job. We know we have a great volunteer base here for sporting events, cultural events. The BKT tires curling event is a perfect recent example, right. I think they knocked it out of the park in Moose Jaw. Maybe not the best curling analogy, but you know, they did a fantastic job.

But you know, on the business events side, again I think we've got a role to play to help Saskatchewan be better known across the world and really bring expertise here and showcase our expertise, and you know, ideally help drive some investment and future growth for the province that way.

Chair B. McLeod: — So having reached our agreed-upon time for consideration of these estimates, we will adjourn consideration of the estimates for Tourism Saskatchewan. And I'll ask Minister Ross, do you have any closing comments?

Hon. Alana Ross: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just really want to thank Jonathan and the officials who have attended with us, attended here tonight, for all the work that they have done. To the committee members, it's been a long night. Thank you so much for hanging in there, and thank you so much for the courtesy with which you asked the questions. That was greatly appreciated. And thank you to all the staff members who are here. It's a long night for you too. And thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chair B. McLeod: — You're very welcome. And I'll give closing comments as well to our opposition members if there's anything you'd like to add.

Don McBean: — I would repeat the appreciation and thanks for everyone for being here. You have no idea how much past my bedtime this is. But I also am usually up by 5, so that's my caveat on that.

I said that a good part of my goal this evening — as well as performing the estimates questioning that is beholden upon us — was to learn about Tourism Saskatchewan and I did. And it's very impressive and gives us lots to think about.

So thank you, everyone. Madame Roy, we didn't ask any questions about francophone tourism, but we'll get there. Okay. Thank you very much, everyone.

Chair B. McLeod: — And thank you, everyone, for the participation. The backbench there, ladies, great wisdom and an in-depth analysis of all the detail. And Jonathan, you have a great team. And Minister Ross, be a pleasure to lead that group, so you're honoured to be able to do it.

So thank you so much, everyone, for participation here tonight, officials as well. And my Clerk, I appreciate all the help. This committee stands adjourned to the call of the Chair.

[The committee adjourned at 22:43.]