



STANDING COMMITTEE ON INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS AND JUSTICE

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS AND JUSTICE

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Mr. Greg Ottenbreit
Yorkton

April 22, 2021

[The committee met at 18:00.]

The Chair: — Okay. Hello, everyone. Welcome to the Standing Committee on Intergovernmental Affairs and Justice. My name is Mark Docherty. I am the Chair of the committee. And with us today is Gary Grewal who is part of the committee, Travis Keisig, Tim McLeod, Greg Ottenbreit, and sitting in for Ms. Betty Nippi-Albright is Matt Love.

I've got a few things to say just prior to our agenda tonight. Today our committee is tabling a list from the Law Clerk of regulations filed with the Legislative Assembly between January 1st, 2020 and December 31st, 2020, which have been committed to the committee for review pursuant to rule 147(1). The Law Clerk will assist the committee in its review by submitting a subsequent report at a later date identifying any regulations that are not in order with the provisions of rule 147(2). However committee members can also decide to review any of the regulations for policy implications. The document being tabled is IAJ 2-29, Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel: 2020 regulations filed.

Okay, pursuant to rule 148(1), the following estimates and supplementary estimates were committed to the Standing Committee on Intergovernmental Affairs and Justice on April 12th, 2021 and April 6th, 2021 respectively. 2021-2022 estimates: vote 73, Corrections, Policing and Public Safety; vote 30, Government Relations; vote 91, Integrated Justice Services; vote 3, Justice and Attorney General; vote 27, Parks, Culture and Sport; vote 88, Tourism Saskatchewan. And for the 2020-2021 supplementary estimates no. 2: vote 73, Corrections, Policing and Public Safety; vote 3, Justice and Attorney General.

Because we're still implementing measures to facilitate safety in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, I'd ask the officials to please speak at the microphone podium to answer any questions. Please introduce yourself before you speak — that's you — for the first time to identify yourself for the official record. And, as a reminder to members and officials, please don't touch the microphones. They're fragile and sensitive. The Hansard operator will turn your microphone on when you're speaking to the committee. If ministers need to confer privately during proceedings, they may do so in the hallway or the vestibule at the front of the Chamber. Cleaning supplies are located at the tables by the side doors for members and officials to use if they require them.

**General Revenue Fund
Parks, Culture and Sport
Vote 27**

Subvote (PC01)

The Chair: — So today we will be considering the estimates for Parks, Culture and Sport. We're going to be here until 9 o'clock, or possibly earlier, but 9 o'clock — three hours. We'll begin our consideration of vote 27, Parks, Culture and Sport, central management and services, subvote (PC01).

Minister Ross is here with her official. Minister, please introduce your official or officials and make your opening comments.

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — Well thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to be here this evening to answer your questions related to the estimates for the Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport.

First, I would like to start with introducing some following brief remarks. The two officials with me in person today are Twyla MacDougall, our deputy minister of Parks, Culture and Sport, and Carter Zazula, my chief of staff. Virtually, we have Jennifer Johnson, assistant deputy minister, parks division; Candace Caswell, assistant deputy minister, stewardship division; Leanne Thera, executive director of strategic and corporate services; and Brooke Lochbaum, executive director of marketing and communications. Thank you everyone for being here this evening.

This government's direction and budget for 2021-22 is focused on protecting Saskatchewan people through the rest of the pandemic, as more residents are vaccinated, and life begins to return to normal. As we emerge from the pandemic, this budget will build and grow Saskatchewan by helping to ensure a strong economic recovery.

The Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport continues to offer a high quality of life for residents of Saskatchewan. And I am happy to report the priority placed on our provincial parks and sport and culture, recreation, and heritage sector in our province in this provincial budget. While the pandemic continues to bring challenges to the good work we do, we are now in a situation where we can pivot and ensure that Saskatchewan residents have access to our much-loved destinations.

The Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport is and will continue to be a vital part of the recovery efforts of our province. Spending time outdoors is important for our health and mental well-being, particularly during these times. There are no better places than our provincial parks. As we have navigated these last two weeks of a very busy and successful reservation launch, we know campers are eager to begin camping this season.

Throughout this past winter, Saskatchewan provincial parks offered safe escapes where families could connect once again. We promoted parks that offered four-season accommodations to safely explore, and the uptake was unparalleled. Saskatchewan residents booked winter vacations in Duck Mountain, Moose Mountain, and Cypress Hills provincial parks. We also offered experiences such as the reoccurring skating trail at Echo Valley Provincial Park, an experience that is unlike any other in the province. This year the expanded trails allowed folks a serene skate through the Aspen campgrounds with ample opportunity to physically distance, get some exercise, and enjoy the outdoors.

New this year, we built a snow maze in Duck Mountain Provincial Park. This experience was hand-built by the staff at Duck Mountain and offered visitors another safe, family-friendly activity in the park.

The parks offering unique experiences were strategically placed around the province so Saskatchewan residents could find something safe and new to experience without having to travel too far. Aside from safe, planned activities, our parks were available spaces for self use and offered trails for snowshoeing,

cross-country skiing, and hiking, as well as snowmobiling.

During a time when out-of-province travel was not recommended, our parks offered just what Saskatchewan residents needed as people sought ways to enjoy something safe for their mental and physical wellness. With extra signage in place, enhanced cleaning and sanitation protocols, and vast spaces for our visitors, our parks will offer safe destinations to be enjoyed by many. Visitation and satisfaction remains strong in our beautiful provincial parks. We look forward to welcoming existing and new users to our parks this year.

This visitation continues to increase in our parks. Providing a high-quality experience remains our priority. We want to ensure provincial park facilities and infrastructure systems meet the growing needs of our park visitors. The ministry's capital program aligns with government's plan to invest in services, programs, and infrastructure that Saskatchewan people value today and into the future. In 2021-22 this government will provide the largest capital budget in provincial parks history and invest around \$18 million for capital projects and preventative maintenance in the provincial park system.

These include new group pavilions for Pike Lake, Blackstrap, Echo Valley, and Buffalo Pound Provincial Park that will greatly enhance day use areas by providing sheltered spaces for groups or park visitors to gather once it is safe to do so again; the development of a new serviced campground at Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park that will include more than 65 serviced campsites; new campground service centres for Saskatchewan Landing and The Battlefords Provincial Parks; interior and exterior refurbishing at the historic Holy Trinity Church at Lac La Ronge Provincial Park, ensuring this site is preserved for future generations; as well as a new boat launch developed for the park near Stanley Mission; a new visitor reception centre in Saskatchewan Landing and a visitor centre for Buffalo Pound; and day use area enhancements, accessibility improvements, water and waste water system upgrades at several parks.

With further improvements, we look forward to continuing to enhance the visitor experience while ensuring safe and reliable park infrastructure. Many of the planned stimulus projects will have a focus on improving access to park facilities for all visitors, including picnic sites, campsites, improved facilities for visitors in day-use areas. These investments support the government's mandate to enhance quality of life and grow tourism in our province.

I am also pleased to report that the 2021-22 budget includes 600,000 in grant funding for regional parks. Now this is an increase of \$77,000. This grant funding requires cost matching from regional parks and assists with capital infrastructure improvements at over 50 parks annually. Regional parks are major camping, cottaging, and recreational hubs contributing to tourism and the local economy for rural municipalities. These parks are represented and administered by the people who frequent them and serve as a great example of the outcomes that can be achieved by the local community and government teamwork.

On the arts, culture, sport, recreation, and heritage side of the ministry, we are pleased to offer some significant funding programs to assist citizens in our province during this very

difficult time. Arts and culture play a major role in the civic and economic life of Saskatchewan residents. Saskatchewan's creative sector, which is a major economic driver, is facing significant challenges because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our government funds our arts and heritage sectors annually with millions of dollars contributed to the Saskatchewan Arts Board and Creative Saskatchewan. The Government of Saskatchewan is committed to supporting Saskatchewan artists and cultural workers through this difficult time which is why we have provided the sector with support through the Saskatchewan small-business emergency payment, strong recovery adaptation rebate, and the Saskatchewan tourism sector support program.

My office proactively reached out to the federal Minister of Heritage, Steven Guilbeault, in the lead-up to the federal budget. And the ministry officials are setting up a meeting between Saskatchewan stakeholders and their officials. Now this meeting will help officials direct stakeholders to relevant provincial and federal supports.

[18:15]

We are also working to support Wanuskewin Heritage Park through COVID-19 and continue to support the organization's effort to secure a World Heritage designation.

We have supported Wanuskewin in the World Heritage designation process with several actions, including 900,000 of operational funding annually; over 10 million since 2008-2009; undertaken legislative changes; protection of Crown land; supplementary funding; and hiring an additional UNESCO [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization] World Heritage staff. Wanuskewin continues to work with Parks, Culture and Sport officials to find areas for further collaboration and in-kind support.

The francophone affairs branch will continue to be a liaison between the provincial government and the province's francophonie population. During this last year, the branch has worked to translate information on COVID-19 in French, making it available to Saskatchewan francophonie citizens via the Government of Saskatchewan website. This supports both public health and the vitality of the francophonie community in Saskatchewan.

Our heritage conservation branch, like the rest of the ministry, was quick to pivot when the pandemic hit and are now offering virtual training sessions and hearings. This change is allowing for more public access to our services from remote places. In February and March this team offered a series of lunch and learns entitled Adaptive Reuse — and like I said, I had the opportunity to also participate in one of these — The Ingredients for Successfully Redeveloping Historic Buildings.

Giving historic buildings new life can be profitable investment for developers and deliver many benefits to communities. The webinars aim to provide insights and advice for navigating the financial, the regulatory, and technical requirements for the successful redevelopment of historic buildings. These sessions were well attended, including more participation from remote and rural attendees.

Another initiative the heritage conservation branch has been working on is the online client service system, which is designed to improve efficiencies and reduce client wait times and costs in the heritage approval process for developments in Saskatchewan. This digital transformation's aim is to automate and streamline the heritage regulation process with enhanced capabilities for the governance of heritage data. Currently the team is working to create a comprehensive, high-level project plan for identifying the optimal digital transformation path forward. I look forward to sharing more details in the future.

The Royal Saskatchewan Museum was starting to see record-breaking visitation when the pandemic hit more than a year ago. In 2019-2020 visitation was the highest in four decades, with just over 175,000 visitors. That's significant growth, up from 140,000 visitors in 2018-19. While COVID-19 put a pause on the RSM's [Royal Saskatchewan Museum] ability to deliver an in-person experience, the staff at the RSM continue to keep the public engaged with interesting, fun, and educational online programming.

In April 2022 the RSM team looks forward to revealing the new exhibit called *Home: Life in the* — oh, I'm not a scientist; I'm going to work this one through — *Anthropocene*. I think I got that right . . . which will replace the *Human Factor* exhibit. This new human-centric exhibit will be another terrific addition that will create dynamic and educational experiences using artistry and some of the most modern museum exhibit techniques. World-renowned scientists continue to impress at the RSM. They do such important work on behalf of the people of our province.

As for the original home of Scotty, the T.rex Discovery Centre in Eastend, our staff are monitoring the environment and hope to open during the May long weekend this year after being closed during the 2020 season.

With the shift towards online programming, I would also like to recognize the work done by the Western Development Museum across this province throughout this pandemic. These museums spent considerable time and resources transitioning to online services with offerings like summer day camps; Christmas activities; interactive school programs for kindergarten to grade 12; public programming for group crafting, storytelling, and cooking; and a video series showcasing the museums' exhibits. The Western Development Museum also integrated an online gift shop to be added to their website, which provided a focus on unique Saskatchewan products and museum-branded merchandise.

For their work, the WDM [Western Development Museum] was recognized as a recipient of the 2020 Governor General's History Award for Excellence in Museums: History Alive! for the exhibit on the Saskatchewan Doukhobor Living Book Project.

The museums will continue to provide quality virtual offerings to the people of Saskatchewan and advance the collective knowledge of the culture heritage sector of our province. While the programs and initiatives that I have mentioned thus far enrich the lives of Saskatchewan residents, we must mention the Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport's role in keeping money in the pockets of those who have needed it throughout this difficult time.

This government has re-established the active families benefit program which will make it more affordable for families to enrol their children and youth in sport, recreation, and cultural activities. The benefit will provide eligible families \$150 per year per child and will provide families of children with disabilities an additional \$50 per year per child. It is anticipated that 34,000 children and youth in Saskatchewan will be eligible for this credit.

We have also expanded the 2019 veteran service club support program to support the important work that these service clubs do. This program continues to strengthen the long-term sustainability of Saskatchewan service clubs, providing support for veterans, their families, and communities in the province. In 2021-22, this government is increasing the total funding amount available from 100,000 to 1.5 million. This increase gives eligible clubs access to support for infrastructure upgrades, programs, events, activities, and COVID-19-related updates.

Community rinks affordability grant was also reinstated to recognize that community rinks are vital recreation and social gathering places for communities across our province of Saskatchewan. This grant will continue helping Saskatchewan communities with the cost associated with operating their curling and skating rinks. The program provides \$2,500 per ice surface to eligible recipients with total allocation of 1.7 million provincially. Funds can be directed towards rink operating costs, COVID-19-related costs, or minor capital improvements. It is expected that more than 600 ice surfaces with more than 350 communities will be eligible to receive this support.

Together, these three election commitments will help to expand the quality of life and health and well-being of Saskatchewan residents. While we navigate these unprecedented times, the Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport will be vital to the pandemic recovery efforts as we continue to offer programs and services that contribute to a high quality of life for Saskatchewan residents.

With that I will turn it over to the Chair, and my officials will be happy to answer any questions you may have. Thank you very much.

The Chair: — Thank you, Minister. The floor is yours, Mr. Love.

Mr. Love: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Minister, for your opening remarks. I think that there is a lot there to agree with. And I just want to point out one experience that I had — or maybe two — very quickly before I dive into some questions.

You know, as many of us are new . . . You're new as a minister. I'm new as a critic in this area. We have a new Chair. You know, one of the things that I wanted to do in this role was to get out and visit some parks and learn, and so I had a couple of really, really fantastic experiences.

One of those was at Echo Valley park. And you mentioned it, and they're doing such an amazing job there, aren't they? And that new skating program that they have there is why I went. It was phenomenal, and I had a chance to meet some of the staff there and learn about what they do and learn about what it takes to start a new venture like that.

And you know, one of the things that was really impressing me during that visit was the role of parks staff. And here in this Assembly we hear a lot of thanks being given out to folks in different, you know, different sectors. We thank front-line workers and we thank teachers. And you know . . . [inaudible] . . . want to make sure that we say thank you to the parks staff because what they provided for this province over the last year — and you pointed this out, Minister, too — is really something that's, you know, improved our health and our well-being and our sense of community. It's a place for families to go and get away from the drudgery of COVID life, and sometimes just for a few hours, things can feel kind of normal.

And I was really impressed with the work that they were doing there at Echo Valley and their hospitality, showing us around and really wanting . . . Certainly there's a sense of pride in what they were doing and that was just really cool, and you know, it was a fantastic experience. I didn't get to put my skates on, but my kids got skating and it was a really good day.

The other experience was at Wanuskewin Park, and I know I talked about that in here already, but again seeing the sense of pride in what they do and just the amazing work. Like hats off to those folks and certainly something that our province can be very proud of as we do everything we can to make sure that they earn the designation as a World Heritage site through UNESCO. You know, as a teacher who's on leave from the classroom, that was the best field trip I've been on in a long time. I've taken students there lots of times, but you know, sure appreciated the time that those folks gave to me to help me learn and gain appreciation of the work that goes on.

So I wanted to start by mentioning that. I'll dive into some questions now and I'll just start by saying, you know, I did take the time to look back over the *Hansard* record of estimates from last year, and I know there was a lot of discussion then between Mr. McCall and Mr. Makowsky about the measures taken in provincial parks and cultural and heritage institutions to combat the spread of COVID.

So I'm wondering if you can give me an update and update the committee on the efforts that will be in place for the second summer of COVID in Saskatchewan and how these changes were informed by last year's estimates and what is being done to prepare for the second summer of COVID in Saskatchewan parks?

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — Well I'll start by thanking you for going out and having an opportunity to speak to the employees in the park. I think each and every one of them is so proud, and they love their jobs. Let's face it. What's not to love about working in a park? So I really do appreciate that you did take the time to go out there.

[18:30]

And I'm going to encourage you this summer to visit as many of our provincial and regional parks as possible because we can be very, very proud of the work that is being undertaken, some of the improvements, but also just the natural splendour and the beauty that we have. Like, we have areas in this province that . . . Nobody else can compete with us; they absolutely can't. And some of them are hidden little gems and others are just, you

know, they're very close, like Echo, like you had an opportunity to go out there. But we are very well-prepared for this upcoming season in camping, and ensuring that everyone is going to be treated in a very safe manner.

And what I'm going to ask is our deputy minister to explain exactly what is being undertaken to ensure that people will have an enjoyable camping experience. But it's also a very safe camping experience. So, Deputy Minister, if you wouldn't mind explaining exactly the protocols that have been put in place.

Ms. MacDougall: — Thank you. Twyla MacDougall, deputy minister of Parks, Culture and Sport. And it is a pleasure to be here this evening and have an opportunity to speak to our estimates.

In regards to the parks and the protocols, it will be very similar to what you would have experienced by about the summer time last year — not when we first opened, but about summer time. And I should also preface this that we follow the Sask Health Authority's regulations, protocols. We work very closely with them as well as the business response team. So if changes happen into any restrictions or regulations, we abide by those. But currently, as it sits today, we're able to offer camping through 100 per cent of our sites right now. We started at 50 per cent last year, but proved that the sites are spaced out far enough apart and being outside, there was a high level of safety, is what they felt.

But in addition to that, we have several protocols in place. They were all in place last year as well. So that would include different barriers, such as the one that's in front of yourself, Mr. Love. And, also there are protocols for cleaning. Anything that's high-touch, there's an increased protocol for cleaning those, you know, your taps, that type of thing.

There's a lot of signage. So there'd be signage, for instance, in where you pick up your wood. It'll have, sort of, "maximum two people," that type of thing. And we've also implemented, and proved to be very successful last year, a touchless entry, for lack of a better word. So if you have already reserved a campsite and you already have your permits to enter the parks, you can just go straight to your campsite and our staff will check around to ensure that everybody was registered. And so it eliminates that stop at the entry gate.

So those are some of the pieces that we have put forward, and you know, and that's just from the staff perspective. We also look after our staff very carefully too.

Mr. Love: — So with capacity back to 100 per cent, and I do understand that last year we started at 50 per cent, were there any . . . Maybe you could walk me through how these decisions might be made, whether they're at the very local level or at the ministry level. Or were there any specific spots that were identified as, you know, maybe trouble spots? Or say if there's 100 per cent of this in this facility, in this campground, we just simply can't have this bathroom open, this interpretive centre, or like whatever it is. Is there anything identified to say, like, this is something that we just don't have the ability to monitor and we maybe can't leave it up to each individual to, you know, monitor and respect the limits that are put in there?

Ms. MacDougall: — Yes, well very good point. We found that

all areas could open, and if they couldn't, each park individually would also monitor. So for example, if there were service centres that we felt were being overcrowded, we would close them down. But it was an individual request from a park area that would then go through the protocols.

Mr. Love: — As far as preparing for this year and also looking back at last year when we were at 50 per cent, can you just maybe update the committee on the status of hiring for seasonal jobs? Is that something that you've been able to go ahead with and you've got your full complement of seasonal staff ready to go? I may have some follow-up on that, but if you could just start there, as far as the hiring process, because there's so much uncertainty. And you know, a lot of folks are holding off, wanting to know what will the summer be like. You know, when were you able to proceed with hiring for 100 per cent capacity?

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — Mr. Love, what I'm going to do is have my deputy answer any of the human resources questions, only because it wouldn't be appropriate for me to answer those questions. So I will ask my deputy to answer the human resources questions.

Ms. MacDougall: — Yes, so another great question. And we're only 50 per cent. I just wanted to clarify something first though. We were only 50 per cent capacity for camping up until about the third week of June, and then we went to 100 per cent capacity. So we've had some experience already at that 100 per cent. And I would say that last year at the end of March when this all began, of the COVID, we did put a hold on hiring students and delayed that a little bit and gradually brought — we hire students as well as labour service staff — and so we gradually brought them back as we were informed more from the business response team and SHA [Saskatchewan Health Authority] and so brought them back. But this year because there's already a well-established protocol in place for parks, we were able to hire as we normally do, and we're still in the hiring process as we speak.

Mr. Love: — Do you have any sense of — maybe this isn't a regular year — what can be anticipated? Like, what would be the percentage of park staff that would be students, post-secondary students, you know?

Ms. MacDougall: — Yes, it's a high percentage. I don't have it offhand. I might be able to get it for you here shortly. But I can tell you that we're the second . . . There's one other ministry that hires as many students as we do. We're very much the leader in hiring students. We couldn't do it without them. They're an excellent resource.

Mr. Love: — So you indicated that you've started hiring; you're in that process. What's the response been in terms of the . . . Are you seeing a high number of people applying? Or are you seeing that there's kind of, you know, in a sense, like a high demand in the labour pool for these types of jobs? I'm thinking about, you know, a post-secondary student and the type of work that might interest them. And is there any plans to, you know, increase staffing? Like I guess, any comments on the uptake so far and if there's any, you know, if you have any insights into that.

Ms. MacDougall: — So what I can tell you is that I haven't heard of any difficulties, and I know that I would if we were experiencing problems hiring. That's not to say across the

province there isn't, you know, a park here or there that might be having problems finding sufficient employment. And they are already contemplating, given the success of reservations and the interest in camping these past two weeks, you know, parks will also be considering whether they do need to bring on additional resources to help meet that demand. So that would be about what I could add there. And I did just get a comment here that about 25 per cent of the staff in parks are students over the summer months.

Mr. Love: — Would you be able to, or you might not . . . Maybe you'd be able to answer this shortly, but do you have any sense of the number of jobs overall that would be . . . Like what is the full complement of jobs that you're looking to hire, you know, seasonal jobs for the upcoming season? What would be the impact? And just to back up just a minute, I think that there'd be a lot of folks wanting to do this work. I certainly wasn't insinuating you won't be able to find them. I think it's a great place to work and people would really want to do that, you know, with everything going on right now.

But yes, back to the question. Is it possible to update the committee on . . . What are the overall jobs, numbers that you're looking to hire or have already hired for the upcoming season?

Ms. MacDougall: — Well what I can tell you is in the estimates . . . No, no longer. We budget for about 440 full-time positions in the ministry each year. And what I can tell you is in the summer months, we're close to 800 folks within the park system. About 260 roughly, I think, they're thinking is . . . Eight hundred in total for the ministry, not just the park system. I have to clarify that.

Mr. Love: — Then that'll be somewhere around 200, if it's 25 per cent, be around 200 would be students. Okay thanks for that.

You know, one question that I want to dig into a little bit here is, I'm curious, are there any plans for privatization or selling-off of any public assets? Is there anything being considered at this time by the ministry on the provincial parks side?

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — I'm sorry, I didn't quite . . . Did you say privatization?

Mr. Love: — Yes, privatization or selling-off of any public assets that would be in the public interest, like anything significant?

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — No, there is no appetite for selling off of or privatizing our provincial parks. Since we've formed government, we've created two new parks. So I think people in Saskatchewan look upon our parks with great pride and joy, and we want them to be accessible to everyone. So no, there is no appetite for that at all.

Mr. Love: — And is there any planning or any processes happening to develop any new parks?

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — Not at the moment, no.

Mr. Love: — Now when it comes to privatization, I understand, you know . . . You made several comments about the relationship between the ministry and the regional park system. But if a

regional park were looking at privatizing their assets, would the ministry have any involvement in that? Would you be notified or would there be any reason that you would engage in that process?

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — Thank you very much, Mr. Love, for the question. I will have my deputy answer the question that you posed in regards to privatizing regional parks. Okay.

[18:45]

Ms. MacDougall: — So regional parks are legislation, part of our legislation, so there is an ability to dissolve regional parks. There is an ability eventually to privatize regional parks. But they would have to go through legislation and regulation changes, which is possible.

And the other piece though that a person needs to be mindful of is that quite often a majority of the land that the regional parks are on is typically Crown land. So if there was actually a privatization, we would have to involve the Ministry of Environment or the Ministry of Agriculture, whoever's Crown land that happens to be. So there is a process in place that could happen. We've had, you know, a few dissolve but no questions about privatization as of yet.

Mr. Love: — Could you provide any remarks on if this process was beginning, what type of consultation is required of the public, of the municipalities who invest, provide funding, who provide board members? What type of consultation is required either for, you know, public consultation, public meetings, informing stakeholders, consultation with Indigenous groups? Like what would be expected there?

Ms. MacDougall: — So what I can tell you is that those regional parks are actually set up and established with a board of municipalities in that area. And so any type of privatization or talk or just any type of changes to their regulations at all would have to go through all those municipalities and they would have to all have approval as well as typical communication in the area.

Mr. Love: — And are you aware of any of these talks going or any processes that have begun to privatize regional parks in Saskatchewan?

Ms. MacDougall: — I'm not aware of any to privatize.

Mr. Love: — Okay. It kind of may be in the same vein a little bit. I have some questions about the process for public consultation when it comes to leases within provincial parks. So I know that there's many private businesses that operate, that lease land or facilities, and operate within provincial parks.

So let's just say, for example, that a private investor wanted to lease a parcel of land and then subdivide that into seasonal lots or, you know, seasonal permanent lots, something like this. Again, what type of consultation would be expected there? Is this something that the public is informed of? Is there an RFP [request for proposal] or a tendering process? And what consultation would take place with other property owners or folks who have other permanent leases? Could you maybe just walk the committee through a little bit of what that process would look like?

Ms. MacDougall: — I can. So what I can tell you is it is definitely a transparent and public process. We do an RFP process for any new opportunities. We quite often will have individuals approach us about an idea they have, and even if they approach us about an idea, it is still transparent and an RFP does go out if it is core to our park and aligns with the park needs.

Mr. Love: — And how does the ministry decide? Like let's say that, obviously if somebody has plans to do this, they see that there's great economic interest in this. They're doing it to make money, to generate income that's, you know . . . So how does the ministry decide whether that is best undertaken by a private lease and someone . . . Because I know that the ministry does operate some, you know, seasonal, permanent campgrounds where people lease for the whole summer. I know that we do that in some locations. So with this example, like how would the ministry decide, you know, why don't we make the profit if we develop this site, you know, as opposed to turning it over? What is that decision-making process like to get the most investment back for Saskatchewan people?

Ms. MacDougall: — Okay, I can give you some background on that as well. We do have what we call our business development framework that does have guiding principles that we follow, and also provides a little bit of a strategic plan as far as what types of leases or businesses would be appropriate in the park.

What I can say to you, in fact, is that we focus on the core services of a provincial park. We want to be able to offer an experience for a family at an affordable price and so that's really where we fall. If it falls outside of that, camping and beach and interpretive programming and beyond the core, we will then consider leases. Does that provide an answer to your question?

Mr. Love: — Yes I think so. Could you maybe give me an example of, you know, a time or like something that falls outside of that core that's really been a benefit? And as you say, this is a shining example of when this is done. Well, we brought in a private company or individual to run a business that's really been a huge benefit to the folks who use the park.

Ms. MacDougall: — The minister actually listed three in her opening remarks in regards to our winter activities where we had many of those four-season accommodation facilities busier than they ever have been in winter season, so there's a success story. And then there's many. We have minigolf. We have golf courses. We have seasonal campsites, like you suggested or had mentioned, four-season campgrounds. We have, you know, convenience stores, marinas. Those are some.

Mr. Love: — So I guess it's further to the question of like the permanent camp sites. You've referenced the business, I think, the business development framework. Is that something that you would be able to table for the committee, that framework, so we could have a look at it and see?

Ms. MacDougall: — The framework?

Mr. Love: — Yes.

Ms. MacDougall: — I would think so, yes.

Mr. Love: — All right. And would you be able to do that during

the meeting today?

Ms. MacDougall: — I might have to get a hold of somebody.

Mr. Love: — Okay. I believe it can be emailed out later. That would be fine too. But I guess just . . .

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — Just a second. We'll go and make an inquiry for you.

Mr. Love: — Sure.

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — Okay.

Ms. MacDougall: — Yes. Okay, so I did just want to confirm, before I spoke about it any further, and the business development framework itself is an internal guiding document for us, but all of those key principles are actually on Saskatchewan.ca.

[19:00]

Mr. Love: — Okay, thank you for that. So just to clarify here and I'm going to move on. So you indicated there's lots of different leases that might take place inside a park. But again with this example of somebody wants to subdivide, they want to have an extended lease on a chunk of land that they're going to develop into a permanent seasonal site, which is something that operates in some parks, how does the ministry decide, you know, say hey, it's profitable here for us and it could be profitable there but we're okay sending that to a private lease? Like how does, you know . . . Because to me, it certainly would look like if there's a person say, hey, this is really profitable for us; we can generate income for the park but we're going to not do that. It certainly raises questions.

So how does the ministry decide when to do that and when to outsource that?

Ms. MacDougall: — So I guess I'd first say, any long-term seasonal camping, we don't do any of it. We do have some seasonal camping, but those sites are only available from the May long weekend to the September long weekend, not year-round. So I would go back to my opening comment. And we really focus on the core, so anything that falls outside of the core we are comfortable in setting up leases for it.

Mr. Love: — Thank you. Thank you for that. I'm just wondering if you can provide some numbers. Yes, I want to go here. If you could provide any numbers of the anticipated revenue in park fees, like specifically entrance or gate fees. And I'm curious if those revenues are tracked by in-province visitors versus out-of-province visitors, if you break it down that way. And if you can provide the committee with the breakdown of what's anticipated for this year. However you break it down is fine, but if you do break it down by in-province and out-of-province, that would be great.

Ms. MacDougall: — I'll start. Okay. So what I can tell you is that we don't track in-province versus out-of-province. But further to that is the majority of our campers are from in-province. The last statistic I had, it was still about like 85 per cent in-province. I don't know how current that is so I wouldn't put that on the record. And what we have budgeted for in '21-22

for park entry is just under 3.8 million.

Mr. Love: — Okay, thank you. Do you have any sense of how many visitors to our parks are eligible for the free 65-plus park pass each year? Or how many last year? How many are anticipated for this year?

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — Thank you very much for the question in regards to seniors. Last year about 34,000 passes were given out to seniors. Now that's 65 years and older, but they have to be Saskatchewan residents and they have to show ID [identification] to be . . . So we card them. So they get to be carded again in order to obtain the pass, because otherwise there would be abuse.

So we want to ensure that our senior citizens, who have worked so hard to build this province, have the opportunity to really experience and enjoy our parks. So that's a fair number of passes that are handed out to our seniors in this province. And I know we get a lot of emails thanking us for the opportunity to be able to experience Saskatchewan, and especially in their quality years of life, that to them it's really important. It's a little bit of a thank you very much for helping build our province.

Mr. Love: — That's fantastic. I know my in-laws . . . and this is a family of big fans of Jackfish Lake. I know that my wife's grandmother loves going to Jackfish Lake and visiting the provincial park, and when she became eligible for that it was a nice treat. So that's great; 34,000 is phenomenal engagement.

One area that I have some further questions on is, I understand that there is a new company, a new system that's been contracted to run the online booking for provincial parks camping. So I'm just wondering if you can provide the committee an update on where this company is located? I believe it's called Aspira. Where's the company located? How much do we pay them? What is budgeted this year to pay them for their service? If you have any sense of how many folks they employ, or what we contract them to do to provide this service to the province. And also if you can tell me how long would this contract be for, like how many years have we contracted them to do the online booking?

Ms. MacDougall: — See if I remember all of your questions.

Mr. Love: — I can go through them.

Ms. MacDougall: — Okay. If I don't, just let me know. So it is an American company. Aspira is a North American company that has offices right across . . . There's an office in Canada here, as well as the US [United States], as well as call centres both in Canada and the US. Aspira is the largest campsite reservation system provider in North America and they have 30 years experience. The contract I believe is for five years. I think three years with a two-year renew, renewable option. And what else did you ask me now? Sorry.

Mr. Love: — And how much do we pay them for their services?

Ms. MacDougall: — So very good question. We actually pay them per transaction, and we send that . . . We don't make any money off of it but we send that expense on to the customer. So when you do book your campsite you're charged a transaction fee, and that covers the cost for that service. And I do just have a

correction here. I believe the contract is five years with an option to renew one or two.

Mr. Love: — Okay, thank you for the correction. So can you tell me what is the transaction fee? So this is the surcharge. I believe a campsite is \$33 a night, and that was an increase of \$1, and then what would be the transaction fee? Is that added on? Is it per transaction or per night that is booked?

Ms. MacDougall: — It's per transaction. And it varies depending on whether you use the call centre or the website. So the fee is a little bit more if you use the call centre. And \$12 is the reservation fee.

Mr. Love: — And the \$12, is that for online or calling in?

Ms. MacDougall: — I think that's the website.

Mr. Love: — The website, okay. Okay. Can you just update the committee on what that process is like? Did any local committee submit a tender? Did anybody respond to the RFP from Saskatchewan or from Canada? And how did the ministry decide on Aspira? And then . . . Well let's just go with that. Like what was the process like? I do recognize that you say that they, you know, 30 years, you know, industry leader. But why did we decide to go with this company over others?

[19:15]

Ms. MacDougall: — Sure, I can give you some insight into that. Certainly again this is a full and transparent RFP process, and it's conducted by SaskBuilds. Some of those detailed questions you'll have to ask SaskBuilds specifically. But I can tell you that . . . Now I've lost my train of thought.

Mr. Love: — How did you decide on this company?

Ms. MacDougall: — Yes. So it's through procurement, an RFP process, and then there is a committee established. And it had members of the Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport again, as well as at the time it would have been central . . . no, SaskBuilds. And we do a full evaluation process with metrics. I've got all those details, yes.

Mr. Love: — So because the cost is outsourced to the consumer through transaction fees, is there any line in the budget where the cost for their services is represented in any way? Is there any direct payment from the Government of Saskatchewan to Aspira, which I understand is located in Dallas, Texas?

Ms. MacDougall: — Well we make the payment, but it's offset to the revenue that we've brought in. It's a flow-through, yes.

Mr. Love: — Okay.

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — We probably should share with you, the reservation system has been an absolute success, and thousands and thousands and thousands of people have been able to book their campsites. We started out with the seasonal campsites. And we, you know, didn't do all of them at once but did a tranche of different parks. Very well taken up, you know. First day there was a couple little hiccups — nothing major; got it rectified. That's what's really good about working with a company that's

been around for a long time, their turnaround and being able to, you know, kind of smooth out the bumps instantly.

Also too, the response has been very positive. On occasion you'll have someone who posts a negative. And you know what it is? They didn't get the site they wanted, because probably 3,400 other people wanted that same site. That's what's been so incredible, and that's why we know this year our parks are going to be well attended. People really appreciate the new system in that it worked out very well. They were able to manipulate it very well for themselves. And like I said, the uptake has been . . . Well it's phenomenal.

And when you kind of step back and go oh, by 10 o'clock we had oh, 3,400 people. And it opened at 7. So you kind of think . . . like just visualize those numbers of being able to go through. And like I said, people were waiting. You know, it opened at 7 but they would be sitting there waiting for the 7 o'clock. So coffee cup was full. They were waiting to get on to that site and get their spaces.

And like I said, the comments that I've been hearing back from people are very appreciative of how well it worked. But also they're really excited about being able to participate in camping again this year and really just looking forward to spending time with their families in our parks.

Mr. Love: — Yes, you read my mind. My next question was, how is it going?

And I'll even add to your comments, Minister, is that I've heard other . . . in the case with like a touchless arrival and being able to display park passes without . . . or contactless, I think, would be the better way to put that.

Yes, so there's definitely a lot of things here to consider. This is by no means . . . But you know, unfortunately the way things go in here, there's often much to be made of who hired a campaign manager from outside the province. And that's due to experience and due to, you know, qualities, qualifications they have. And I just got to say, there's a lot of things that go into making decisions, aren't there?

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — Absolutely. And like I said, the response we have had, people are very appreciative of the new website.

Like I said, you may hear a few grumblings because there is some changes and not everybody likes change. Let's be honest. And then also from someone who maybe didn't get their favourite, favourite, absolutely favourite camping space. But otherwise, people really have appreciated the ability to be able to work through this seamlessly.

We did increase the fees with like the dollar. But you know what? There is an increase in cost, but we really worked hard to maintain that it's still such an affordable way for families to spend time together.

And like we've said before in my opening statements, it's so important for our children to be able to spend time with their families doing things together just developing that kind of relationship. And COVID has done some good things and some bad, believe it or not. And the good thing is, is that parents have

had the opportunity to maybe just step back, slow down, and think about the importance of their children. And that's the good part about some of this. Most of COVID's been pretty ugly, but you know, we know that our Saskatchewan people are booking up their spaces and are planning for an absolutely fabulous summer.

Mr. Love: — Well I hope this new booking system continues to impress. And I hope that it, you know, stands the test of time for the five years plus one or two. I hope it continues to be positive.

I'm curious though, did this result in any savings for the ministry? And forgive my ignorance of how things may have been done in the past, but was this always, was the booking fee always a surcharge at the end? And has that surcharge increased or decreased with this new provider?

Ms. MacDougall: — So again, there's no savings because it is a flow-through and it was with our previous provider, a flow-through as well. I believe this is . . . It is a fee-for-service so yes, there were no savings. What I can tell you is that maybe it's provided us, or not maybe, it has provided us some new efficiencies and it's also provided us some new features for the campers. We didn't implement too many of them this year. We wanted to, you know . . . Change is significant when it comes to technology, but there are other opportunities there for us to offer more to our citizens as we go down the road.

Mr. Love: — So there's some value-added items there for that amount. Okay. I'm going to move on to more, you know, culture side of things. I've got some questions as it relates to Sask arts, Creative Saskatchewan, and so on.

You know, my first question is when I looked at the numbers included . . . Oh actually maybe just start with this. I understand that the purpose of Creative Saskatchewan, that this body is created to somewhat kind of commercialize the creative economy in Saskatchewan; to recognize the role that artists, performers, you know, play in the creative economy. So my question right now is, you know, the numbers included in this year's estimates, from the outside looking in, seem to indicate that there's no funding or structures in place to support Saskatchewan artists through to a time when performing for crowds will be possible.

You know, and I'm open to correction here, but it appears as though like the funding has kind of flatlined from previous years despite the fact that we have a number of new hurdles in the way for folks who gain employment through the creative economy. So I'm wondering if you can elaborate on any work being done by the ministry to support those in Saskatchewan whose income is dependent on a thriving, creative economy. In other words, you know, what has the ministry planned for a COVID recovery in the arts?

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — I can answer the beginning part in that. We did have a really fulsome discussion with the federal minister responsible for culture and Heritage and had the opportunity to talk to him about what programs we could use to augment, here in Saskatchewan, our creative industry.

And he said one of the things . . . This was a discussion we had before the federal budget came down, okay. So it was a good opportunity to have that meeting and talk about the real

challenges. And it's not just here in Saskatchewan. It's across the country. It's across the world for creative people, be it whether it be musicians, artists of every genre. But the important part was, the take-away from that conversation that I had with the federal minister was that he was prepared to meet with a fairly significant group of our stakeholders to talk about what kind of funding is available.

Because let's be honest, the federal government seems to have much deeper pockets than we do. And so he was more than prepared to have his individuals talk to our stakeholders about what is available for them. So I thought that was a very probably positive way of us being able to kind of access additional funding for our artists in the province. Deputy?

Ms. MacDougall: — I guess I could add a little bit here for you — and the minister also did relay this in her speaking notes — but certainly the province also has some supports in place, both the Saskatchewan small-business emergency payment and strong recovery adaptation rebate. Some of those individuals would qualify as well as the Saskatchewan tourism sector support program.

And in addition to that, what I would also say is that — and we were talking specifically about Creative Saskatchewan — they have the ability to adapt and change their programs. And so they certainly did make an adjustment to one of them so that folks would call . . . Like the travelling one certainly wasn't going to get spent this year so they made some adjustments to that. So they have that ability. And you know, in this budget as well as last budget they did not receive a reduction in funding; they're still getting their status quo.

Mr. Love: — Yes, I think of my questions, they're about the status quo and there's just real significant challenges for getting people back to work. So just, you know, to the minister my question was, what is the ministry's plan for COVID recovery in the arts? And again — let me know if I've got this wrong — but what I heard was that you're hoping for the federal government to solve this? That you've asked those people to kind of correspond with the federal Heritage minister, is that . . .

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — Well no. I think that I'm going to reject the premise of that, in that no, we are not depending on the federal government. But what it is, is it's a collaboration to be able to work together. And I think we all benefit much better when we work together. And that was one of the things we talked about. And we talk about that with Creative Saskatchewan too, and that they have the ability to discuss with their stakeholders how they pivoted during COVID.

Like this is, this is not . . . There isn't a one-shop fix for creative industry in the province because of the wide variety of the genre, whether it be a festival, whether it be an individual musician, whether it be whichever. It's very difficult because it isn't, like I said, a one-size-fits-all.

We, you know, have had the opportunity to talk to so many stakeholders within the artistic community. You know, we've got our two symphonies, Regina Symphony and the Saskatoon Symphony, and those are really important aspects to the quality of life within our community, and we really value that. So we've had the opportunity to talk to them about how do they do things.

And like the RSO [Regina Symphony Orchestra] has been really clever in being able to pivot and doing some virtual concerts.

And same with a lot of our artists, in that they've pivoted that way because, like I said, COVID . . . A lot of them are gate-driven, right? It's not just sports that are gate-driven; our artistic community is. That's where they obtain their livelihood from.

So you know, we had to think of how do we do things differently, and they have. And a lot of them have been very successful and in fact have had the opportunity to reach a wider audience, because when you go virtual there's no geographical boundaries, right? So they've had the opportunity to reach out and touch a wider audience. So we feel very fortunate to be able to work with our artistic community.

[19:30]

I'm not sure if you realize, but myself and the Chair, our Chair of our committee, we worked together on creating Creative Saskatchewan. And we're very proud of the work that we did in putting it together because I'm committed to the arts in our province.

Mr. Love: — So yes, thanks, Minister. All of those groups that you've mentioned from RSO, Saskatoon Symphony Orchestra, individual musicians, festivals, I've had a chance to meet with all these people too. And they're hurting. They're hurting big time.

And so I hear what you're saying. The appreciation is effusive. And I share that appreciation for the arts. But again I just want to say, like what are the very practical things that this ministry will do to support a COVID recovery in the arts?

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — Thank you very much. So in regards to COVID funding for the arts . . . And as I have stated, we're really proud of the arts sector and we realize the important role they play in our economy. So our government has funded our arts and heritage sector annually with 6.6 million for the Saskatchewan Arts Board; over 7.3 million for Creative Saskatchewan. Now several COVID financial supports have been available to these organizations and the provincial grants such . . . And a lot of this comes from the tourism sector. Tourism used to be within Parks, but it has moved over to another ministry. So there's no point in doing duplication of our ministry and Tourism doing a duplication. So Tourism has support programs. So they've got 14.5 million in phase 1; 9.9 million in phase 2 — this is the COVID supports — and the Saskatchewan small-business emergency payment was 32 million provided in phase 1; and 7.7 million in phase 2; 14.9 million in phase 3 and 4; and then the strong recovery adaptable rebate of \$500,000.

So we've reached, like I said, we've reached out through both federally and also with our organizations to ensure that there is funding in place. And what I did was reach out to stakeholders. We had quite a few Zoom meetings. We told them about the funding that is available through Tourism, made sure we kind of helped walk them through so that they . . . And we sent them the whole package of how they could make sure that they could access that funding.

Mr. Love: — Okay, so I guess, you know, you've highlighted a

number of the ways that funding is available and I am familiar with the tourism sector support program that, you know, makes an effort to locate where income has been lost. I think it sets some benchmarks there as far as how an organization, a venue, or you know, whatever could apply for some of the support. But to me, one of my concerns that I've heard, you know, I've met with many of these stakeholders that you've met with. And you know, as an aside, Minister, I'll say I'm actually very impressed that you've taken time to meet with so many, because I talk to them and they say, yes, that they have been able to meet with you.

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — Nobody can call me lazy.

Mr. Love: — I do commend you for that. But one of the things that sometimes, you know, a concern that I have is something that can sometimes fall through the gaps here are folks whose income doesn't show up as a full-time equivalent job. You know, many artists, performers, technicians, they didn't lose full-time equivalent jobs; they lost gigs. They take part in a gig economy and sometimes there are good times of the year and slower times of the year and that's all kind of, you know . . . It's all a bad time of the year right now, if that's where your income comes from. So I'm curious, you know, from the perspective of the ministry, is there any life raft for these people to get back to a time for when they will be performing in front of crowds again?

Ms. MacDougall: — I guess what I could tell you is another piece is we don't want to duplicate any of the federal funding as well. So it's important for us, again, to collaborate with the federal government to see what they have to offer. And they have provided support to some of those artists you've just spoken to. And really we continue to work . . . I guess at the end of the day, the bottom line is we continue to work with these stakeholders and manage through this process.

Mr. Love: — Okay. I'd like to read a quote. This is published February 9th, 2021 in the *Regina Leader-Post*. This comes from the executive director, music director, of the Regina Symphony Orchestra. And they state:

Our industry creates thousands of quality careers. SK Arts hasn't seen a budget increase in over a decade, but costs have risen.

The situation is dire and full recovery will take years. It is time for material emergency assistance and permanent funding increases; it's time for appreciation and clarity regarding our industry's significant financial and employment impact, and certainly time for recognition of the vital role the arts play in the well-being of our communities.

I'm wondering if the minister has a response to this, and what the ministry is doing to address the concerns raised in this quote.

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — Interesting, because I know the quote you're talking about because I think he also quoted me in that article and that he met with me, and I was fully understanding of their situation.

The Regina Symphony is a well-known and respected organization and is very highly valued within the community. And it is tough. Absolutely, it's tough. And when I talked to

them, I also encouraged them to sit down and put together a plan. And this may sound unusual, but I said they needed to put together an economic plan of the impact it has on our city and our province.

And in fact that's the same message that I've shared with Creative Saskatchewan and also with the different stakeholders, because I think what happens sometimes is people don't realize that economic impact.

We understand the importance and how they create our lives and what they add to our lives and how they enrich a community. But we don't always understand the economic impact of that. And so that's what I encouraged them to do. Because once you have that, then the case can be made.

It's also important for them to be able to have that same kind of information. So when they do go out and seek sponsorship, that they have that information and that the sponsors then can also realize the benefit and the value of being able to say, sponsor that specific concert or a series of concerts.

So it was good discussion. Is there any easy answers? Absolutely not. But you know what, there isn't any easy answers for just about the whole economy when we're going through what COVID has done.

[19:45]

COVID has done something that world wars have done to economies and to countries. And that's what we're in right now. We're seeing our way. We're coming through. But the devastation across the board, not just to our artists, but to businesses and to everyone and families. And so, this is like I said, there's no easy answer. I wish I did; I wish I had an easy answer; I don't have an easy answer. But I did spend a lot of time . . . I go to the symphony. To me it's like, it's part of me. It's important to me. It's important to a lot of people in this community. And so working together, encouraging them, that's really important.

Mr. Love: — I'm wondering if you could just respond, even for my own clarification, to two specific parts from this quote. Sask Arts has not seen a budget increase in over a decade while costs have risen; and that the situation is dire and in need of material emergency assistance.

Ms. MacDougall: — I guess first off, if it's the article that I believe you're referring to, it was actually comparing it to the money the hockey league funding received, I believe, and wondered why one was covered over the other.

Mr. Love: — I can comment on that. It was actually very supportive of the money for hockey. It wasn't combative, you know, why did they get it, not us. As most folks that I've talked to in performing arts are very supportive of saying, you know, we're glad they got it, they need the support. But I'm also hearing statistics from the sector that the performing arts employs four times as many people as sports do. And so the question remains, where's the support for, you know, our folks who want to get back to work and who want support to have a plan for when that's going to happen.

Ms. MacDougall: — So I guess we do every year reach out to our stakeholders, Creative Sask, Sask Arts Board about their budget and their requirements and their new initiatives and that type of thing. And certainly we put forward what we believe is in the best interests of the Government of Saskatchewan and balancing their budget right across government.

And I guess the other piece I would say about the RSO though is, the minister in fact is meeting with them again May 6th, I believe. And you know, I want to give you an update. They're continuing to keep their staff on; they haven't had to lay anybody off, and they're continuing to adapt. So the meetings we've had, I think, have been helpful and I guess, you know, that's what we continue to do is monitor the situation.

Mr. Love: — Yes, but by no means am I questioning your willingness to meet and listen and work with. The reports coming my way are very positive in that regard, but you know, and I used this quote because on my end I thought it really captured what I'm hearing across the sector, not because the RSO . . . I've had no contact with them about this quote, but I just really thought it captured what I'm hearing and that's why I chose to bring it forward tonight.

Another group that I think or several groups that in this sector are struggling and in need of, you know, whether that's support, or you know, co-operation or whatever it is, is the summer festivals. And so my next question is about Saskatchewan outdoor summer festivals as they've begun. We've seen announcements of cancellations again for the second summer. And so I'm just wondering if there's anything in this budget to provide gap funding to ensure that those festivals are able to return, to emerge from what will be multi-year layoffs to host events maybe in 2022 or 2023?

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — Thank you very much for that question. I have met with the — we've had more Zoom meetings than you can imagine — but we have met with the festivals and the concert. And so we had a really good discussion on their concerns and how do they go forward.

And so Tourism Saskatchewan has got some money set aside in regards to it but there's an application. So what — in discussion with them — they said to me that if the, say the festival puts together a plan, say a smart COVID-safe plan of how to go forward with that festival, they would be able to then obtain some additional, some funding.

So we ensured . . . As soon as I had that from Minister Harrison's office, we then made sure that we sent out that information to those individuals and those groups to ensure that they then could put their application in and look at obtaining some additional funding of how to put on a COVID-safe festival. So we've been, I think, pretty proactive in that. They were very thankful because I brought that up with Minister Harrison and said, you know, need a little help here. How do we do this? And he said, well if they go through, you know, these kind of steps, make that kind of application, then we would be able to work with them.

So I think that . . . And let's face it. I think we all want to go to a concert. We've all been stuck in our houses way too long, and it's time we got to go out, enjoy some music, do some dancing, and really get to enjoy what Saskatchewan has to offer. So we've

got our fingers crossed.

And we know that as we work our way through with more people obtaining vaccines, we will come through this and we will love going to our festival. Somebody said to me, I think people would be afraid. And I said, are you kidding me? They're going to be out there, and they're going to be having a good time celebrating, celebrating what we have to offer here in this province.

Mr. Love: — Yes, I think you're right. Like, that sounds great. I'm looking forward to it. Again my more immediate concern is that we want to make sure that our artists and performers are here and ready to perform for crowds again when it's safe to do so. And you know, as it turns out due to, you know, the limited number of members on our side, I'm also the critic for Tourism. So I can follow that up when I'm in estimates with . . .

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — So we've given you some practice.

Mr. Love: — Oh yes, I got practice last week with Minister Hindley. So I, you know, wear a number of hats on this side.

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — And like you said, the festivals are covered by that tourism package.

Mr. Love: — Yes, I'll be sure to ask about that.

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — Yes, please do.

Mr. Love: — Thanks for that. I'm wondering if you can give the committee an update on, you know, in the budget what amount of funds are included to support the Regina sound stage. And if you could give a breakdown of how those funds are allocated, like, what that budget looks like in terms of like HR [human resources], facilities, maintenance, however it's broken down.

And I'm also just curious. What's the usage been like at the sound stage? Obviously COVID's had a big impact on it, you know, various productions that would've been taking place there. Yes, just open to comments on the budget breakdown for the sound stage and what the last year's been like.

Ms. MacDougall: — So I do have a little bit of a breakdown here for you in regards to the number of days each area was used, or the total area. In total the number of rental days was 193. And that would be for various, like, sounds. There's three stages in there and there's production rooms, and so that would include any of that.

In regards to any line items for the sound stage in our budget, we just have the one and that's accommodation. And to SaskBuilds and Procurement, our accommodation for the sound stage footprint is \$725,000 this year.

Mr. Love: — Okay, thank you for that. Are you able to provide a breakdown of the 193 rental days, like what the different usage is? Or do you only have the overall number?

Ms. MacDougall: — I have a little bit of the breakdown.

Mr. Love: — How many?

Ms. MacDougall: — So there were some music videos,

live-streaming events, some commercials, National Film Board used it, some storage place for storage, commercials, interviews, SaskTel commercial, feature film, and a children's show — those types of things.

Mr. Love: — Okay. I'm going to kind of scatter around here to a few different areas. I'll jump around. I have a few questions to the minister about the status of horse racing in the province. And this is, you know, a powerful lobby. They're passionate. These are folks who have been . . . you know, thoroughbred racing has been part of their family history for four or five generations. They're hurting. I understand that there's various levels of government including, you know, the Saskatoon Prairieland Park Corporation, which is outside of government control. And so there's lots of things going on there.

But my question is, are there any funds in this budget to support the sport of thoroughbred horse racing? And are you aware of any agreement in the past to provide funding to Saskatoon Prairieland Park, derived from VLT [video lottery terminal] revenues, that was designated through a 30-year agreement to be given to the sport of horse racing?

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — Okay, that's the wrong ministry. That's under SLGA [Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority] so you'll have to . . . Have you had a chance to do estimates with them? If not, that's the ministry that is responsible for that kind of funding.

Mr. Love: — Yes, I understand that the VLT revenue . . . and this is where, like, it kind of . . . But as a sport, you know, the HBPA [Horsemen's Benevolent and Protective Association] certainly understands that there is a 30-year agreement to fund horse racing through Parks, Culture and Sport. And I understand that their questions to the government have been sent to your office. That's just what I've heard. I'm not sure if you've had any conversations with them and if there's . . . You know, they're in a bad situation as, you know, things tend to . . . You know, it looks like Prairieland Park is moving on, and that's obviously not your job to direct them.

But I guess I'm just curious if you're aware of any previous agreements to provide provincial funding to the sport. Because we've seen this, you know, in other jurisdictions lead to, like, very profitable and successful thoroughbred racing tracks. Is there any business through your ministry to support this sector?

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — You're asking for the historical background? Is that what you're asking?

Mr. Love: — Well there's some historical precedents here, but I guess I'm just . . . You know, my understanding is that their questions, any questions coming to the government, have been directed to your office. So I'm just curious what your involvement is as Minister of Parks, Culture and Sport for thoroughbred racing.

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — Okay. Well the funding, like I said, the funding has absolutely nothing to do with this ministry; that is SLGA. Now I have had the opportunity to have a conference, virtual meeting, with the individuals who have been working very hard and very diligently on lobbying both provincial and municipal people.

But one of the things is that their agreement is with Prairieland and that is city of Saskatoon. And so what I have asked them to do — and we have had some really good conversations — is that they need to talk to their mayor of Saskatoon, and they need to talk to their city councillors.

[20:00]

That's who they have to have the discussion with because Prairieland, where the horse racing took place, has the relationship with the city. The province has nothing to do with Prairieland and the city of Saskatoon. And so because of that relationship that they have with Prairieland and the horse racing, that's the city of Saskatoon. And so that is where I've directed them and helped them out with pointing them in right direction of how to go to speak to their mayor.

And in fact, had a conversation with a couple of people today and they have a meeting with your mayor, Charlie Clark, tomorrow. So they were feeling quite good about finally having an opportunity to sit down and have a really good discussion with their city mayor, because they hadn't up to now had that discussion. They really hadn't had the discussion either with the city councillors. So we pointed them in that direction because that's where they need to focus their energies.

Mr. Love: — Yes, I hear what you're saying and I'll also note I'm also the critic for Municipal Affairs, so I often do correspond with the municipal officials on things like this. And you know, the city of Saskatoon doesn't provide any guidance to Prairieland Park as far as how they run their operations. So there is kind of a, you know, a tough situation that I think is leading to, you know, the folks being hurt through this or the jobs that'll be lost through the sport of horse racing.

But I do think that there is space for the provincial government here as they used to provide direct funding to Prairieland that was designated for horse racing. There was \$2.6 million annually. And so I do . . .

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — That's not in my ministry though. That's from another ministry. Also too, there is a city councillor that does sit on Prairieland.

Mr. Love: — Yes, that's correct, yes.

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — So they do have the opportunity to have those conversations. But I think you're probably . . . Your questions would be better directed to the ministry responsible for the funding of that. Because we don't have that. There's no responsibility in this ministry for Prairieland or horse racing in Saskatoon. So in order for you to kind of have a fulsome discussion, it would be with SLGA.

Mr. Love: — Yes, I don't disagree with that.

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — Okay.

Mr. Love: — But I think that my point here is that as far as the level of government, that this doesn't simply lie on the shoulders of, you know, the municipal government of Saskatoon, the mayor and council. I think that the provincial government, you know, due to the way that that funding was provided, that changed over

the years between, you know, a levy collected through parimutuel tax to, you know, the different ways that that funding was disbursed . . .

At the end of the day, you know, the folks who are losing out are . . . The jobs of people who breed and train and race and jockey and all those things, and you know, so it is, you know, upon me to come here and ask — and I've got the answer — but the question was: are there any funds in the budget of Parks, Culture and Sport dedicated to thoroughbred racing? And the answer is no, and that funding comes through different ministries.

I have a few questions about overnight camps as well. And I believe that that's also something that flows through this ministry. And I've heard and I'm just curious, have you had any discussions with the Saskatchewan association of overnight camping? And are there any plans in place to provide direction to them for the '20-21 summer camping season?

Ms. MacDougall: — Again so any questions or concerns that our stakeholders have in regards to COVID restrictions and regulations all goes to the one centralized area within government, the business response team. So again that's where I think you'd get a better answer.

Mr. Love: — So then for this ministry is there any, you know, gap funding in place? As many of these organizations are church-based or community-based, you know, they're non-profit by and large. Is there any gap funding or anything in place, you know? As again we're looking at the second COVID summer and the prospect of running a camping season and generating revenue is unlikely, but a lot of them have sunk costs in terms of their staffing and facilities. So is there any support coming through the Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport to get them through hopefully to a camping season of 2022?

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — We had the opportunity to meet with them, and it was again a very good discussion. And they had some questions because what we did was we pointed them again in the right direction for them to be able to obtain funding through . . . The business response team was able to help them out, because there's no point in duplication. And like I said, they shared with us their issues and their concerns, but then we also helped them through with getting them pointed in the right direction so that they would be able to obtain that funding that you just referred to.

Mr. Love: — I'd like to ask a few questions about the Royal Saskatchewan Museum. So last year when this committee met, then minister Makowsky said, “. . . RSM has developed a long-term proposal to assist with improved care of sacred, culturally sensitive, and natural history collections.” So I mean this is good news.

I know that there's been some struggles at the RSM as far as their maintaining their collection which is used by world-renowned researchers and they want to be able to attract the kind of staff researchers that, you know, understand the value of their collection for their academic fields.

So I'm just curious if you can update the committee on what supports the ministry is providing this year or will be providing to support necessary improvements to the building of a new

facility to replace the Annex specifically? I think it's important to note that the current situation of the Annex is that it was deemed a temporary solution over 35 years ago, and you know, the important role of the Annex for our researchers, you know, and people who are drawn here is somewhat in jeopardy.

And I know that they've spoken, you know, at length over the years but I think the feeling is that they're getting to a time where something needs to be done and they need . . . So I'm curious if there's any planning, any commitment from the government, any hope to alleviate that strain on the Annex at RSM?

[20:15]

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — Thank you very much for the question in regards to the Annex and the importance of the sacred items that we have within. Now I, along with Twyla, recently met with the museum's director Peter Menzies on this challenge. And ministry officials are currently working with SaskBuilds on a business case for the Annex. And then we will be considering our next step. And we will bring forward recommendations. It will be going out to an RFP. In fact, I think at this point it's already been put out. And in an effort to secure the sacred items, we have rebuilt a cocoon in that building. And Twyla, if you would like to, kind of, elaborate on how the cocoon works.

Ms. MacDougall: — Certainly I could. So we store several sacred items on behalf of First Nations and we've had to, in essence, build a building inside the building so that they're at the appropriate temperature and humidity and everything. So we've just recently upgraded that as well as included new shelving and storage facilities for that. So we're doing interim steps while we're going through this business case.

Mr. Love: — Cool. That's good news.

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — It is.

Mr. Love: — Do you have any sense . . . So, you know, I hear you say that the RFP is maybe already out. Any sense of what the timeline might be moving forward as far as, you know, what they could expect for . . . Is the RFP for a new facility or is this for a renovation?

Ms. MacDougall: — The RFP is to look at options. So a new facility is an option, but there may be others. Government of Saskatchewan does have other buildings as well, so we want to keep it open. We don't want to predetermine what we should be doing. And the procurement process is with SaskBuilds, so some of those steps are out of our control a little bit. But the expectation is to have something in July — some recommendations, not a new building.

Mr. Love: — Yes, won't be finished by July. Okay. Okay. Well that's exciting. We'll be watching that closely. I know that's an important step.

Okay, moving on. Kind of getting to the tail end of our time and my questions, although I do still have lots left to go if we need them. But some of these may just be looking for data and numbers and just curious in a few kind of scattered areas here.

I'm wondering what data does the ministry have or keep or

collect regarding employment numbers in the sports sector in the province. Is it something that you track? Do you have any sense of how many people are directly employed through sports, whether that's, you know, community sports, you know, professional? Like is there any way that you track employment numbers in that sector?

Ms. MacDougall: — I don't have anything offhand. A lot of, again, a lot of what our ministry does is work with other stakeholders, and so Sask Sport may have some of that information, but I'm not sure.

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — Do you mean paid employees?

Mr. Love: — Yes . . . [inaudible].

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — See, because I think we have to also realize that so many of the people who dedicate their time and energy do it on a volunteer basis. So it's pretty hard to be able to track that. And like I said, you're right Twyla, it's probably . . . Maybe Sask Sport would have some of that, but then again you have to realize we've got so many different levels of sport, right.

We've got the people who are getting ready to go to the Olympics, and then we've got little Billy who's out there, you know, playing T-ball; and then Sarah who's, you know, like, she's again playing with Billy out there with T-ball, all that sort of stuff. So I mean it's pretty difficult to be able to . . . Because it's such a wide variety of people that we're serving and age groups.

Mr. Love: — Yes, if anything I know . . . And I'm not looking for volunteer numbers, like we've got amazing volunteers in this province that coach youth sports . . .

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — Well it is . . . Saskatchewan is the heart of volunteers, isn't it?

Mr. Love: — Yes. I guess then I'm just more curious when it comes to provincial sport bodies, organizations, you know, teams and sports that generate income at the gate, like how many people they might employ. I know it's kind of a, like a wide net that, you know, catches people in that sector. But it's just a question, wondering if that's something that you track or have any numbers on.

Moving back to some questions about parks. I'm curious, you know, some provincial parklands, my understanding is that they have substantial, like, oil and gas activity on the land or nearby. And how does the ministry manage, like, the stewardship of parkland? Specifically, like, what kind of studies does the ministry engage in, ecological studies, of the impact of industries that operate on or near the lands of our parks?

Ms. MacDougall: — Okay, so I'm prepared to answer your question. I think I've got it covered here. We have a specific branch within our ministry, the landscape protection unit branch. They review any of the land use permits or requests that come in and then they sign a lease with certain stipulations on it, if appropriate. And all projects actually go through a work authorization process as well, and the permit provided.

Mr. Love: — So maybe along the same vein . . . I know that, you

know, as you've mentioned that one of the goals of the ministry and parks Saskatchewan is to increase visitation, increase the number of visitors. And I think we've seen, you know, a lot of that in the last year as people stay close to home and people are getting out and exploring the province. How does the ministry track the impact of those increases, increased visitation use? How do we track, you know, the human impact of those visitors on the ecosystems and the impact of that on land, wildlife, water? How does the ministry, you know . . . But certainly I'm not arguing against increased usage. But just how do we watch that, track that, and monitor the impact on the natural environment?

Ms. MacDougall: — So another great question. And I guess one of our goals is certainly to increase visitation in our parks, but another goal is also to protect Saskatchewan parklands and heritage. And we do that by really again recognizing the landscape protection unit does work every year on the ecological health of the parks. They actually prepare reviews each year. We've got certain . . . They've got a schedule set up for reviewing parks.

And it's also important to know that part of the management of the parks is we have what we call a core area in parks where, you know, the majority of your visitors are, and then there's you know, a vast amount of parkland that is not nearly as disturbed. So we try to focus activities on that core area.

Mr. Love: — So I guess just, like, to have the impact kind of concentrated in a small area instead of more widespread impact in the surrounding area.

Ms. MacDougall: — Sorry?

Mr. Love: — You know, I think that's okay. I guess I'm just summarizing what you're saying that part of the strategy is to localize the impact on the smaller area to preserve the wider park area.

Ms. MacDougall: — Yes, that's part of the strategy for sure. Yes.

Mr. Love: — Okay. I would like to ask about just one line in the budget. Specifically I see that there is \$500,000 allocated to urban parks in Saskatchewan, and I'm curious if you can update the committee on which urban parks received an allocation. And how is that determined? Are there applications from municipalities for, you know, funding? Or I guess where did the funding go this year? Where will it be going? And how does that process work?

Ms. MacDougall: — So the funding you see in the budget is for Meewasin Valley Authority in Saskatoon. It is funding that has been a consistent level for several years at that rate. And the reason it goes to the Meewasin Valley Authority really because it supports planning and conservation activities that occur on Crown lands included in the Meewasin Valley Authority park area. And so we're recovering costs for education, development, and resource management of that park.

Mr. Love: — Okay. So just for my understanding in the future, the urban parks allocation is just the Meewasin Valley funding from the . . .

Ms. MacDougall: — Correct.

[20:30]

Mr. Love: — Okay. I didn't know that. It's good to know.

Another question that I have for the minister is I'm just curious if you can update . . . I guess just really as a whole for the ministry, how much funding was received by the ministry from the federal government for COVID-19 supports?

So when we look at the estimates from this year, does any of this funding originate with the federal government as far as like, yes, COVID-19 supports and funding that's come to the province?

Ms. MacDougall: — There is no federal funding that has come directly to the ministry for COVID-specific activity. We do have federal funding for a bilateral agreement in regards to sports for disadvantaged youth and children, but that is not related to COVID.

Mr. Love: — Okay. It's just obviously something that we're trying to figure out where the federal funding . . . We know where it comes from, but where does it go and how's it being applied to, you know, creating COVID-safe environments.

Ms. MacDougall: — I could add clarification to that. There was federal funding available for sports organizations and that went directly to Sask Sport. As I mentioned earlier, they're one of our partners. So that is the stakeholder that did look after the federal funding.

Mr. Love: — Okay, fair enough. Another kind of broad question for the ministry as a whole, I'm just curious what progress has been made with the implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action within this ministry. Is there anything you can point to as far as work of the ministry to answer the TRC [Truth and Reconciliation Commission] Calls to Action?

Ms. MacDougall: — So as you can imagine, there actually has been a fair bit of activity for our ministry in the Calls to Action and I'll go over a few of them. It's quite extensive but I can say that under the Call to Action, I believe it's around education, is the senior Indigenous advisor we have that has developed two Indigenous awareness mini-sessions on topics in regards to introduction to culture and protocols and terminology. And the senior leadership team of Parks, Culture and Sport attended both of those sessions.

And there was also an introduction to culture and protocol with the executive assistants community of practice right across government. The Royal Saskatchewan Museum has championed Orange Shirt Day recognition now for, I think this is it's second or third, maybe third year. In this past year, all students participated in school events remotely. And then you know many of our stakeholders as well have educational programs for their staff such as SaskCulture does, Western Development Museum does. So we do monitor that too and encourage that.

And again stakeholders also do some features on Indigenous sports histories, that type of thing. You know, in regards to sport, of course we're supportive of NAIG [North American

Indigenous Games], and so that and other . . . Tony Cote First Nations summer and winter games is supported through Sask Sport. There's also an Indigenous sports enhancement program that Sask Sport offers and that provides . . . and sports leadership programs are also offered there. And there's specific Indigenous coaches and officials programs as well at Sask Sport.

And Call to Action 66 on federal government to establish multi-year funding, I think that would be related to our partnership with SaskCulture and Sask Lotteries in regards to develop organizations and programs throughout the province, and funding Aboriginal arts and cultural leadership funds, to name a few. I could go onto another one. No?

Mr. Love: — No, that's great. I appreciate that response. And just something that came to mind as you were sharing there, are you aware of any parks that engage in land-based learning opportunities? You know, an example being lessons on, you know, indigenous plants, like plants that are indigenous to the prairies or ecosystems there, or Indigenous medicines. Is there any land-based education going on within our parks?

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — Are you referring to Indigenous or just all land-based?

Mr. Love: — Yes. Yes, I guess I am referring to Indigenous land-based education.

Ms. MacDougall: — I guess we do have interpretive programming, and it is established and determined based on the park attributes. So there could very well be some interpretive programming that's land-based. I just don't have any of that in front of me. Wanuskewin Heritage Park would also be an example. And we do also have, you know, some heritage sites like Fort Carlton that specifically does very much land-based and First Nations heritage.

[20:45]

Mr. Love: — Yes, I'm just asking this through the lens of a teacher and the land-based education, especially in times of COVID. You know, an opportunity for teachers to visit sites where there's already some programming or infrastructure set-up is awesome. You know, one of . . .

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — I think that's probably one of the real highlights of having Wanuskewin is that because, you know, not just the location but everything about it creates the perfect learning environment for that. And to be able to kind of showcase that and, like you say, have your school groups but also our tourists come and really gain a real fulsome understanding of the history of this province and, you know, the importance of the Indigenous people, the Métis people, like, all of that is what created Saskatchewan. And so I just think we're so fortunate to have a facility like that, that really just encapsulates what we can showcase to not just our students and our province, but to the world.

Mr. Love: — Yes, you're absolutely right, Minister. I mean, I was really impressed even to see the changes that have taken place in the last year since the last time I was there with students. I couldn't believe it. And I would take anybody there, any visitor from anywhere in the world. You can take them to Wanuskewin

and be proud of everything that they're doing there. It's really amazing.

And one of my, you know, final questions I have for tonight, which you answered in your initial remarks, I'm going to read the question anyway. And then I just got one question from your initial remarks. I wanted to ask, how does the ministry review its role in aiding Wanuskewin's path to designation as a UNESCO World Heritage site? You answered that, and I thank you for . . .

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — We're good.

Mr. Love: — But I guess just one of the things that you mentioned, and this is the one that stuck out to me. I wasn't familiar with that piece. Is it the ministry? Or I'm not sure how if you could clarify — again it's just out of personal interest here — that there was a hiring of UNESCO World Heritage staff. Was that hired by the ministry or was this funding provided to Wanuskewin? Could you just tell me a little bit more about that? Because I think it's such an exciting thing, I'm just curious where we're at with that.

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — That's an HR question and I'd like Twyla to answer the HR questions.

Ms. MacDougall: — So it actually was a one-time funding to Wanuskewin Heritage Park for them to determine what type of consultant they needed to initiate the paper for the UNESCO proposal.

Mr. Love: — Great. So you provided the funding and they took it from there to hire a consultant to help moving that forward?

Ms. MacDougall: — Correct.

Mr. Love: — Fantastic. You know, I'm looking forward to a day when — I don't know how far away it'll be — when that announcement comes that they're able to gain a designation. And people from both sides will celebrate and we can be proud of that and recognize the years and years of work that has gone into that. I'm hopeful that we'll get there.

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — Well you know, I'd like to speak too a little bit about that because I think any of us who have maybe travelled, travelled maybe to Europe, and you have the opportunity to . . . When you look for highlights and you look for places that you think have got something special — not just, you know, another castle, another whatever — and then you come across, you know, like Mont-Saint-Michel where you realize that it's a UNESCO Heritage site, and I think it was done in the 1800s. It's like, it's the most incredible place. But people who are interested in what makes a place tick, right? And what created that place, they look for sites like that, right? That becomes a, I have to go there. Like, people have a bucket list, you know, 111 places I have to see before.

And so that's why it's so important that we have something like that because we have something to showcase, something to show the world. And so I really look forward, like yourself, both sides, to be able to go celebrate when they have their designation and it becomes a real stamp on the map. And like I said, it's an opportunity for us to really showcase to the world what we have to offer here.

Mr. Love: — Absolutely. We're together on that one, Minister. This brings me to my final question for the evening. It might come in just under the wire here. I'm just curious to the minister, and perhaps your officials would like to answer as well if they choose. But I'm just curious if you could share with the committee the most challenging and the most rewarding decisions that went into this year's estimates and budget.

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — The whole experience has been rewarding. And there has been challenges. With COVID it has absolutely. And I think I probably mentioned this in my speech in reply to the budget, is that everything we've done, we've had to look at it and then kind of overlay the ramifications of what happens with COVID on that. So what we've done is we've worked really hard to put forward a budget that really speaks to people, people in this province, how we can absolutely work to protect our people in this province by doing things such as sanitation in our parks and things like that. All those things, they're very carefully thought out. But there's a dollar to it, right? And so all of those sort of things we've had to undertake.

Then you know, we looked at some of the programs that we implemented in the budget, you know, the rinks. Now — and I think you've probably heard me talk about it — I grew up in the Springside curling rink because that was a very important facility to that town and to the greater community. I grew up on a farm not far out of Springside. And so when we sat down and did the rink program, to be able to provide them with a little bit of money, that was very rewarding. The emails, the phone calls coming in thanking us because it may not seem like a huge amount of money but it really helped them.

And then when you look at, how do we put some money back into people's pockets? And that's where we did the child benefit, you know, again to be able to ensure that children have the opportunity to participate in sports, cultural dance, all of those things. It makes for a healthier child mentally and physically. How can we help? We helped by giving them a tax rebate. So those things are, like I said, those were so rewarding.

And then last November watching Remembrance Day on TV because it was totally different, we didn't all get to go and put our poppy on and go to the cenotaph or go here in Regina to the Brandt Centre. I'm not quite sure where you go in Saskatoon. Is it TC place or wherever?

Mr. Love: — I usually go to the school assembly.

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — Okay. So like, everyone has the opportunity to gather and celebrate and remember and thank the people who did this on our behalf so that we have the ability to live the way we want in this country. And I would listen to the interviews of those veterans talking about how they needed a little help for their Legion halls, right, for the ANAVETS [Army, Navy & Air Force Veterans in Canada]. And then again, it's like a cornerstone in so many small towns and in our cities.

So when we sat down and looked and said, what can we do to help them? And a lot of them, you know, as you know we've got an aging population. So we have to be able to make sure that the funding we provide will go to capital projects like accessibility, maybe a new roof, maybe having a new furnace, things like that, to ensure that the viability of those centres remain.

So when we upped the funding to 1.5 million, that was big. It was very big because it really . . . And again, we had the opportunity to speak to the stakeholders and they said, "you don't realize," and I said, "I think we do," and they said, "this is . . ." It's a game-changer for them because so many of them, they're on limited resources. But it's also, like I said, those facilities are a cornerstone. They also were providing so much mental health services for their membership, right? So they need a place to go and they need to be able to just maybe share. And so when we put that into the budget, that again was some of the most rewarding things.

And then the work that we're going to be doing in our parks, right? We're going to be building a new campground at Cypress Hills. Now I don't know if you've been to Cypress. Have you been to Cypress yet? You've got to go. It is the best place. It's heaven on earth. It absolutely is. It's just such an incredible place. And so how do we ensure that more people can go? Well we are building a new campground there. How many spaces, Twyla?

Ms. MacDougall: — 65.

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — Sixty-five spaces. So that means that at one time at any time 65 families or individuals will be able to come and absolutely get to experience one of the most special parts of our province. And as a teacher, you probably know all about Cypress Hills and what makes it so special, is because the last ice age, that part was not covered. So it's got unique fauna and flora there that you absolutely do not find in any other part of this province. And like I said, we have some of the most incredible parks. And yet that one is so special. And so I encourage you to go.

But that's why we made that investment, because it is a place that people need to go. We have the Regina research station out there in the park. And a lot of those grad students, they're international and national grad students that have the ability to then interact with the visitors to the park.

And they did an event — not last year, the year before, because last year was, you know — and a couple of grad students were going to do a presentation on Cypress Hills. And they thought, well maybe 50 people will come. Well, Twyla, how many people did they have? I think they had over 200 people show up. And these were campers that were there. And they absolutely . . . They didn't want to go home. They didn't want to go back to their campsites because of the experience that they got to share. So those educators, those grad students got to do what they do best, and that's share their knowledge and their information, but also got to share the wonders of that park.

So like I said, my job — I love my job. To be able to talk to artists from across our province and as you know, I have great respect for people who hone their craft. And so talking about the budget, it was a tough budget. But this ministry, it's gold. It absolutely is the one where we get to go and we really get to have the ability to make people feel good about living here. So that's the best part about my job I guess.

The Chair: — All right. Any more? I guess we're right at the time of adjournment. So having reached the agreed-upon time for consideration of estimates for the Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport, we'll now adjourn consideration of estimates for the

Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport. And I'd like to thank you, Minister, and your officials. Do you have any closing comments? And then we'll give you an opportunity to close as well.

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — Okay. Well thank you very much. I'd like to thank Member Love for the insightful questions and the opportunity for us to have a really good discussion, share ideas, and for us to be able to tell you about the wonderful work that this ministry does.

And I must thank the legislature staff here this evening for, well it's late at night, 9 o'clock. But also the committee members, thank you very much for attending, and yourself, Chair. But also I'd love to be able to thank — in person, but we can't — but we can virtually thank all of our support staff in the ministry. They have been very supportive with helping us with our questions. Thank you, Twyla, for being here; Carter; we've got Ty in the back room.

You know, preparing for this takes a whole group of people, and being able to make sure that we have a fruitful discussion, not a confrontational discussion but a fruitful discussion, a fulsome discussion . . . And I really thank you for your insightful questions but also your interest in what we do within this ministry. And I must say we are so well served. Everybody's going to sit here and say, I have the best people possible working within the ministry. Well you know what? They're wrong because I do. I have the rock stars. And I think you'd be pretty pleased if you looked at the senior management within Parks, Culture and Sport — it's women. Thumbs up.

[21:00]

So like I said, thank you each and every one, for helping to make this evening flow quite smoothly. And thank you yourself for your insightful questions.

Mr. Love: — Yes, I want to thank all committee members for being here for a late night with an early morning coming tomorrow. I want to thank all the officials who are in person or joining us virtually and, you know, I want to echo many of the comments from the minister. I think that by and large the work done, the direction of the ministry, is something that Saskatchewan people value greatly and it provides us with a vital service, probably now more than ever.

And I know my family enjoys that, as do you know, thousands of families and individuals in the province, when we get to take part in the best our province has to offer in terms of our parks, our culture, and our sport. We will continue to ask questions from our side on opposition to make sure that, you know, that our public dollars are well spent and that people are getting back to work in this province as we recover from COVID-19.

And so I thank you for the fulsome discussion and for the back-and-forth exchange of ideas that we've had tonight. So thanks again to our Chair and thanks to everyone for staying again late tonight.

The Chair: — All right. This concludes our business this evening and I'd like to ask a member to move a motion of adjournment. Mr. Ottenbreit has moved. All agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. This committee stands adjourned to the call of the Chair.

[The committee adjourned at 21:01.]