



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
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April 27, 2021

[The committee met at 16:00.]

The Chair: — All right. Good to go? Welcome to the Standing Committee on Intergovernmental Affairs and Justice. I'm Mark Docherty. I'm the Chair. With us this evening are Gary Grewal, Travis Keisig, Greg Ottenbreit. And substituting, we've got Jennifer Bowes, who's substituting for Ms. Betty Nippi-Albright, Nadine Wilson for Lisa Lambert, and Todd Goudy for Mr. Tim McLeod.

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

Subvote (PC01)

The Chair: — Today we'll be resuming our consideration of the estimates for Parks, Culture and Sport, and then we'll have a recess and we'll consider the estimates for Tourism Saskatchewan. 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 officials and make your opening comments.

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — Well thank you very much, Mr. Chairperson. I'm pleased to be here today to answer questions related to the estimates for the Status of Women office. First I would like to start with introductions, followed by some brief remarks. The officials joining me in person today are Mari Petroski, executive director of the Status of Women office; Carter Zazula, my chief of staff. Virtually we have Twyla MacDougall, deputy minister of the Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport; Jackie Demerse-Abbasi, director, Status of Women office; Brooke Lochbaum, executive director of marketing and communications; and Ty Symenuk, my communication ministerial assistant.

Thank you, everyone, for being here today. As I mentioned during the estimates for the Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport, our government is working to protect, build, and grow Saskatchewan and to ensure a strong economic recovery.

I am pleased to present you with the work of the Status of Women office, an office focused on ensuring the protection of all women's rights in Saskatchewan. The Status of Women office moved to the Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport this year and the connection between the two has been strong. The importance of gender equity is paramount, no matter which ministry they are a part of.

The Status of Women office is a Government of Saskatchewan-wide entity that acts as a catalyst to ensure gender is taken into consideration in government programs, legislation, and policy making. The office bridges connections and brings attention to issues impacting all women in Saskatchewan, and they do this through creating strong partnerships with diverse groups and agencies. The Status of Women office gathers information and provides insight and direction to leaders so thoughtful decisions can be made and meaningful change can happen.

Given that the mandate of the office is women, they focus on a

wide range of topics, including two major portfolios: women's economic security, participation, and prosperity; and interpersonal violence and abuse. The two go hand in hand, as without economic participation and prosperity, there is a lack of options and therefore a lack of security.

As all of us in this room are all well aware, this pandemic has affected everyone in more ways than we could ever imagine. The impacts of COVID-19 are exacerbated for women in multiple ways, which this government recognizes and is determined to mitigate. We know that women are at the highest risk of experiencing interpersonal violence and abuse, and those numbers are even higher if a woman is Indigenous, black, a woman of colour, or has a disability. And this is why enhancing security through interpersonal violence and abuse initiatives, including those related to gender-based violence, is important work that the Status of Women office and our partnering ministries continue to be engaged in.

In fact just this past year, the Status of Women office entered into a partnership with the ministries of Justice and Attorney General, and Corrections, Policing and Public Safety to bring forward an awareness campaign on interpersonal violence and abuse. This campaign stretched across the province and was translated into Cree, Dene, and French to ensure it reached as many Saskatchewan residents as possible.

The goal of the campaign was to start the conversation. It features three strong women from diverse backgrounds and asks Saskatchewan residents to stop the excuses for engaging in or supporting perpetuating violence and abuse. Viewers were directed to a website called Face the Issue and provided with resources, statistics, and facts about these complex topics. The campaign did start conversations on social media and hopefully in homes across our province where incidents of interpersonal violence and abuse often takes place behind closed doors. Putting a spotlight on this topic and bringing it from behind closed doors to the public sphere helps to shift attitudes and norms that perpetuate violence in our communities and shows that ending violence is everyone's responsibility.

I'm encouraged to see this campaign continue as there is still a lot of work to do. The Status of Women office will keep working with their partners to advance this conversation and campaign. Our government's justice budget also included a total of 22 million for interpersonal violence awareness and support with new initiatives including 800,000 to respond to interpersonal violence, including support for the public awareness campaign; creation of a 24-7 interpersonal violence and abuse provincial call line; family intervention rapid support teams to allow violence intervention workers to operate alongside police; expansion of the victims' advocate case review initiative; and transportation for survivors and their children fleeing from violence.

Besides the campaign, the office invested 34,000 in making domestic violence in the workplace training available online and accessible by employees and employers across the province. The Provincial Association of Transition Houses and Services of Saskatchewan, also known as PATHS, is leading the way on this initiative and hopes to have it completed sometime in the fall of this year. This training is in response to the introduction of five

days' paid leave legislation. Many employers asked for the training in order to provide their employees with the skills and tools needed to address domestic violence in the workplace.

I am pleased to report that the Status of Women office has been able to support PATHS and their continued important work in this area. In 2019 the Status of Women office, along with the Justice and Attorney General and Corrections, Public Safety and Policing, provided funding to the Sexual Assault Services of Saskatchewan to pilot the victims' advocate case review with the Regina Police Service and the Regina Sexual Assault Centre. We are pleased to say that the final report was received in January of this year and the pilot was a success. Due to the success, the project will continue to move forward into other locations across Saskatchewan.

As previously stated, safety and security is aligned to economic participation. Our government recognizes the importance and impact of women's participation in the economy. The Status of Women office has committed itself to being a lead resource in advocating for women in our province's economic growth, and empowering women could not be more relevant than right now. A lot of progress has been made, but COVID-19 brought a spotlight to the inequities that women experience.

The Status of Women office has strengthened and grown in their ability to support internal and external stakeholders in developing programs and services aimed at building the economy through women's economic prosperity. The office has been investing in areas that showcase the important contributions that women make to communities across Saskatchewan and their capacity to grow Saskatchewan's economy.

Through research projects and leadership, the office is identifying innovative solutions to advance women's participation in male-dominated sectors such as the scientific, technological, engineering, and mathematical fields, also known as STEM [science, technology, engineering, and math]. Last year the Status of Women office invested in the research project focused on identifying barriers for women entering the STEM field. This project aligned with the work that the Status of Women office did for the federal government and territorial task team that they co-chaired on economic participation and prosperity.

This paper was finalized in October and identified that the gaps between all levels of education and employment were contributors to women entering the field. It also identified the need for additional research to uncover what employment opportunities do and will exist for women in Saskatchewan. In response to the findings, the Status of Women office has developed a multi-ministry committee focused on moving this work forward and identifying how we fill the gap and better align services.

Bridging connections with partnering ministries to advance work and policy is a major component of the work of the Status of Women. Not only do they co-chair the inter-ministerial committee on interpersonal violence and abuse, they also chair an inter-ministerial committee advising women's policy. Both committees allow the Status of Women office to make connections, gather information, and form important partnerships that advance their work. They are also currently

working with Innovation Saskatchewan, Trade and Export Development, and Immigration and Career Training to identify ways of advancing the recommendations of the WESK [Women Entrepreneurs Saskatchewan] advisory committee paper, a paper resourced by the Status of Women office and released in July 2020.

Partnerships are also how the Status of Women office identifies what work is of priority for the community. The office has many strong connections. Whether they are working on the Resolve Saskatchewan advisory board or attending a STOPS to Violence [Saskatchewan Towards Offering Partnership Solutions to Violence] collective impact meeting, they are always connected.

An important connection the office made a few years ago is with the Aboriginal Friendship Centres of Saskatchewan. The centre is led by two strong Indigenous women who are creating programs and services that are geared towards supporting Indigenous women and children all across Saskatchewan.

[16:15]

The Status of Women office has invested 47,000 in their community-led project, Honouring Her Spark, a project aimed at supporting Indigenous women in Saskatchewan by addressing barriers and root causes of issues impacting them. This project aims to create further opportunities for participation in the economy, culture, and access to traditional knowledge, healing, and learning.

The important work of these organizations in leading community discussions around issues impacting women and promoting the growth of women-led businesses not only brings us closer as a community, but also shows the importance of having female leadership.

Although the office is providing funding for Honouring Her Spark project, the support goes both ways. And they have guided the office in becoming more knowledgeable about the impacts Indigenous women face in Saskatchewan. Impacts of the pandemic have been felt by all women in Saskatchewan, specifically women who may be experiencing interpersonal violence and abuse. It is reported that we may not know for years to come about the true impact some women have faced until that time.

The Status of Women office continues to work with partnering stakeholders to identify any issues that may limit important services provided to women, like emergency shelters, and ensuring that their needs are met. Federal funding to emergency shelters and community organizations that supported women who experienced domestic and sexual violence was coordinated through the Status of Women office. The office gathered agency information and provided the list to Women and Gender Equality Canada to ensure no agency in Saskatchewan was missed.

The partnership between our federal, provincial, and territorial counterparts has been a good one. I had the opportunity to engage in my first Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women in Canada meeting in January. Ended up chairing it as Newfoundland went into a writ period prior to the week of that meeting. Saskatchewan is slated to host this year's meeting in late fall. So it was good experience for me to gain, and I enjoyed

learning about what other provinces and territories are doing to support women across Canada.

In closing, the Status of Women office understands the importance of diversity and inclusion, not only in the community but within the office itself. The office staff have taken part in a number of education and training opportunities to ensure their work reflects the realities and makeup of our province. This includes training such as the blanket exercise — and I don't know if you've ever participated in one; it's very moving — Aboriginal awareness training, and being involved in the promotion of diversity and inclusion in the work they do.

The Status of Women office is working hard to promote women and create a province where all women can succeed. This last year has been a challenge for all of us, but especially for women, and we understand that. 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. I will now turn it over to Ms. Bowes. The floor is yours.

Ms. Bowes: — Thank you very much, and thank you to the minister and her officials. I'm looking forward to asking some questions and learning more about the Status of Women office in my role as the new critic here.

So I'll begin my questions. I did notice in preparing for committee that there's very little information and public reporting on what the Status of Women office does. There's, for example, few reports and deliverables available. So these questions are to establish what the deliverables and activities of the office are. My first question, Minister, I'm curious to know why the decision was made to transfer responsibility for the Status of Women office from the Ministry of Advanced Education to the Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport. Just curious as to the rationale for the transfer.

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — Well to be honest, I wasn't in on the discussion of why the transfer was made. But to be honest, it was the perfect transition. And you and I have never met, really, but I have been advocating on behalf of women and girls, probably before you were born, marching in front of the courthouse on behalf of women's rights. So in fact this is the perfect fit. I probably am the perfect minister for this role. So to move it into within Parks, Culture and Sport, Status of Women, it's a very important aspect within our ministry.

Ms. Bowes: — Thank you for that, and by no means was questioning your suitability as the Minister Responsible for Status of Women, just the fit there within the particular ministry. I just wondered if there was a reason for it. But yes, I respect that I'm sure you've been doing many years of work on this front and certainly meant no offence.

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — Yes, but it is the perfect fit for me. And like I said, if there is one person that this position was made for — it's me. I'm not, you know, kind of setting myself up, but I've been a very strong advocate for women and girls, and so to move it within my purview, it's perfect.

Ms. Bowes: — Well I'm glad to hear that. And thank you for

your important work.

Moving to the annual funding, regarding the annual funding for the Status of Women office of \$375,000, we see that the funding is flat. And so I'm wondering if the minister or her officials could tell us, how is the funding allocated? For example, what proportion of the funding is allocated to salaries, programming, etc.?

Ms. Petroski: — Yes, I can answer that. Again, Mari Petroski. I'm the executive director with the Status of Women office. In 2021, again you said \$375,000 was allocated for the Status of Women office budget — \$250,000 was spent on salaries; \$104,000 was spent on operational costs and contracts for projects. And I can elaborate on those projects.

So \$2,500 was provided upon receipt of our STEM report in October 2020. The office invested \$3,500 for the facilitation of three financial literacy seminars that were provided by Amakon Women Empowerment Inc. The office also provided \$47,000 to the Aboriginal Friendship Centres of Saskatchewan for their Honouring Her Spark program. We also invested or paid the remaining \$3,800 for the public awareness campaign upon receipt of the campaign video, which was released November 30th of 2020. We invested \$34,000 into the provincial association of transition houses of Saskatchewan's Make It Our Business training, online training that they're developing that will be due hopefully by the fall of this year.

And then we also invested \$4,400 to produce three videos highlighting diverse women champions for International Women's Day, and again \$2,200 for a video that's due to come out for Women Entrepreneurs Week.

Ms. Bowes: — Great. Thank you, that's extremely helpful to know. I was wondering then too, building off that, what is the current staff complement in the Status of Women office?

Ms. Petroski: — We have two FTEs [full-time equivalent] allocated to our office, an executive director, which is my position, and a director position.

Ms. Bowes: — Thank you.

Ms. Petroski: — And then, sorry, also we do hire summer students, and then as well, we do have a Johnson-Shoyama student often join us in September to the end of April.

Ms. Bowes: — Great. And I'm wondering then, based on that, is there any capacity in this budget to do further hiring? Is that something that's being considered, or are you looking to maintain the two FTEs in this office?

Ms. Petroski: — We're looking to maintain those two FTEs.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay. And then I have a question for the minister. Just curious to know what your distribution of time is, on the average week, between your cabinet roles, like for example, how many hours a week you might spend on Status of Women issues, just to get a sense of that.

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — Well that's a bit of a difficult question to answer because I don't keep a rolling time card on what I spent

within each ministry, each aspect of the ministry, because as you know, Parks, Culture and Sport, that's fairly wide, and then with the Status of Women.

So I think it also depends on what is happening at the time. When we have, you know, things such as International Women's Day, then of course I spent a lot of time doing Zoom meetings. Of course we'd love to be able to meet with different women organizations across the province face to face, but those were hours and hours of meetings spent talking to the different women organizations. Same as within Parks, Culture and Sport, Zoom meetings. Some can take longer, but the stakeholders, we try and be very respectful of their time. So whether I can define exactly how much time I spend on each one, I can't.

Ms. Bowes: — Fair enough. Thanks. My next question is about . . . it's for yourself maybe. What are the specific measurable goals that the Status of Women office hopes to accomplish in this fiscal year?

Ms. Petroski: — Thank you for the question. You know, a couple of years ago — and just to maybe, if it's okay, to educate a little bit on where this office has come — but we actually provided grant funding. We have a certain amount for grant funding and we used to provide individual, little grants for International Women's Day. And a couple of years ago we took it to cabinet to ask if we could give bigger grants out to fewer things so that we could have measurable goals within our office because it was difficult to measure how \$300 here or \$50 here affected or impacted women's lives in Saskatchewan. And so being able to have that measurable process to say yes, we've actually accomplished this or we have, you know, increased women's participation or women's security or something to that fact.

So with the Aboriginal Friendship Centres of Saskatchewan, their Honouring Her Spark program, we are a minor investor in their five-year program. And so we're hoping to see some measurable goals as to what their participation rate is in their coalition. And they're doing a train-the-trainer program, and so we'll get some measurable outcomes for that.

As well as with the training that PATHS is doing for Make It Our Business. Again that's something that we're hoping to see a huge uptake in how many people are able to be trained online for domestic violence and identifying domestic violence and working with people who've experienced domestic violence in the workplace.

Because as we heard, you know, with five days' paid leave, when that was released, there was a lot of, sort of, fear of what does this mean for our workplace, what does that look like, how do we deal with it, how do we get services. And so part of that is being able to measure how many people will take part in that online service that will be made available all across Saskatchewan, which is really important.

The other thing is we do have an indicators project that we look at and we actually post it online. We just created a new website for the Status of Women office that was released, I believe, in December. And so we're hoping to keep those up to date and as well as provide any kind of reports or any of the videos that we've done for International Women's Day on there to help, sort of, I

guess showcase women in Saskatchewan. And so we can also measure how many people watch those and view those videos.

As well as the public awareness campaign, we were able to measure how many people were viewing them and what media source they used to view them. And so those are kind of the measures that we're looking at this year.

[16:30]

Ms. Bowes: — Thanks a lot. I'm just really curious about the domestic violence training that you've both been referring to. So is this going to be put on like . . . Is PATHS developing the training, you said then? Or does the office have any . . .?

Ms. Petroski: — No, PATHS is already trained in this. And so they've been providing the training for the past at least couple of years, if not more. They're definitely the experts in this. And that's what we really go to is we provide funding to the experts to do the work, right.

And so PATHS, Jo-Anne Dusel and Crystal there, they're the ones who are wanting to make this training available online. And what they saw was with COVID-19 and not being able to do training with people last year in person, they saw that it could be made available online. So they're actually working with a company that develops online training. And I believe their name's Onlea, but I can look that up. But I'm pretty sure that's what it is. And so they're working with them to make their training available online.

Ms. Bowes: — Thanks. And then, Minister, I just had a few questions. You had referred to the Status of Women ministers' meeting that occurred in January. Can we get a sense on what this agreement means in practice in Saskatchewan?

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — The meeting had a central focus, and that was gender-based violence and interpersonal violence. And so it was a real good opportunity to be able to hear what other provinces were doing, what they were experiencing, and how . . . you know, especially with COVID, I mean, it just changed everything for us. But it was a really good opportunity to be able to put forward some markers on exactly where do we need to go. And there was a strong consensus that enough talking and to get the job done.

Ms. Bowes: — Right. I'm curious to know if you had any sort of specific take-aways from other provinces, anything that's being looked at in terms of approaches with domestic violence. Is there anything that stands out to you that the office is, you know, taking a look at and considering?

Ms. Petroski: — Well I mean, we're working with all of our FPT [federal-provincial-territorial] members. And especially being the Co-Chair of the coming FPT meetings, we are very heavily involved with their gender-based violence national action plan. And people are being asked to bring forward, you know, best practice approaches that they have done in their communities, and so we'll have a better sense towards the middle of this year hopefully of what that looks like.

But with the gender-based violence national action plan, they're actually just building out the pillars right now. And they did put

some funding in the federal government towards building this national action plan right now, so there's nothing that has been . . . no actions have been agreed to yet. They've talked a lot about public awareness, which is already what we're working on here in Saskatchewan.

I would say one of the best practices that has come forward that other jurisdictions are looking at is Clare's Law, which we have done here in Saskatchewan. And so actually Alberta's looking at that as well. And so there are a few things that other jurisdictions have been involved with that, yes, that we're sharing best practices across Canada.

Ms. Bowes: — Great. So it's a bit more exploratory at this stage is what you're saying.

Ms. Petroski: — Exactly. Yes.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay. And so then I'm not sure, maybe this is too early to say at this point, but I'm curious to know if any funding has been allocated towards the objectives for Saskatchewan. Has it gotten that far or not quite yet?

Ms. Petroski: — Well actually the Aboriginal Friendship Centres of Saskatchewan, their Honouring Her Spark project touches on every single task team's sort of outcomes and measures what they're trying to do. So there's a task team that's focused on economic prosperity and participation, which is actually one that Saskatchewan leads. And that is one of the outcome measures for the Honouring Her Spark program.

There's a GBA+, a gender-based analysis plus, task team, and Aboriginal Friendship Centres is using that analysis tool to look at their policies and practice, not just with themselves but other jurisdictions. It is based on gender-based violence, their project, which is one of the task teams, as well as leadership which is working with a coalition of women.

So we are actually looking at that and moving forward as well as the Make It Our Business training, online training which is a huge component of gender-based violence because as we know a lot of women who are experiencing gender-based . . . or domestic violence, and probably gender-based in some areas, would rather just leave their job and go somewhere else than have to deal with exposing what they're going through to their bosses or to others. It's just easier. And so having this training will impact a lot more than just having the online training, right. So it speaks to the gender-based violence part of it as well.

Ms. Bowes: — Just one more question about the training. Is this training intended specifically or exclusively for employers or is it . . .

Ms. Petroski: — Employers and employees. So it's meant as far as . . . Whoever wants to take it is welcome to at the end of the day with a cost.

Ms. Bowes: — Right. Okay, moving on a little bit. It had been mentioned that federal funding for shelters was coordinated by the Status of Women office. So just getting into that a bit more, I'm wondering what work is being undertaken by the Status of Women office to address the fact that Saskatchewan has the highest rates of domestic violence in Canada? I mean, I know

that's quite a broad question.

You've touched on a few different things. But I guess specifically I'm wondering, is the development of a provincial action plan to address violence against women being considered by the office, like similar to plans that have been developed in Ontario and BC [British Columbia]?

Ms. Petroski: — Not specifically. Well we released in 2019 the interpersonal violence and abuse response paper to the domestic violence death review. And in that we made a number of . . . We attached it to a number of different pillars and looked at a number of different actions that we were taking and what our goal was to move forward. And we really used that paper as a guide to continue moving forward with the actions that we have invested in over the last years.

And we did actually invest after that paper or close to after that paper . . . was in the Philadelphia Model or the Victim Advocate Case Review, which has just wound up. In that pilot project, and as well again in Aboriginal Friendship Centres of Saskatchewan and the PATHS and we've done a number of different things to work with . . . I'm also on the STOPS to Violence advisory committee for their collective impact committee.

And so there's a number of things that we're working with our community partners but also with our ministry partners. Shelters falls under, as you know, the Ministry of Justice, Attorney General, and Corrections and Policing, under their community safety well-being area. And so we work really closely with them and did work very closely with them during COVID. We had calls with them, as well as Social Services, to ensure that everybody who needed a house, who was seeking emergency shelter, any woman received that.

Ms. Bowes: — Thanks. From what I have been told, approximately 3,000 women were turned away from YWCA [Young Women's Christian Association] Regina last year alone due to lack of beds. And from also, you know, additionally what I've been told YWCA Saskatoon has reported that they're forced to turn away 150 to 200 women per month due to lack of beds.

I'm also aware that there have been no meaningful increases to funding for shelters over the last decade, and my understanding is that the provincial government has not provided any additional emergency funding to shelters throughout the pandemic. So I guess based on that, I would like to know a bit more specifically what work the Status of Women office has undertaken with other ministries on this front.

Ms. Petroski: — Okay. So as you're probably aware, we don't fund programs and services ongoing, and we have never funded shelters. That is within Justice and the community safety and well-being area. However what I can say is I do know that those officials have been in continuous contact with the shelters. I can't speak to the numbers because I don't have those numbers, and nobody has spoken to me about those because they're not in our area.

But what I do know also from the funding that they did receive, because we did help make the connections with the shelters to Women and Gender Equality Canada, was that the agencies did receive approximately \$32,000. And I believe that was in May of

last year — May, June maybe — to help with COVID implications.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay. \$32,000 broken down how?

Ms. Petroski: — Sorry?

[16:45]

Ms. Bowes: — How was the \$32,000 broken down?

Ms. Petroski: — I believe it was just given to each shelter.

Ms. Bowes: — Yes, okay.

Ms. Petroski: — Yes, but I don't know. I'm not 100 per cent sure how. I wouldn't be able to speak to other than that.

Ms. Bowes: — Great. Okay, thanks. I'm wondering too, then, have any recommendations or studies been presented to ministries or cabinet on expanding shelter resources that women and children depend on in Saskatchewan?

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — Well again, that's not within our ministry, and so those questions would probably best be directed to the Ministry of Justice. Okay?

Ms. Bowes: — Right. Sorry, I understand the funding doesn't come from the office, but . . .

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — Yes, but that's within their purview, so those questions would be best directed to them.

Ms. Bowes: — Sure, and I certainly can do that. But unless — correct me if I'm wrong — but is it not within the purview of the Status of Women office to make those sorts of recommendations or to undertake studies that, you know, would have an impact on something so integral to women's security in Saskatchewan? Or am I incorrect?

Ms. Petroski: — It would be . . . if we were asked to do that, then we would do it. And so from what I can tell you over the last year, I have been in connection, again, very closely working with our ministry partners with Justice. And so I would again recommend that you talk with them about that, because it is within their area.

Ms. Bowes: — Thanks. Now I know, I mean we've just covered this, and I know the funding, you know, your office isn't responsible for it. But the Government of Saskatchewan does not provide funding to second-stage shelters in Saskatchewan despite, from what I've, you know, been advised that they're associated with very positive outcomes. So I'm curious to know what the position of the Status of Women office is on the lack of funding. And I mean, do you think that that is something that should be funded in our province?

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — There again, as we have stated before, shelters, that is within the Ministry of Justice. So second-stage housing would be best discussed with Minister Wyant to have that, you know? Like I'm not sure if you've had an opportunity to have him in committee, but that would probably be a very good opportunity for you to be able to have that discussion with him,

because that is not within the Status of Women office.

Ms. Bowes: — Yes. No, I appreciate that. I understand that funding is not within your purview. But you know, you did say one of the core focuses is interpersonal violence, and I mean this does fall squarely within that. So I won't go any further with that, but I guess I'd like to bring that to your attention. I mean that's what I'm hearing from shelters across Saskatchewan is that this is something that's very much needed. We're I think one of a few provinces that do not provide funding, and it's something that is being called for by advocates across the province.

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — Well thank you very much for bringing it to our attention. And that's what, to be honest, that's what your job is as the critic to ensure that you're out there collecting that kind of information, talking to women, talking to women organizations, finding out, you know, where needs are met or not being met. So thank you very much for doing that.

Ms. Bowes: — Sure. Another question I have related to domestic violence and it sort of . . . it'll build off something that was mentioned earlier about funding from the Status of Women office for transportation for survivors. I'm wondering what has been done to make up for the loss of STC [Saskatchewan Transportation Company] in terms of ensuring women fleeing domestic violence have a safe way to do so and don't have to resort to unsafe methods such as hitchhiking.

Which again, just to mention, this is something that is a recurring theme when I talk to women's organizations across the province is that especially since the loss of STC, that's left a real gap for women especially in rural and remote areas where they're often, you know, without an option to get out of the situation, physically escape the situation that they're in. So I mean if you can comment on that and just elaborate a bit on the funding for transportation of survivors, that would be great.

Ms. Petroski: — As you guessed, yes, same as you said. It isn't within our funding. And so what I do know is, you know, the Ministry of Justice does provide funding through the northern transportation initiative support services, I believe it's called. And so they do have resources for women who are fleeing domestic violence, especially in the North, to get to safer space.

Ms. Bowes: — Great. It's not under your office but just curious if you know, is that on a case-by-case basis, like women or people would have to apply?

Ms. Petroski: — From what I know about the initiative, it is based on . . . It would be a referral from a service. So if somebody reported to the police or to somebody else, then they would be able to receive transportation. But again, I don't want to speak to something that I don't have all of the information on and give you false information.

The Chair: — Go ahead, Mr. Ottenbreit.

Mr. Ottenbreit: — Mr. Chair, I just point out, although these subjects are all very important to a lot of different people throughout the province and the different ministries, they aren't the purview of the minister and, although her opinion is very important, they don't really pertain to the budget or to the estimates that we're discussing tonight. So I'd just ask the

member to stay on subject with the pertinent information that pertains to the minister's portfolio.

The Chair: — Thank you, Member Ottenbreit. And I'll just remind Ms. Bowes just to . . . We're here for estimates so, as best you can, stay on the estimates. Thank you.

Ms. Bowes: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll try my best but, as I mentioned, there was not a lot of public-facing information out there for me to base my line of questioning on. So I will do my best, and thank you for that.

Within the Status of Women office, has a plan been developed to ensure that the government's pandemic recovery will address the disproportionate impact that COVID has had on women? Will there be recommendations, for instance, to different ministries on how the government could best handle and navigate the pandemic recovery for women?

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — Well if we're going to be talking about women who own businesses, they had the opportunity within Minister Harrison's office to apply for some relief, financial relief during COVID. And there was different tranches that were available because I think, as we stated, a lot of our women in Saskatchewan are entrepreneurs. They own their own business. They really do create a real economic backbone for our province.

And so we know that a lot of them were financially . . . They had to figure either how to pivot to be able to provide to their clients and their customers maybe in a different way, but also financially they were stressed. So they were able to apply to that ministry to be able to, through Minister Harrison's office, to be able to obtain some additional funding to help them through the COVID.

Ms. Bowes: — Thanks. I guess part of . . . I mean as we all know, you know, part of the pandemic recovery has so much to do with child care. We've seen and I've heard — I'm sure you have heard as well — that there is so many, not just women but predominately women, who are making really difficult choices, especially when, you know, school is moved online for periods of time to really be able to juggle maintaining their job and having child care. So I'm wondering if your office will be making any recommendations specifically around child care in the pandemic recovery.

Ms. Petroski: — Our office, really one of the biggest things is that, again, we work very closely with our partners as the minister has stated, and we will be working when invited to work with our ministry partners when it comes to the child care file, for sure

Ms. Bowes: — Okay. And I'm sorry, this is an amateur question I'm sure, but I just don't know how this all works. So is it normally that other ministries approach your office? Or can it go both ways? Or how does that usually work?

Ms. Petroski: — It can go both ways, definitely. Yes, we're a bridge and a connector. We really try to work with our partners in bridging those connections with external stakeholders, but also bringing information. Like I said, we have our indicators project that we provide information and we're in constant contact with different areas to gather information. And so they're aware of what we do and we're very much aware of the files that they're working on that impact women. And so it goes both ways, for

sure.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay. I'm wondering what actions or recommendations have been made from the Status of Women office to address the 231 steps outlined in the MMIWG [missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls] final report. Just curious to know if there's been any engagement with Government Relations, Justice, Corrections, Health, Social Services by your office.

Ms. Petroski: — Yes, we've actually been working very closely with Justice and Government Relations. Justice does lead the file and has led it for the past, I'm going to say, five years or so when the stakeholder engagements began when they were writing the paper on the Calls for Justice. And so they have been really leading this file, but Government Relations, the Status of Women office, and Justice are working closely together.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay.

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — I'd like to kind of include something. Like the Government of Saskatchewan supports the federal government's national action plan on missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and has inter-ministerial working groups that we dedicate to responding to this important issue. And this working group, like I said, is led by the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General.

But earlier today we had an excellent meeting on this exact topic with both the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Government Relations, talking about how we can go forward, how we can ensure that this is being addressed. Last year the Status of Women office invested 47,000 into the Aboriginal Friendship Centres, so Honouring Her Spark program.

So these are some of the things that we, you know, learning from the community, taking the lessons learned, and also then like I say, working with the other two ministries to advance this. So it's something that . . . It's an ongoing partnership with the other ministries, and like I said, the Status of Women office signed a joint declaration to support the federal government's national action plan to end gender-based violence.

Ms. Bowes: — Great. So the Honouring Her Spark project, yes, I mean that sounds wonderful. Are you able to elaborate at all on any of the conversations you've been having with other ministries about what actions are taken to address the steps? Like can you tell me some of what those actions might be?

Ms. Petroski: — Yes. Actually if you just want to give me one second to pull up a document, if that's okay. You always think you put everything and make it easy to find, and then . . . So we've been working with the Ministry of Justice all the way along. A number of times we've been asked to put together lists of what the different ministries across Saskatchewan have been doing to work on this file.

[17:00]

And so the public awareness campaign is also one of those ones that addresses one of the actions, right, in public awareness and education, as well as looking at things like Clare's Law, like the five days' paid leave, like the victim advocate case review. Those

are all things as well that look at the actions because they look at the safety of women, as well as address some of the issues that impact the safety of women in Saskatchewan.

You know, and as well Health expanded the sexual assault nurse examiner course as well, and they continue to look to do so and were provided funding to do so last year. And so those are important features because, of course, people in the North had to travel quite far distances to get services, and they're looking at how they better support victims of sexual assault in different ways like that.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay, thank you. Moving on to . . .

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — You know, I should include in here, when this is all said and done, COVID, and you have an opportunity, it would be a good opportunity for you to be able to speak to some of the same nurses, because they . . . Like, I know a couple years ago I had an opportunity to tour the improvements in the emergency at the Pasqua. And they had designed and dedicated a room for women who had been sexually . . . well people, right, individuals who have been sexually assaulted, as before it was just curtains, right. So they finally, you know, designed a room that would allow the nurse, the same nurse to be able to go in there and do the examination in a very respectful way, but also to ensure that the findings were not contaminated.

So it was very enlightening and very . . . but like I said, very disturbing when you realize that at that point we knew we needed to hire more nurses and train more nurses in this. So I feel really pleased that in this budget we did put more money in Health, put more money into being able to train more nurses because, like, this is so needed.

I don't know if you saw that W5 program where they talked about this issue across Canada and especially young girls who have to get on a plane and travel, you know, fly for hours to be able to have a test done. And it was like . . . The inspection, it was just very traumatic, especially for young girls in the North who maybe have never been on a plane and never left their parents.

So like, you know, we've kind of come a long way in a lot of respects. We have a long way to go. We still have more work to do, but it was a really good opportunity to be able to see the kind of work and the dedication. Like it takes a very special person to be able to walk any individual who has been sexually assaulted through the whole test. And like, gosh, my hat goes off to them, because they are doing absolutely incredible work. So to be able to provide more funding for the education so that we have more of those nurses — excellent.

Ms. Bowes: — Thank you. Moving on to a different topic, I know you've probably all heard me in the House speaking to this already and, sorry to get at it again, but what better place. The Government of Saskatchewan has not yet implemented pay equity legislation, even though Saskatchewan women are still making, I think the most recent statistics are, on average 85 cents in Saskatchewan for every dollar compared to men. Saskatchewan women are also concentrated still in industries related with their traditional gender roles. And I appreciate your comments about STEM, but notwithstanding that.

The Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission prohibits

discrimination on the basis of a prohibited ground, which includes gender, with respect to the terms and conditions of employment, which includes wages. Some jurisdictions have established true pay equity legislation regulatory schemes for assigning value to various jobs and requiring non-discriminatory pay scales for jobs that are equivalent in value. And the commission's also recognized that pay equity is crucial to women achieving equality.

In its code review report, *Renewing the Vision* — and I actually asked the staff of the library to pull this for me. I couldn't find it online and it saddened me to know that this report is 25 years old. But in this report, the commission recommended that comprehensive, proactive pay equity legislation be enacted in Saskatchewan. It recommended that a separate, specialized agency, a pay equity commission, be responsible for administering pay equity legislation in Saskatchewan.

So I guess I'm curious, like, what sort of work has been done with the Status of Women office on this front? Is it something that is on your radar? Is it something that is under consideration or review by your office? And do you have a position on the absence of this legislation in Saskatchewan?

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — Well I'll state that, in fact, I know the Minister of Labour has answered that question both in the House, in question period, and also in his committee estimates to state that in fact, no, he was not considering that newer legislation but that equal pay legislation does exist in Saskatchewan. However, within the Status of Women, I have asked for an interjurisdictional scan to be undertaken to see exactly what other provinces and territories are doing. So we're not sitting on our hands just kind of going, yes okay, but in fact are looking to see exactly what other provinces and territories have done and then also looking and saying, how effective are they? Okay?

Ms. Bowes: — That's great to hear. And I mean certainly I know what the answers have been from the Minister of Labour. I did want to speak to you directly about it, though, in your role and I'm encouraged to hear that you've asked for that scan. I think that's a great first step and I'll be interested to chat with you further about it as that moves along.

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — Well we're not going to just rush right through it and say yes, job done, because we want to do an in-depth look to see exactly, what have they done? Or did they just, you know, like you say, put lipstick on a pig, you know. We want to know exactly what have they done, what are the outcomes and lessons learned, right. So that's what I've asked the Status of Women office to undertake, so that any decisions that are being made are made on facts, not fiction.

Ms. Bowes: — That's prudent. And thank you for letting me know that. I guess just a few comments around that. I'll try not to go on and on. I'll save it for petitions. But, you know, I know for myself, prior to being elected I represented workers in health care across the province, and health care is, you know, predominantly women — of course, not exclusively. But you know, there's workers like . . . I represented continuing care aids who I think we can all by now surely recognize are providing such important service to people, some of the most vulnerable people in our province, to our elderly and especially during the pandemic some of the most vulnerable.

And so it's professions like that, right, that are almost exclusively held by women and, you know, they're not paid enough money. I know that from my work as a union rep representing CCAs [continuing care aid] like there's real issues with recruitment and retention, and it's a real problem. And I think we can all agree that, you know, the seniors in our province deserve the best care. And I think part of the equation there, it really is, and it comes down to pay equity because we need to make sure that that work is valued appropriately in terms of compensation.

Just like one other quick example is early childhood educators, same thing. I mean they're looking after everyone's kids as they're going to work during normal times but now during a pandemic. And it's extremely valuable work, but I don't think it's being recognized in what these women, almost exclusively women, are being paid.

And so that's why I go on and on about it. You know, that's why I bring it every day in a petition, is because it really is important. I'm not trying to be a pain in the butt here. It's just — and I'm sure I am but — you know, it's just . . . I think it's a really key component to achieving and working towards true gender equality in our province.

And thank you for filling me in a little bit on your considerations there. I do appreciate it.

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — Well you know, and I guess that's why I feel it's so important. And this is where we all have a role as elected representatives and especially female elected representatives. If we have the opportunity to talk to our young girls, not wait till they're in high school, just to ask them to really seriously look at charting their course for careers.

You know, when I was very little, it was a choice. Oh, what do you want to be when you grow up? And it was like, ah, well would you like to be a teacher or a nurse or a secretary? Not that I have anything against those, but that was automatically assumed that that's what you would be when you grow up as a woman. That's no longer the case anymore and I think it's really important that we set the example. I always say, if you can see it you can be it. And we need our young girls to be able to see that they've got choices, right.

To me when we talk about positions that are mostly dominated by women or men, I think we need to break down those barriers. I think a perfect world for us is when that's no longer . . . the idea of women's work, that isn't even in anybody's vocabulary anymore, right. If that's what you want to do and that's what you're passionate about, go ahead and do it. But I think we need to ensure that we, especially our young girls, learn that they need to explore.

You know, I've spent some time during COVID doing online meetings and also workshops with the Saskatchewan Science Centre. And they've pivoted to doing things online. And they did a couple of coding classes for really young girls and then teenage girls. And so I had the opportunity to present to both groups of young girls, and it was a really good opportunity. You know, there's bad things that's happened with COVID and good things. The good thing is that they have done now these programs virtually, so now there isn't a geographical boundary of who can attend these classes, but in fact now it's open to all of our girls in

the province.

And so it was a really good opportunity for them to experience and look at new . . . charting their course for their professions. But it was a really good opportunity for me as an elected person to be able to talk to these young girls and the young women about the importance of women in leadership, the importance of women in elected office.

And I'm not sure if you know, but I was Chair of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians. And you remember. Every woman that's elected both provincially and federally have an opportunity . . . are members. And our main objective there . . . and it's apolitical, right? So it's non-partisan. And what it is, is the whole mandate is to encourage more women to seek public office, because when we have more women sitting around the decision-making table, I think better decisions are being made.

So I encourage you to participate by going out and talking to young women about the importance of leadership, the importance of public service. Because sometimes this job can make you crazy, but there's no greater gift that we can give to our young girls to show them some leadership.

Ms. Bowes: — Yes, I mean I couldn't agree more. I think, you know, leadership and representation is very important, and we have a long ways to go here in our province and really across Canada in ensuring that there's, you know, equitable, equal representation of women in decision-making capacities, including as politicians. And I certainly do talk to women often about it.

But I just want to actually recognize what both you and your predecessor have done in terms of encouraging women's involvement in STEM. I do think that's really important. I think you're very right with that. But I don't think it's the whole answer. And I think, you know, it's going to take a while, as you said, before we get to a point in society, whether consciously or not, where we look at a job and we say wow, you know, that's a man's job or that's a woman's job.

I mean we see it play out, as I said, especially in the caring professions. And I think that's such a tragic thing because some of the most important work that can be done in our society is through the caring professions, and yet many of those jobs are very poorly paid.

[17:15]

So I think you're right. We need to make sure that there's opportunities for women to participate in non-traditional fields. But I think in doing that, we need to not lose sight that that's not the whole answer, I guess, and that there will always be women who are working, especially in some of the lowest paid jobs in our society. And we need to make sure that the work that they do is valued equally compared to some of the traditional male jobs like, say a trucker versus a continuing care aid.

I mean all workers are important. All work is important. But I think that analysis and that kind of ongoing analysis through something like a pay equity commission would really help and dovetail well with some of the initiatives that your government has undertaken.

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — And that's why we've asked for the scan to be undertaken and Mari is going to ensure that this is comprehensive so that then good decisions can be made.

Ms. Bowes: — Right. Thank you. So we've talked a little bit about this, but a bit more specifically on a different topic. What work is being undertaken by the Status of Women office to address the fact that Saskatchewan has among the highest rates of sexual assault in Canada? You had referenced earlier the Philadelphia model and the pilot project that has been undertaken in part by your office, I believe since 2019 is when it started.

And I noticed, just from what I was able to find around this project, it was intended to be a 17-month project. And you said the report has been received just in January. Is that report publicly available? Is it . . . No, okay.

And then you'd mentioned too the pilot was a success and that it's going to be continued in other areas in Saskatchewan. And I was just curious to know where it will be extended to outside of Regina, if that's been decided.

Ms. Petroski: — Yes, so that will fall under Justice again, and they can provide information if they've made a decision in that area as to where it will be expanded. But I can talk about some of the success that we did see with this one, and I don't think that Chief Bray or Lisa Miller, who is the Regina Sexual Assault Centre's executive director, would mind me sharing some of the information.

But really they started the pilot . . . Even though it was supposed to start in May, there was some privacy things that they had to work out within the legislation to allow for the Regina Sexual Assault Centre to come in and review files. So it actually started in September, reviewing the case files. And they reviewed over 200 files, I believe. I don't have the exact number in my head right now, but they reviewed over 200 files and provided recommendations to the Regina Police Service. And really what they found was that relationship, number one, between the Regina Police Service and the Regina Sexual Assault was a really positive one in being able to allow an outside agency of experts to come in and review files, which can be quite intimidating for anybody who allows somebody just to come in and have access to all of your stuff, right?

But what they did, you know . . . I know that Chief Bray has already implemented some of the recommendations that were made, including with regards to some processes, some investigating processes, some training, and how they keep forensic data, I believe. But they did, yes, but both agencies found that it was a success for them.

Ms. Bowes: — Great. Are any of those recommendations publicly available?

Ms. Petroski: — We will be doing a summary of those recommendations, and so we'd have spoken to them. And so they will be making them available as the Regina Police Service sees fit, as it is there. It does affect them.

Ms. Bowes: — Yes. Yes, I'll look forward to hearing more about that. And then I noticed too that there was, I believe, a total of \$122,000 in funding for the pilot project, and that that was

provided from both your office and the Ministry of Corrections and Policing. And I was just curious as to the breakdown of the funding.

Ms. Petroski: — We provided them \$47,000.

Ms. Bowes: — Right. Sorry, I think you said that earlier. Apologies. Okay, and then this is a bit of a different topic but somewhat related. There's been, I guess, in my consultations with stakeholders, one of the things that has really stuck out to me as a theme as something that's really crucial to alleviating our issues with sexual violence in this province on a long-term, systemic basis is having mandatory curriculum around consent. And my understanding is that that doesn't exist in Saskatchewan currently. But I'm just wondering what the position of your office is on that and if that's something that's being explored as a potential avenue for addressing the extremely high rates of sexual violence we have in Saskatchewan.

Ms. Petroski: — Education would be the one to ask because they are the ones who formulate the curriculum.

Ms. Bowes: — Yes. No, for sure. And I understand that's under Education, but I guess my understanding is that, you know, you can proactively make recommendations to different ministries. And that was I guess my question here, is if that is something that is being considered as something you may proactively look at approaching the Ministry of Education on.

Ms. Petroski: — Like I mean, we have our inter-ministerial committee on interpersonal violence and abuse and Education does sit around that table. And so we do have conversations, given the public awareness campaign and that education is a really important piece of how we inform. I know that Education does have some relationship curriculum, and I can't again speak to that because I don't know the full extent and I'm not as knowledgeable in that area for sure. And I do recognize that different schools have the ability to bring in Education. So as far as that is, that's as far as I can speak to that at this moment.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay. Thank you very much, and just it would be great if it's something that your office, you know, considered, if you could take a look at it. It's something that the women's organizations around sexual assault in Saskatchewan that I've spoken to, that's something that is coming up as a really key component of how we can address the high rates of sexual violence in Saskatchewan on a fundamental basis. So I have . . .

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — I'd just like to interject here a little bit. You know, the Minister Christine Tell and myself have since 2008 hosted a self-esteem workshop for girls and their moms. And every year we have hundreds of girls and their moms attend. Last year of course we did it virtually because we weren't able to do it in person.

But there was a . . . We bring in like police officers to talk to our moms and our girls about the importance of being safe, but also online. We also talk to and have people talk to them about the importance of being comfortable with yourself, not allowing yourself to be bullied or maybe put into a situation where in fact you are then very vulnerable to sexual assault.

And it's absolutely, it's probably one of the most rewarding

things that I've had the opportunity to do because also it educates not just the girls but their moms, to ensure that they respect themselves, that they develop a strong self-esteem, which then helps immensely with not allowing themselves to be put into a situation where you are very susceptible.

Ms. Petroski: — We also think, if it's okay for me to add one more thing, is the public awareness campaign is really focused on changing behaviour, sort of changing the behaviour and the culture around interpersonal violence. And we look at it as sexual assault, domestic violence, and gender-based violence are the three major ones.

And so some of that is, is because some of the complexity around it is huge, right, and in different areas. And you're looking at geographical differences as well in Saskatchewan and what people are dealing with across Saskatchewan and the complexity of that.

So really part of that public awareness campaign is to talk to reducing the rate of interpersonal violence, including sexual violence and abuse in Saskatchewan, to create a safer future for women in Saskatchewan and to promote really an individual and community involvement in the effort, so saying that's it's everybody's responsibility that we need to address this issue and look at it and educate in that way.

Ms. Bowes: — Thanks. I just want to speak a bit to your comments, Minister. I think — and I say this with all due respect — I think that is part of the problem, right? And that's such a part of the problem is we're treating this as though the onus is on girls and women to keep themselves safe and, you know, to have high enough self-esteem so that they're not going to get abused. But that's not the way this works. It's just not. And I think part of shifting those attitudes and norms in our society is, you know, holding the people responsible that should be held responsible for this, and women are not responsible ever for being abused. And I know that's not what you meant.

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — No, that's not what I meant, and so I will elaborate on that. I think youth, strong girls, and strong women, they push back more. I'm not saying that it's acceptable. And I think our video is very, very strong messaging in locker talk, all of those sort of things. No, I think that it's really important that we have strong women and strong girls because we know women are much more susceptible in the interpersonal violence to be the ones who end up being hurt.

If we can do . . . Every little bit we can do to make women stronger and our girls stronger so that they know when to say no, they know when to leave, I think that's really important. I think that's a basis of women making sure that they keep themselves in a much safer position, that they have respect for themselves, that they don't fall under the . . . that they have the opportunity to walk away.

I mean, we have Clare's Law. There's a really good example of a woman who . . . They can find out, is this person that I'm thinking of entering into a relationship a strong person, a bad person? We never had that kind of information before. We have the ability now to be able to do things like this. We have the . . . You know, for women fleeing horrible situations, they can now break their lease. That was really big. Because a lot of times

women would just say, well you know what, I have to stay here. No, you don't.

And those are the kind of things . . . Are they big steps? No. But there are all these steps that we need to take to make sure that we're moving in the right direction.

Ms. Bowes: — Mm-hmm. I mean, don't get me wrong. I mean I think things like Clare's Law are crucial, and I think this was a game changer for women. And again, I do commend your government for, as I understand, being the first in Canada on Clare's Law. It's not inconsequential.

But I do have to stand by what I said. I really do hope that the focus will not be on making sure that girls and women respect themselves and know when to walk away and know when to say no, because that's just not the reality of what's happening here. It's just not. I'm sorry. Like if you're in the middle of being sexually assaulted, I'm going to assume nine times out of ten you don't have the option of just walking away, right?

So I guess what I'm saying and what I'm getting at with, you know, talking about curriculum around consent, is changing the attitudes and norms in our society where it's not acceptable for men to abuse women. That's where we need to be putting the focus. And you know, I'm not saying some of these other things . . . You know, teaching girls and women to be strong and stand up for themselves, of course it's great. But the responsibility is not on women to fix this problem and . . .

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — I never said that.

Ms. Bowes: — No, and I know you didn't say that, but . . .

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — Like I mean I don't want to be confrontational, but I'm just saying like these things go hand in hand. They do.

Ms. Bowes: — Well . . .

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — Does that mean that any struggle wouldn't end up being in a bad situation? Absolutely not. That's not what I said.

[17:30]

Ms. Bowes: — Okay. Well I think, moving on, I have been speaking to a number of women's groups and health care providers across the province about access to abortion in Saskatchewan. And again, one of the themes I just wanted to bring up was, I'm hearing over and over again that, especially in rural and remote areas, that's where there's a particular struggle in access. And I know even in Saskatoon and Regina there are differing policies around, you know, a woman's ability to access abortion and at which stage. And so I'm curious to know just if your office has looked at this issue at all or if it's something that is under consideration. Again I know, you know, it falls under Health, but of course it is an issue, reproductive health generally, that is crucial for women. And I wanted to know your thoughts on that.

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — As you stated in your answer, this is within the Ministry of Health.

Ms. Bowes: — Yes, I understand that. You know, we kind of keep going around in circles on this, right? But abortion is a women's issue. It's an issue of women's equality. And so therefore, you know, I mean it does fall under the Status of Women office as an issue that is of importance to women, an issue that affects their lives, and frankly, an issue that has implications for women's equality, as I'm sure you know.

So I mean, if the answer is that the office isn't looking at issues around this, that's fine. I'm not trying to trap you in any way by the question. I'm just honestly curious.

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — Well no, it's not a trap. Like you said, "I don't want to trap you." No, I mean, I think that that question would be well put to the Minister of Health because I think they've done a fairly good job of ensuring that women have the right to choose in Saskatchewan. And we have no intention of changing that.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay, thank you. Another issue that's been coming up an awful lot for me in this . . . the role of critic here has been, again, around reproductive health and around access to midwifery services in the province. And again, I know it falls under Health, but I again, I mean I think . . . Correct me if I'm wrong, but I assume part of, you know . . . I would hope part of the reason for these meetings is that so that we can actually communicate on the issues that are out there and the issues that I'm hearing about.

So I understand, speaking to the Midwives Association . . . And we actually reached out and created a website open to women, people, families across Saskatchewan to let us know their experiences with attempting to access midwifery services. And I do want to flag it.

Again, I don't need a hard answer from you around that. But it's something that I want to bring to your attention, because my understanding is not only is it an option that many women and families would like to have in this province, but it's also extremely cost-effective.

And you know, certainly I can bring it up with the Minister of Health at a later date as well, but it would seem to me that there is just really no downside to expanding midwifery services in the province. So I just want to flag that for you. I'm sure it will come up again. But part of that is the funding of a midwifery education program in Saskatchewan, especially in terms of the ability to recruit and retain midwives, which I understand there's been some difficulty with in Saskatchewan.

But it really does come down to, you know, a woman having the right to choose the services that she would like to have for giving birth to her children. You know, there's implications in terms of continuity of care that are really important to women in our province. And I just wanted to bring that one to your attention. If you did have something to add to that I'd be happy to, be happy to . . .

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — No, I don't have anything to add to that. And I don't want to just say, okay, well there you go. You have to talk to the Minister of Health. However, thank you very much for bringing it to our attention.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay, I think I'm going to get a bit more on topic here, hopefully for what you would like me to be asking. So looking specifically at some of the documents I did have available to me, the Status of Women office mandate states that "The Office acts as a catalyst within government to raise awareness of issues affecting women to ensure gender considerations are integrated into government policy-making, legislation and program development."

I wonder if you would please provide the committee with an overview of the awareness-raising initiatives the office has undertaken. And I certainly know with interpersonal violence, and you listed . . . I think you quickly listed a few others earlier on.

Ms. Petroski: — Well I guess the WESK advisory committee would be another example, because that paper was released in June of . . . or at the end of July, sorry, of 2020. And right now ICT [Immigration and Career Training], trade, export and development . . . I guess Immigration and Career Training — sorry, I shouldn't use acronyms — and Innovation Saskatchewan and the Status of Women office are working together to look at those recommendations, which is a really great thing.

We've also again worked with, like I said again, with Government Relations and Justice on the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls file. Through our ICAP, which is the inter-ministerial committee advancing women's policy — it's kind of a big one — we talk to our ministry partners. It's made up of policy advisors, directors, and executive directors from all across Saskatchewan. And what we do is we talk to them about not only what the office is working on, but hear from them what they're seeing in their different areas. I was invited to a conversation at Ministry of Highways recently to talk about some of the impacts of gender within their area.

And so we do quite a bit of talking with our ministry partners as well as stakeholders, but mostly when we're talking about obviously being a catalyst to bring things forward. That is how we do that work.

Ms. Bowes: — Thanks. And then within the same document the goals are outlined of your office, and the goals are listed as increasing women's economic prosperity and eliminating interpersonal violence and abuse in Saskatchewan. I guess my first question is, are there goals outside of these two? I mean, I understand these are your, the two main focuses, but can you maybe explain why those two were selected as the main focuses, and if there are others that your office focuses on additionally?

Ms. Petroski: — Well as you can imagine, women integrate into every single area of life, right? And so ensuring that we can have actual measurable outcomes, you have to be able to focus in some areas to have some specific goals so you can achieve and attain them. And so covering off women's economic prosperity and participation, that covers a number of different areas which can include entrepreneurship, which can include women in the economy, which can include, you know, the gender pay gap and different areas like that, right? And leadership, if I didn't say that.

And then looking at interpersonal violence and abuse, that covers off, you know, missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls file, the gender-based violence section, and sexual assault

and domestic violence and all of those areas. So within themselves, those are just sort of the overarching titles, but they're kind of the umbrella titles for larger portfolios and outcomes. We obviously have a number of different things that come our way here and there, but those are the ones that we kind of, that we identify as where we want to produce some measurable outcomes so that we can be accountable to the people of Saskatchewan.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay, great. So just one topic that you touched on, the gender pay gap. What work has been done by your office around the gender pay gap specifically?

Ms. Petroski: — Well I would say that would be specific to looking at the advisory committee report is one of them. Obviously looking at scaling up women entrepreneurs is one of those things that we're looking at.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay. And anything else on that specific topic, or is it mainly focused around entrepreneurship?

Ms. Petroski: — Yes, it's mainly focused right now on entrepreneurship. The Aboriginal Friendship Centres of Saskatchewan, they identify one of their outcomes as women's economic participation and so that would be one of it too.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay, great. And I know you've already addressed some of these, but are there any other initiatives that are being undertaken by your office to address domestic violence rates in Saskatchewan aside from what's been covered or . . . You've got all of them? Okay, great.

Okay, so moving on in the same document, the strategy of the Status of Women office includes identifying and addressing gender equality gaps. What specific gender equality gaps have been identified by your office, and what research has been conducted to this effect? And what reporting has been done on equality indicators? I know we've talked about entrepreneurship.

Ms. Petroski: — Well I think you had touched on it with the STEM field. We did that paper last year that came out in October 2020, and what it really identified is across Canada — and this is something we see with our FPT partners as well — is there isn't really measurable data or statistics that come out often enough to be able to understand where women fit within that field.

And something that I learned is that the STEM field, when you're talking about STEM, you know, there can be over 200 certificate, diploma programs when it comes to STEM, so you say women in STEM field. Our next project is working with our, again, ministry partners and then our external stakeholders on identifying, number one, if we tell women to go into the STEM field, what jobs are going to be available in that field. What programming and services do we have available for them to go into? And of course how does that continuation of support, right from kindergarten all the way through to the end of when you're in a job and you're participating, what does that look like, right?

And so that's one area that we're looking at with indicators, as well as the WESK advisory report. One of their recommendations was to look at women entrepreneurs' scoreboard. And so we're looking again at those recommendations to see where we can do better at looking at

indicators for women in Saskatchewan and even across Canada with our FPT partners.

Ms. Bowes: — Thanks. And then in the same document it has performance measures for women's economic prosperity listed as including the employment rate of Saskatchewan women, the average weekly earnings of Saskatchewan women, and the employment rate of Saskatchewan Indigenous women.

And we heard Minister Morgan speak to this a little bit today in the House, but I was wondering if you could, yourself, if you could speak to me a bit more about those numbers and maybe a bit more background there.

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — In regards to women in the economy, so employment indicators for women in Saskatchewan are positive and on an upward trend, according to Statistics Canada in 2020. The employment rate for women, aged 15 and older, was 56.4 per cent. So it's the highest in Canada and above the national average of 53.9 per cent.

In 2019 the average weekly wage for women in Saskatchewan was \$886.49. So it's the third highest in the provinces. The proportion of Indigenous women working full time in Saskatchewan was 74.9 per cent in 2019 which is above the provincial average of all women working full-time, which is 74.1 per cent.

In 2019 women entrepreneurs contributed over 23 billion to the Saskatchewan economy, creating 191,000 jobs. When Saskatchewan women lead a business, as the minister had stated, they're more than likely to headquarter that business in this province.

One in every eight women employed in Saskatchewan runs her own business, which puts female entrepreneurship in the province above the national average and the fourth-highest among provinces.

[17:45]

In the 2019-2020 academic year, of the 53,000 students enrolled in credential post-secondary programs in Saskatchewan, over 30,000 were female, representing 50 per cent of the total student body. Female students represent more than half of all of the students for several credential types including the master level with over 60 per cent of students, followed by certificates . . . had 59 bachelor degrees. In 2019 over 12,000 graduates of credential post-secondary programs at Saskatchewan public institutions, over 7,000 were female, representing 57 per cent of the graduates.

I can add to that. My husband taught at the University of Regina in biology over 25 years ago when he started teaching there. The cadre of students was male, right. And so he was teaching introductory and upper-level biology. And most of those students were either going in to become doctors, dentists, veterinarians, or in the natural sciences. When he left after teaching there for over 25 years — which was not that long ago; a couple years ago he retired — there was more female students in his classes, in his labs. He said it was the best sight possible. But those are the kind of changes we're seeing. And those are the positive changes we're seeing.

Ms. Bowes: — Thank you. That's good to hear. Also in the document that lists performance measures for interpersonal violence and abuse, and it references the reach of the interpersonal violence and abuse public awareness campaign, and I think you had mentioned earlier that you do have the numbers for that. And I'm curious to know what the numbers are, for example, like for completed views on social media or TV advertisements or other media.

Ms. Petroski: — We actually just had a presentation yesterday so I don't have those numbers readily available. But what I can tell you is that what they stated was that it was some of the highest completed views that they had seen. And with the Cree and Dene having put pins . . . And I guess that's to do with Facebook, pins. I don't know anything about technology, so I apologize.

But you know for them it's sort of new . . . Which was Phoenix — I'm talking about them, sorry — is our contracted company that we went through RFP [request for proposal] to get. They said that this was sort of a new area for them and they saw a lot of interaction in northern communities with this particular video. But they had a high number of views on YouTube and completed views on Instagram stories and different avenues like that. So they were quite impressed with the numbers.

Ms. Bowes: — Good.

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — Did you view the video at all?

Ms. Bowes: — I did.

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — It's really well done. It really speaks to, I think, our province. And it has the opportunity to showcase, you know, a variety of women who had a really good, strong message.

Ms. Bowes: — I guess, I'm not sure if you can answer but, like, how will you be able to measure outcomes from the public awareness campaign? Is there a way to do so other than sort of looking at engagements?

Ms. Petroski: — So this is definitely a conversation that we've had with our partners in this. And it's going to be long-term outcomes when you're measuring complex situations like interpersonal violence and abuse. When you start making changes, like, to cultural change and behaviours and attitudes and belief systems, it can take a while to measure. So we're still developing that measure outside of just views at this point.

What we wanted to gauge is . . . With the first one we wanted to gauge people's interaction and reaction to this kind of a campaign. And it showed us exactly what we needed to know, which is where people require more education in some areas. But also that people are ready to have that conversation with each other, which is really important.

Ms. Bowes: — Thanks. I'm wondering with the specific public awareness campaign, were women's groups across the province consulted on the development of the campaign? Or how did that occur?

Ms. Petroski: — This was part of the interpersonal violence and

abuse paper that we had completed. And so from that, those engagements, we had three different engagements between, I believe it was 2017, prior to when I was in this position, through to 2018. Maybe it was before that — 2016. Sorry, I can't remember the exact date of the first one.

But we have engaged people in a conversation to understand what interpersonal violence and abuse look like in Saskatchewan and get a sense of what was going on, as well as through our conversations that we had ongoing with our stakeholders. We didn't consult with them specifically on this public awareness campaign, but we did take the information that we learned from them to develop it.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay, thanks. And so are there plans to build on this campaign specifically, like specific to this topic? Or is that something that you'll have to assess at a future time?

Ms. Petroski: — Yes, there is plans to continue building. We're in conversations currently so I can't give you more information of what that will look like. But the goal, and especially through our inter-ministerial committee on interpersonal violence and abuse, is to continue all these conversations and building on all the work that we continue to do.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay. And are you able to let me know, like, what is the makeup of that committee? I think you may have mentioned.

Ms. Petroski: — So it's inter-ministerial. So there are our partners from Justice; Attorney General; Justice; Corrections and Policing; Government Relations; Education; Health; Parks, Culture and Sport; and the Status of Women office. And I hope I didn't leave anybody out.

Ms. Bowes: — Great, thanks. And I know that you had mentioned earlier that there's 22 million allocated specifically for interpersonal violence awareness and support. Could you offer a breakdown there?

Ms. Petroski: — Okay. So what I do know of what Justice, because that is with Justice, is the increased funding of \$800,000 — I can't speak to what the rest — will be used to respond to interpersonal violence; interpersonal and domestic violence, including support for a public awareness campaign; the 24-7 interpersonal violence and abuse provincial call line; the development of a family intervention rapid support teams; and expansion of the victims advocate case review initiative. There was also a 1.5 per cent lift for CBO [community-based organization] salaries above and beyond the additional 800,000.

Ms. Bowes: — Okay, thank you.

Ms. Petroski: — So they may have some other things reported under that but I'm not . . . As it's not my budget, I'm not aware of what that might be specifically.

Ms. Bowes: — Oh, okay. And so there's a couple things that are really interesting to me in here. The 24-7 IPV [intimate partner violence] call line, can you tell me a bit more about that and the plans around it?

Ms. Petroski: — Well that is contracted with Justice. What I can

tell you with that is that we did work with 211 with the Face the Issue campaign. They did build a page for us that provided people with information and supports on domestic violence, sexual assault, and interpersonal violence and abuse. And so that side of it is something that we were involved in. On this other side of it, that's specific to Justice.

Ms. Bowes: — And then one of the other things you mentioned was the family intervention rapid support teams. Are you able to elaborate at all on that?

Ms. Petroski: — Unfortunately I'm not. That's part of Justice's and I don't know. And yes, I'm not privy to that information at this time.

Ms. Bowes: — Well I think I should leave a few minutes for your closing remarks, and so I'm going to end my questioning now. Thank you so much. And I'll turn it over to you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: — Thank you, Ms. Bowes. It was enlightening. I certainly appreciate the comments. I'll tell you what, we've got time for one question. If anybody's got one question, we can entertain that. Ms. Wilson.

Ms. Wilson: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Minister, did the move from Advanced Education to Parks, Culture and Sport impact the Status of Women mandate or interrupt their work at all?

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — No, it didn't; it worked out quite well. I think they changed locations, but the cadre of people who work within the Status of Women office did not change. So it did not disrupt the work that was being undertaken by the Status of Women office.

Ms. Wilson: — Thank you.

The Chair: — Any other questions? If not, we can wrap up. Seeing none. Having reached our agreed-upon time for the consideration of estimates for the Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport, we'll now adjourn consideration of estimates for Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport. And thank you, minister and the officials. Do you have any closing comments? And then I'll come back to you.

Hon. Ms. L. Ross: — I do. I want to thank Ms. Bowes for her questions. They were very insightful. And I know she's passionate, the same as I am. I think we work well together because we hold each other up and we make each other accountable for the work we do.

And foremost in our mind is that when each and every one of us get elected to come here, we all come here with the same objective: to serve the people of Saskatchewan. And for the two of us, for her as the critic, for myself as the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women, that's just like right in our windshield. That's exactly where we are focused. And I appreciate the thoughtful discussion, the respectful discussion; I think it was excellent. We had an opportunity to learn from each other. And I want to thank all the officials that were here this evening to be able to accommodate us for the committee meeting.

But also, I really want to thank the people within the Status of Women. Mari has been just a rock star. She's just really made

sure that the support we needed and her knowledge . . . And that's what so important to be able to . . . The question was, what kind of change was there. There wasn't a change. And so we just got to continue on doing the absolutely incredible work that is being undertaken within the Status of Women. What is the . . . I'm trying to think of the quote from Shakespeare, "She be small, but she is mighty." I think that kind of describes the office of the Status of Women.

And that we may not have this huge cadre of people, but we have the ability to work within . . . across ministries, and so we have the ability to really make a difference in the government. Because we get to have the opportunity to share with different ministries and ministers the needs and the wants of what we know that the Status of Women are bringing forward. So, it's a really . . . it's kind of in a unique position because we do get to put the gender lens on legislation that is coming forward, and we get to have the opportunity to make our voices heard.

So I really appreciate the support from the Status of Women and also within the Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport, the officials who also support the Status of Women. So, it's just turned out to be a really . . . it's a good working relationship. And I'm not sure if you heard when I was talking about the senior management within the Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport — they're women. Thumbs up; two thumbs up, absolutely. So I feel very fortunate and very blessed to be able to work with such a wonderful, strong group of women who lift each other up and make sure we are the best we can be.

So with that . . . And I'd also like to thank Carter, he has been very supportive, and Ty who's been managing the back room, and everyone who has helped to prepare us for this evening and supports our ministry fully.

[18:00]

So, it's . . . like I said, I love this file; I think it was made for me. And so I really appreciate your thoughtful, insightful questions for this evening, and we'll all be the better and stronger for it. So thank you so much.

The Chair: — Ms. Bowes, final comments.

Ms. Bowes: — Yes I mean I would like to say the same. I've really appreciated this opportunity. We've never actually met before. It's nice to be able to sit down and have a conversation instead of the yelling and heckling back and forth that happens usually in this space. And so it's refreshing. Thank you for taking the time. Thank you for your candid answers to my questions. As well to you Mari, sorry am I pronouncing correctly?

Ms. Petroski: — Mari.

Ms. Bowes: — Mari. So sorry. I'll get that right. But I want to say I really value the work that is done out of the Status of Women office. I'm so happy to say that we have an office that exists, that is dedicated to looking at issues that are important to women and to work towards equality for women in our province. And I hope we'll be able to have more of these conversations, maybe in a different venue at some point, but appreciate the work that's being done. Thank you so much for undertaking that work and all the best.

The Chair: — Okay thank you so much for the respectful dialogue. It was a good evening. So with that we'll now take a recess to bring in the minister and the officials from Tourism Saskatchewan. Thank you all.

[The committee recessed for a period of time]

The Chair: — So welcome back, everyone. I've got to announce some substitutions. Tim McLeod joins us. Welcome. And Matt Love is substituting for Ms. Betty Nippi-Albright for these estimates.

**General Revenue Fund
Tourism Saskatchewan
Vote 88**

Subvote (TR01)

The Chair: — So we will begin a consideration of vote 88, Tourism Saskatchewan, subvote (TR01). Minister Harrison is here with his official. Minister, please introduce your officials and you can make your opening comments.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Sure well thanks very much, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the committee members for being here this evening. So I think folks who are watching estimates would know from previous ministries that officials are not all in the room, and that's owing to the COVID-19 protocols that we are following to minimize the number of officials that are in person.

So I'm very lucky to have our CEO [chief executive officer] who I'll introduce in just a second. And also we're trying to hold all of these committee meetings in the Chamber, and we have held all of them thus far, and I can speak to that from my House Leader duties.

So on the line, Jonathan Potts executive director of marketing and communications; Tracy Breher, our executive director, destination and workforce development; and Kathy Rintoul, our corporate services executive director as well.

And I think for folks who have been following or know government, really do know Mary Taylor-Ash, who we've been very lucky to have as our CEO of Tourism Saskatchewan for many years. And she's suffered through the same minister on a number of different occasions now, but Mary's just a wonderful, wonderful human being. And I want to just say thank you to Mary. She's going to be retiring here in June, and I just want to thank her very publicly for her service on behalf of the entirety of the legislature and the public and people of Saskatchewan. Mary, you've done an amazing job,. So thank you.

So introduce the officials who are on the line and also my chief of staff, Richard Davis. So we may be stepping out on occasion to consult with senior officials who are joining us via video conference behind the Chamber. There's a bit of a delay on the internet feed from what we are speaking here in the Chamber, so it may be a few minutes of consultation between questions, but that is what we are doing.

So into my opening statement. For more than a year now, tourism in Saskatchewan and worldwide has suffered serious losses due to the COVID-19 pandemic and necessary restrictions on travel.

Prior to the outbreak, Saskatchewan's visitor economy was maintaining steady growth numbers. Travel expenditures in Saskatchewan exceeded \$2 billion annually. Figures for 2020 show a decline of approximately 1.17 billion. The total number of Saskatchewan residents employed in tourism careers was 30 per cent lower in 2020 than 2019.

The most severely affected industries were the performing arts and sports event sector, along with accommodations. Job numbers dropped by roughly 60 per cent in these areas. Our outfittering industry has been one of the hardest hit industries. The Canada-US [United States] border has been closed for over a year, and we have no clear end in sight. Many hunting and fishing outfitters rely heavily, very heavily on American customers for their business.

According to the Saskatchewan Commission of Professional Outfitters, 61 per cent of outfitters did not open their camps in 2020. Twenty-four per cent of those who did open, lost between 75 and 100 per cent of their average earnings, and the industry reported \$129 million in lost sales revenue. The downturn in business has affected many northern residents who work in the industry. An estimated 2,500 people directly employed by Saskatchewan outfitters were not hired in 2020.

There is some promising news that came out of figures for 2020. Although the total number of visitors to Saskatchewan decreased, local travel has helped compensate for declines in other markets such as international arrivals. Saskatchewan's reliance on domestic visitors as a share of total visitors has meant that the pandemic has not affected us as seriously as other provinces such as British Columbia and Prince Edward Island which rely heavily on overseas visitation.

The Government of Saskatchewan responded to the fallout of the pandemic with programs that helped tourism operators navigate this unprecedented time. Last August, the tourism sector support program was introduced by Minister Makowsky and I. This was a \$35 million investment that provided non-repayable funding to eligible operators, including hunting and fishing outfitters. It was renewed in February with another second \$15 million tranche available to help the industry.

The majority of tourism businesses are small- or medium-sized operations. The Saskatchewan small-business emergency payment program assists those ordered to temporarily close or curtail operations due to COVID-19. The strong recovery adaptation rebate also helps small operators adapt business models to address health measures and ensure the safety of staff and customers.

The Re-Open Saskatchewan training subsidy reimburses businesses for employee training to reopen safely. Many tourism and hospitality employers are eligible and can enrol their staff in Tourism Saskatchewan's training programs for upgrading skills in earning certification.

Tourism Saskatchewan's work is focused on speeding recovery of the tourism industry, building resiliency to withstand future threats, and striving to meet the goals outlined in the Saskatchewan growth plan. That target of a 50 per cent increase in tourist expenditures by 2030 can be achieved by being proactive, by positioning Saskatchewan top of mind among

promising markets, and creating experiences that will entice people here when it is safe to travel again.

Tourism is recognized in the Saskatchewan growth plan as an industry with tremendous potential for growth, for employment and business ventures, and for increasing Saskatchewan exports.

The onset of the pandemic demanded a new role for Tourism Saskatchewan. Campaigns to attract international travellers were immediately suspended. Working with Destination Canada and other provinces and partners, Tourism Saskatchewan adapted its marketing approach to focus on supporting local. Saskatchewan residents were encouraged to enjoy and support local businesses and discover what is in our own backyard while practising social distancing and respecting health guidelines. Messages were paused or amended when travel advisories were issued in certain regions.

Some interesting trends and figures emerged from last summer. There was an increase of 24 per cent in provincial park entry permits issued in 2020 compared to 2019, and daily permits rose by over 8 per cent.

Moving on, I want to comment on some of the efforts to support operators. Tourism Saskatchewan recently launched a new industry website to serve as a business resource hub for the tourism industry. It has a wide array of tools and offers a personalized user experience and quick access to desired information.

[18:15]

Tourism Saskatchewan modified some of its existing programs to address the present realities. One example is the marketing and event partnership program which traditionally supports the promotion of tourism products, services, attractions, and events to audiences within and outside of the province. Events such as annual music or cultural festivals, national and international sport competitions, or much-anticipated celebrations like the Grey Cup festival bring profile to Saskatchewan and inspire resident pride. They are crucial to maintaining a robust visitor economy.

While live events remain on hold, the marketing and event partnership program is in place to assist with the creation or upkeep of digital assets such as websites or e-commerce portals. Projects like expanding social media marketing or undertaking market research are eligible for funding.

Changes were made to the delivery of our education and training programs including Ready to Work, which traditionally consists of classroom and hands-on experience. Tourism Saskatchewan moved some components of the program online and enabled instructors to create training videos and other tools. Participants had their own workstation, computer, and materials and received thorough instruction in COVID-19 protocols for restaurants and food services. Ready to Work is known for opening doors to employment for First Nations and people who are under-represented in the workforce.

Tourism Saskatchewan works with a number of partners to deliver the training in communities throughout the province including remote northern locations. Tourism Saskatchewan delivers application-based programs that support product and

experience development and help operators to make sound business investments based on timely market research. These programs align with recommendations in the 10-year destination development strategy for Saskatchewan.

One example is the diversification and new market program. In 2020 it resonated with applicants who recognized that adapting products and experiences offered some defence against the downturn in traditional travel due to COVID-19. Fifteen projects are currently under way. Successful applicants commit to a minimal equity investment of 30 per cent of the project budget. Total investment in this round is just under \$1 million, with operators contributing nearly 600,000 to the approved projects that represent a variety of tourism businesses and experiences throughout Saskatchewan.

Tourism Saskatchewan's industry development team works closely with the local destination and city marketing organizations throughout the province. Stakeholder relationships involving municipalities, Indigenous partners, and a range of organizations are critical to fulfilling the goals of the destination development strategy. The creation of unique and appealing market and export-ready experiences will help Saskatchewan competitively when travel resumes.

To assist operators with reopening and adapting their businesses, Tourism Saskatchewan offers numerous online workshops and training opportunities for free or at a minimal cost. Clean it Right is an online training tool for accommodation properties, restaurants, and retailers and provides information to reduce the spread of COVID-19, protect customers and staff, and help businesses stay open. The program is currently free to tourism businesses, and more than 430 people have completed Clean it Right training since the program launched in the fall of 2020.

Earlier I mentioned the state of the province's outfitting industry. Tourism Saskatchewan works closely with the Saskatchewan Commission of Professional Outfitters and provided support for a sector growth and continuity plan. There's a clear commitment to this critical industry that brings international profile and visitors to our province.

Tourism Saskatchewan has a two-phase strategy in place. Currently the focus is on building awareness of Saskatchewan's angling experiences among our own residents. At the same time, it's important to keep Saskatchewan top of mind among key US [United States] hunting and angling markets and remind these travellers that our outfitters are eager to welcome them when the border reopens. The implementation of phase 2 tactics and the increased promotion in US and domestic markets is contingent on widespread vaccinations, open borders, and consumer confidence in travel.

In conclusion, I appreciate the time that's been afforded to discussing Tourism Saskatchewan's work. And thank you for your attention. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

Mr. Love: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I know it is good to get some information on some of the exciting things happening in our province in the tourism sector. We know the impact that the visitor economy has on our province and all of the different, you

know, parts of our province that are impacted by that, by having visitors and then, of course, not having visitors.

And you know, I think that we've heard loud and clear through the pandemic, you know, the impact on jobs and working people, and so a lot of my questions will relate to that. But at the same time I want to acknowledge a number of the pivots and creativity that the minister just outlined. Saskatchewan people are resilient, they're hard-working, and they're doing everything that they can to get through this time together. And so that is obviously the bright spot here, is the resilience of the great people of Saskatchewan. And it was exciting to hear a number of the things that are happening from the minister. So I thank him for his comments.

Just to open up my questions for this evening, I want to just go back to get some updates on a few things that were discussed last year. Of course, it was a very uncertain time. I have taken time to review the *Hansard* report from last year when Saskatchewan, like everywhere else on planet Earth, was just really entering into this uncertain time due to the pandemic. And so there was a lot of uncertainty at that time. So I'm just looking to see if there's any update on some of those things. And you know, I think maybe some of these were included in the minister's opening comments as I was feverishly writing down everything that I could, so forgive me if we are repeating anything here.

In the meeting, you know, last time this committee met, then minister Makowsky, the minister of Tourism at the time, said that tourism in Saskatchewan accounts for 71,000 jobs, or roughly 12 per cent of the workforce and an injection, he said, of \$723 million into the economy. But I've seen numbers much more like around 2 billion.

So I'm wondering if you can update the committee on where things stand today. And again, those numbers were 71,000. I think he was talking 2019 numbers most likely, like pre-pandemic. Again, it was 71,000, 12 per cent of the workforce. And I think the injection in the economy is somewhere in the neighbourhood of 2 billion. If you can just give us an update on where we stand today so we have an idea of what the situation is.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yes, I appreciate the question. We're going to go and have a brief consult and we'll be back and provide that information. So thanks.

So thanks very much, Mr. Chair. And thanks for the committee. So we have some additional information. I'll give kind of the high level, and then CEO Mary Taylor-Ash will go through it in a bit more detail. But 2019 I think I referenced in my opening remarks. The total value was about \$2 billion. And I think the number referenced, the 723 million, that was the amount of out-of-province expenditure that came into the province, which of course was virtually zero this year.

So the total value of the expenditure was a little over 1 billion, 1.17, I think. So you can almost draw the straight line between the lack of dollars from out of the province spent in the province.

[18:30]

So obviously that had a significant impact though on the labour

market as it related to tourism, the peak being at about just over 70,000 in 2019. We've been hovering just under 50,000 over the course of the last number of months. You know, we're hopeful that that's going to recover as we get into the tourist season and have some additional opportunities for folks to travel. But I would say that, you know, we came from a fairly fortunate base in a comparative context in that a lot of our visitations were in province to begin with, and we weren't as reliant on some other jurisdictions are like BC and PEI [Prince Edward Island] are on international travel.

But Mary will be able to speak better than I in the details.

Ms. Taylor-Ash: — Thanks, Minister. And as the minister mentioned in his opening comments, what we thought was always a big challenge because we were very dependent on our own residents travelling, has been a little bit of a lifesaver. Even though our industry has been phenomenally affected, as the minister has pointed out, when we speak about a loss of a billion dollars in revenue to the visitor economy.

Occupancies in both rural and urban Saskatchewan had been affected by this. And you know, speaking about an update, even in the winter, pre-pandemic in our province, we were looking at over 50 per cent occupancies in our hotels, and you know, the fourth quarter of 2020 was about 28 per cent. And some of you may remember the very early days of this pandemic, we were seeing single-digit occupancy in this province. And not just in this province, but throughout Canada and indeed globally.

The impact has been huge and in looking at the estimates from last year, I think which was June of last year, quite a bit has changed, I guess, overall. The work that we have been doing is . . . First off, we spent some time in just assessing the situation. And so we did surveys with our industry, especially from March on to July, so the earlier days of the pandemic, where we wanted to find out from industry what they really needed in order to survive.

And we also wanted to find out the impact of some of the programs that were certainly out there from the beginning, the federal programs — whether they had the information, whether they were meeting the targets. And so we spent quite a bit time with that and then started to develop more of a response, changing some of our programs, adjusting them, as the minister had said, whether it was our marketing focus.

So when the pandemic hit, we stopped our marketing to international destinations. So did everybody across Canada. And in fact, Destination Canada, which is the Crown corporation in Canada responsible for marketing, they redirected those funds to the provinces to help with promoting a hyperlocal, you know, promotion rather than spending any money in the international marketplace.

We also redirected our funds and made changes that would help the industry more with our marketing events programs and also with our destination development programs, so that we could meet the needs of the industry in a better fashion.

Mr. Love: — Okay. So I'm just curious, you know, where these numbers come from so . . . And thanks for the numbers. So we're looking at about a loss of around 20,000 jobs in the tourism

sector, from just over 70,000 to roughly 50,000. Are these numbers from Destination Canada, or are these numbers that we track?

And so do you have any numbers provided by Destination Canada in terms of the impact of the pandemic and loss of employment in Saskatchewan?

Ms. Taylor-Ash: — So the employment data comes from Stats Canada, right. So that's where we're getting those numbers. However, Destination Canada does provide quite a bit of information about the behaviours of visitors and also information around sentiment. So what the travel sentiment is of people, plus the sentiment of whether people are willing to welcome people into their communities since the pandemic.

So Destination Canada, they have a research function and typically we would buy into that. Since 2020 and again in this fiscal, they are providing the research to the provinces free of charge. So that's a benefit.

Mr. Love: — I guess just to follow up on that, do you have any sense how the impact of the pandemic on employment in Saskatchewan measures against impact in other provinces? So you reported on, you know, roughly a 30 per cent decrease in employment. How does that measure against other provinces? Is this standard?

And I'll throw this out now just so you have a chance to respond. I'm told that the numbers from Destination Canada rank us as dead last in Canada in terms of the number of, you know, the impact and the loss of employment, that we would be last, and the number that I've received is a decrease of 38 per cent. So I'm just wondering if you can care to respond to that and make sure that my understanding is accurate.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — I appreciate the question and we're going to go and consult with the team and see if we have that jurisdictional scan. I know right in front of us we don't, but we're going to go check with the team.

So great. Thanks very much, Mr. Chair. And thanks for the committee's time. We were working to pull together some of the information on this, the most recent information we could find, and I think Mary has some more detailed stuff. But you know, just what I was given here . . . So unemployment within the tourism sector has not been . . . PEI for example, is down 34 per cent. Saskatchewan was down 7.9 per cent, the most recent number, the national average being 8. So we're a little below the national average in terms of . . . not quite as high as the national average actually, as far as unemployment within the tourism sector. But Mary can maybe talk about some of the seasonality. And maybe I think we figured out where the information came from there and Mary can speak to that.

Ms. Taylor-Ash: — Okay thanks, Minister. Yes, we did. We checked to see what you were referencing directly from Destination Canada. And the numbers, I do believe, are from December 2020 comparison to December 2019 and showing that the Prairies were more affected. Unfortunately for many businesses, tourism businesses in Canada, we're seasonal. But our season is . . . typically our highest season is in the summer. In some of the Prairie provinces . . . or not some, one Prairie

province. Alberta does have a fairly robust winter season.

So I think that that particular . . . Because Destination Canada takes these numbers and on a very consistent basis are providing feedback to all the provinces on what is happening at any particular time, it was looking at December. December is not our season. And then to see, you know, 2019 where we would have had a more robust visitor economy even with, you know, people, seasonal parties, all of that kind of thing and some people travelling. In 2020 that wouldn't be happening.

I think what's most important for us is looking at the seasons that we are busier in, you know, our summer season certainly. However we are trying to develop our winter season and we're really working on that. But you would see if you were looking at numbers for tourism employment even though, you know, obviously we've been affected by the pandemic, we are least affected in the summer. And the numbers are more in line with what's happening across the country. There's not a great disparity.

And we in fact may be . . . Going back to the point the minister made and I had also spoken about, you know, the fact that we rely so much on our own people travelling within the province, when we went to hyperlocal, you know, people still wanted to travel around their province and they didn't have an opportunity to leave. And so that was a bit of a silver lining for us in some ways, that they had to stay and explore more of their province.

Mr. Love: — Okay, thanks for that. I appreciate it. And I may, if time permits, save some questions on those numbers for later in our meeting.

Just one other question I had that remains from last year but I believe it carries over to understand these estimates is just a comment from the previous minister, spoke of a \$3 million investment into the Grey Cup festival. And he indicated that, you know, roughly half of that, 1.5 million, had already been expended in the organizing committee. But at that time he couldn't report on what would happen with the other 1.5 million. That was kind of to be determined. I'm wondering if you can update the committee on what happened with those funds, and if there were any other large events that Tourism Saskatchewan was financially invested in that were cancelled and result in partial or total losses.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — It's a good question. And Minister Makowsky had indicated, had put the \$1.5 million forward for Grey Cup. We're going to go and make sure that we get the appropriate response here and also on the rest, on the other major projects that we were looking at because I think Roar of the Rings was one. But I want to make sure we get that right so we'll be a short minute here, sir.

All right. So thank you very much, Mr. Chair. And thanks for the question. So I think there were two parts to it: the Riders Grey Cup funding that had been committed to and, secondly, whether funds were expended in loss. So we have answers on both. I'll provide the response on this one; any follow-up, Mary can probably take.

But the 3 million that had been committed to supporting the Grey Cup, which obviously was cancelled owing to COVID,

1.5 million of that money had been flowed to the Riders. And they are going to be in possession of that money going into the 2022 Grey Cup, which we will be hosting here in Regina and we're looking forward to. We remain committed to the additional 1.5 but that money has not been flowed to the Riders yet. That will likely happen in the summer of 2022, but we will work with the club on that precisely. That would be historically how funding relationships for Grey Cup have worked in past hosting years, but we will work with them on that one.

As far as resources committed, expended in loss, there were 650,000 for the Junos, which I think, you know, the member will likely remember was literally cancelled the day before the event in mid-March of last year, right at the very beginning of COVID. So that money had already been expended for things like marketing and, you know, all of the things that went along with the Junos. And we're not going to be making effort to recover any of that. It is what it is, and it's unfortunate.

[19:00]

But as far as funds that are committed going forward for major events this year, there are. Roar of the Rings, which I'd mentioned, is going to be hosted in November at the SaskTel Centre in Saskatoon. And we are looking forward to that being a full, sold-out SaskTel Centre with a full tournament being held. So that is a commitment of \$750,000.

Also, Agribition, which is going to be held in November here in Regina. Also, we have committed \$45,000 to that event and we also look forward to a very full event in November for Agribition. And that's what the organizers are planning for in both circumstances, Roar of the Rings and Agribition.

Mr. Love: — And sorry . . . Can you just repeat. Is that 450,000 for Agribition?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — 45,000.

Mr. Love: — 45,000. Oh, okay.

Okay. You know, one of the things that . . . As I looked at the plan for 2021-22, one of the things in the minister's statement is they indicate that there are a number of campaigns in place to keep Saskatchewan hunting and fishing experiences on the radar of key US markets.

So I understand that there was a time when we cut off all marketing and, you know, we weren't doing that. But could you maybe just update the committee of like, what does this mean that you're keeping them on the radar? Just help me sort out, you know, kind of the fine line there where we're not inviting visitors right now, but obviously we want to make sure that they come back when that's safe.

So by no means is this criticism. We want to make sure the visitors come back. So could you just update the committee . . . What does that look like to keep these key markets on the radar? And how much money was allocated to these campaigns?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Sure, yes. No, I appreciate the question. And Mary can speak to the details of the — the kind of granular details — of the marketing that's been undertaken, but I

can kind of speak to a higher-level sort of set of objectives.

And the higher-level objectives being that, you know, we've really been bullish. And you know, in the times I've been lucky enough to be minister responsible for this file, have really made it a priority and working with the Commission of Professional Outfitters to market very specifically directly to those areas of the United States in particular publications or web advertising or targeting our advertising to those who may come up to Saskatchewan to hunt.

And I think we have just a huge opportunity in this space — both hunting and angling. And we've made very real and significant efforts in growing that business and growing our reach into the US market. I mean the reality is we have the best big-game hunting in the world. If you are a whitetail hunter, you know, black bear hunter, this is the best hunting on the planet. And you know, we have some great outfitters out there who do a great job working with clients from the United States primarily, but you know, other parts of the world as well. But we have really put a premium on working with our industry to market what is a world-class industry.

And I don't know if we've always done as good as job, you know, historically and I don't put that on any specific entity or anything like that. But historically I think, you know, we just haven't been kind of top of mind in a lot of markets like we should have been and that's something we're really, we really are putting and have been for a decade now, we're still putting that priority on. But, Mary, if you want to kind of speak to that?

Ms. Taylor-Ash: — Thank you, Minister. We have invested, in the last fiscal, we invested about \$1.1 million in the outfitting market. As the minister said, it's very lucrative market. It's high-yield; it's a well-established market. And we have been running a digital-first campaign just on awareness. So we know the border is closed. People can't travel, but we want to stay in front of this very strong market and we want to build the market.

So a few years back we did a study. It was probably . . . I'm trying to think now. It might have been in like 2017. We did a pretty extensive study on the outfitting market and especially for angling. And recently we've done some study on hunting that I'll get to, but we know that there's recognition for Saskatchewan in the US market around our angling and hunting. And so we wanted to make sure we were staying in front of them. They can't travel right now but we didn't want them to lose sight of us.

The other thing that we do on a regular basis and continue to do in the last fiscal, was making sure that we were developing content. And we worked with US outdoor media influencers. And we were able to also have people, some people still coming to experience some of . . . from a media standpoint and doing TV shows, that kind of thing. So we do invest in that on a regular basis.

For 2021-22 we're looking at investing about 1.5 million in this market and we're really hoping that the border restrictions will be lifted so that it will not, you know . . . Our outfitters will be able to back in business, you know, in the coming months or certainly within the year.

We also co-invest with Manitoba and British Columbia on a

national — we have, in the past — on a national angling program. Since the pandemic, that program is stopped because, you know, for obvious reasons with the border closed. But that was run through Destination Canada.

And we have just recently completed some research with hunters in the US to get a better handle on how we can grow that market. And so we have been working with Environics to get more details on what those hunters are looking for: what kind of product do they want; what are the ways that they are getting information, so how would we get to them best; what are the mediums? And so that research has been really interesting so far.

And you know, one in three of the people that we're researching in the US, they know Saskatchewan, which is good. I mean that's quite good. And we also have found out about 66 per cent of the people that we've reached out to in that research group are really interested in coming here. And quite a few of those are younger people wanting to engage in outfitting. And that is something that gives us a lot of hope for growth in that area.

Mr. Love: — That's great. Just one quick clarification, and this should be an easy question. But the numbers you're talking about, the investment, is that strictly in marketing? Like the 1.5 million in '21-22, this is a marketing strategy investment?

Ms. Taylor-Ash: — Yes, we're talking marketing.

Mr. Love: — So I guess I'm curious. Has this ministry or this government done anything to coordinate with the federal government to predict or maybe even move into advocating for when American visitors will be able to return and support the outfitting tourism sector?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yes, it's a good question. I was actually going to add to the end of Mary's answer on that, but you fortuitously asked the question anyway. We've been trying to gain a line of sight into what the federal government are thinking as far as border reopening. And you know, as with a lot of measures COVID related, they are fluid and things change on a pretty rapid basis around that.

I spoke to one federal minister last week and we had a discussion around this amongst a few other topics. You know, I'm not going to announce anything here today, but I would just say this. I think that they are giving very significant consideration to what a reopening would look like and how that would occur on a reciprocal basis with the United States. So it would be fair to say that officials, you know, are working on that, giving that thought on both sides of the border. Obviously that's something that's outside of our jurisdiction as a province, but we are staying very closely connected with the federal government on where that is moving and at what pace.

But you know, as of right now we still don't kind of have a clear answer, and frankly I don't think that there is a clear answer from either national government either. It's dependent on circumstance, but I think that they're . . . I can say for sure that a very real degree of thought and work is going into this.

Mr. Love: — So just further to that, you know, and looking at the plan for this fiscal year, there's a plan, a target in place to hit 75 per cent of baseline numbers for angling and hunting licences.

That would require us to provide 19,164. So I'm just curious, is this still a realistic expectation given the current state . . . You know, just given the current state of COVID numbers in Saskatchewan, is that still something that the ministry is expecting to hit?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yes, good question. I'm going to clarify the numbers on this because I'm not sure if that is kind of the overall number of licences issued or the number of licences issued to outfitters that are used by clients. That would be one question. I mean, I can tell you first-hand from my own experience last year, there were a lot of folks out hunting, and it was Saskatchewan residents that were out hunting more so than I've ever actually seen back home or had seen for a lot of years back home. But just give us a second and we'll . . .

Mr. Love: — I can give you that number right now.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Okay. Sure, if you like.

Mr. Love: — Yes. So this is from the ministry's plan for this year: growth in US outdoor markets, number of angling and hunting licences sold to US visitors. The baseline is from 2016-17. That's 25,552; that's the baseline. And then the target of 75 per cent is how I arrived at the number of 19,164.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yes. Well maybe Mary can speak to that. I mean we would love to hit that number and that definitely would be a great target to hit, and I think that is what we're shooting for. But ultimately, you know, it's a bit out of our control as far as the US border. But you know, I would say though, I would say this. I think I'm probably more optimistic on that than folks would be if they were just listening to the news right now. I would say that. But, Mary, if you want to . . .

Ms. Taylor-Ash: — Yes. One of the things that we are doing with all of our marketing is looking at . . . We're marketing based on scenarios and so we're so dependent right now. So the outfitting sector is completely dependent, almost 100 per cent — not quite 100 per cent, but almost 100 per cent — dependent on that border opening. And that's the big unknown.

What we do know, I think, from our outfitting sector is that they are doing everything they can to prepare for welcoming people back and staying in touch with their clients. And we are doing that. Like, we're doing that with our German tour operators. We are making sure that we're talking to the people who would normally come to visit and continuing to build and grow those relationships. So I think our outfitting sector and, you know, the outfitters themselves have done a good job of staying in the market and being ready to welcome people when they can come. But it is the great unknown.

So our marketing area, led by Jonathan Potts, our marketing area is really . . . They've developed all kinds of scenarios based on if people are fully vaccinated. What does that mean? And things can get open up. What if, you know, there are other things that happen and public health orders keep closing things down? So we look at how we're going to market, how we are going to help the industry based on a scenario from things are really not open at all because of public health orders, all the way to, you know, the borders are open, everything gets back to normal.

But you know, it may be ambitious but we do feel hopeful that once the border does open that there will be pent-up demand, you know, once people are more fully vaccinated that this will enable travel to occur again. And this market, when we talk about the outfitting market, we are almost entirely talking about a US market.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yes, and if I could just add to that. Mary said it very well, talking about the really great work that the outfitter operators are doing as far as keeping in touch with their clients. A lot of these clients come up here year after year, right. I mean these are very long-term relationships in a lot of cases. Oftentimes they are people of means from the United States who really do want to come. This is their great opportunity to come do some world-class hunting and they look forward to it all year. The question is just, when can you do it? So the pent-up demand really is a real thing, and the second that it's open . . . And it's more complicated than kind of the border being closed.

[19:15]

So the border isn't closed, right. I mean, the ability still exists for people to cross the border by air. There is after that, though, a requirement for a limited quarantine in a government-mandated hotel followed by a further period of quarantine afterwards, regardless as to vaccination status or negative test or rapid test or whatever, you know.

That's why I say I'm probably more optimistic than I think, you know, a lot of folks probably would be on the surface, just because there are a lot of points in between the border being closed and how we can make it work for circumstances where people have full vaccinations, negative tests. You know, the requirements that exist right now are not going to exist for, you know, the long term. So how do we get to that point where we're able to facilitate these sort of cross-border travel arrangements which are going to have a direct economic impact on the outfitting sector?

So I would say that even, you know, up in my country — I think you know this — you know, a lot of the outfitters in the province, big game especially, are located in my riding, not just even in my region. But you know, they're, I would say, cautiously optimistic but realistic as well, you know, given the challenges that have existed. But you know, I'm hopeful but some of this is really not up to us.

Mr. Love: — Okay, maybe just kind of further to the point, Minister, you know, I see a strong focus both in your opening comments in this report related to the budget estimates and then to the plan for the year, certainly a strong focus on those American visitors outfitting, angling, hunting — for good reason. Like, that's not disputed.

But my question is, where's the focus on other types of travel? And can you provide, you know, some hard numbers on other sectors of travel and how they compare to outfitters who are strongly represented in this ministry's plan? You know, in particular I might ask for, what would be the comparison to, say, business travel, leisure travel, sports and entertainment? And in particular, you know, the economic impact on what are the front doors in our province for travellers, which is Saskatoon and Regina?

So again my intent is not to pit these travellers versus outfitters but saying, where are the targets and the plans to make sure that we're welcoming these visitors back? Because ultimately if we want more air travel coming to our province in the future, we need to have outfitters on the same planes as business travellers, folks coming for events and . . . You know, so I guess to come back to my question, how would these segments of the tourism sector compare to outfitting?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Sure. Well we're going to go and consult with the team and we'll return.

Thanks, Mr. Chair. So I'm going turn the microphone over to Mary Taylor-Ash, who has a great deal of very good information on what was a good question.

Ms. Taylor-Ash: — Yes, a very good question because we do engage in more than the US market around outfitting. So I'm going to speak about a few of our markets and what's happening.

So in 2014 we developed an event strategy in order to identify and help fund events from community events all the way up to national and international events. Business events and festivals, and all types of events are huge business for this province, and I think you mentioned business travel because business travel is really one of the mainstays of the visitor economy. And Saskatchewan relies on business travel which has certainly been curtailed quite a bit because of the pandemic.

So since 2014 Tourism Saskatchewan, through our event strategy and our event funding program, have dispersed over \$7 million. That money, quite a bit goes to the cities for attracting events. We spoke about a number of those events before. We've got the Roar of Rings coming up. We host a lot of wonderful curling events: you know, Brier. We had not too long ago, we had a Scotties in Moose Jaw. So we support a lot of sporting events and other types of events.

[19:30]

Typically when we are looking at that, often they're in the larger centres. However we've still funded over 100 events in communities throughout Saskatchewan and to a tune of about 1.5 million of that 7 million since 2014. We typically — in normal times, not pandemic times — we aim for about a 40 to 1 return on that investment. And we've been quite successful in hosting many events that meet that bar.

In addition to events and festivals and that type of business, which is big in our province, we also have an overseas market. And our overseas market, although it's only about 1 per cent of our visitation, it does account for about 5 per cent of our revenue. And pre-pandemic we were looking very much at how we could expand that export market and bring new dollars into Saskatchewan.

The market is primarily focused on UK [United Kingdom] visitors and German-speaking visitors, so those people obviously in Germany but in other parts of German-speaking people who live in Switzerland and Austria as well. We work with the travel trades for this market almost exclusively, and we work very closely with Destination Canada as well. But in working with the travel trade, we have continued to work with them and stay front

of, you know, very much in developing our relationships with them even though they are not travelling now. That market is about \$100 million to us. So even though it's not a lot of visitors, they are higher yields. So when those people visit us from Europe, they tend to stay longer, they tend to spend more. And they love coming to Saskatchewan for the wide open spaces. They love to see our wildlife. They love to see, you know, some of our . . . be involved in adventurous things like paddling on the Churchill. And they also love our guest ranches. And so that's kind of where they go.

We are in the process of what we're calling our restart marketing strategy. And this is really to get things moving again following the pandemic. And what we are focusing on there, we've taken the time when travel was hyper-local and we couldn't do a lot of promotion, we've taken the time to look at refreshing our brand, and also to look at what markets could we discover. Are there some new markets that we could discover, or are there some markets we could expand on? And what we call this is really looking at niche and passionate markets.

We're not like a mass market destination, and that's great. You know it's great to not necessarily be a mass market destination. But we know we have things that some people are very interested in and it is their passion or it is a niche. We've already talked about outfitting, which is a bit of a niche. In addition to that, we've been looking at other potential, so things like night viewing. And so if anybody, when they hear me talk, I talk about this quite a bit, so people love to view the night sky. In fact some of you might have seen that great moon last night. Hopefully it's there again tonight.

But we have some of the darkest dark skies in North America, and we have in Grasslands National Park, it's named the darkest dark-sky preserve in Canada. And people want to come and photograph that and experience it, and it's very much a niche. Other niches could be around things like paddling. People who love to paddle — you know, rivers, lakes — they will travel to do that and explore some of the great waterways of our country. Things like birdwatching that's, you know, it's amazing in our province we're on a path of so many migratory birds, and people will come here specifically for that.

So we are identifying some of these markets and then working to see do we have the product, the supply of a product to match the person who's interested in that? Can we really compete in that? And then how do we go after that? So we're also looking very much at those markets.

And in addition I think you had mentioned — you did mention; this is your question — the pandemic has affected urban centres more than rural centres globally. And we're, you know, seeing this in Canada and we're seeing it in our own province even though, I would say, we have some of the most wonderful urban centres because they're so close to nature. They're not like these massive urban centres that are not in touch with nature. But we have seen a steeper decline in Saskatoon and Regina when it comes to the visitor economy than in some of our rural areas.

We have been working with flowing funds to assist with marketing. Through Destination Canada and ourselves, we have provided about half a million dollars to Saskatoon for marketing since the pandemic, about 400,000 to Regina for marketing

efforts since the pandemic. And we have just entered into a really exciting partnership with Expedia as part of Destination Canada as well.

And this is the first time we've really gotten into a partnership of this kind, but the Expedia partnership is really one to build awareness of what we have in Saskatchewan. It will give us reach and it will really help our cities once, you know, public health orders are lifted a bit, that it will help as they rebound and start to get people coming back in the cities. So we're looking forward to the Expedia partnership helping them.

Mr. Love: — Thanks for those comments. I'm just curious. You talked about 500,000 to Saskatoon, 400,000 for Regina for marketing. Was that delivered to, say, Tourism Saskatoon or is this marketing done on behalf to promote Saskatoon?

Ms. Taylor-Ash: — It went to the DMOs [destination marketing organization]. So, yes. Tourism Saskatoon would have used that money. We would have flowed it through them and Tourism Regina in Regina.

Mr. Love: — Okay. Thanks for that. I guess just maybe one question related to that. I was going to get to this later, so I'm just going to look for my question.

You know, I have seen in the news some comments that Tourism Saskatoon is in particularly difficult financial position because their income is derived from essentially a levy on hotel room stays. So you know, the minister offered in his initial comments today, indicated that, you know, that the ministry works closely with municipal-based partners.

So I'm just curious, what position is the ministry in to provide some stability for Tourism Saskatoon, knowing that they generate just massive economic impact in that region?

Ms. Taylor-Ash: — Yes. It's a great question and it's a very difficult situation for a number of our destination-marketing, our management organizations. Many of them across the country are reliant on levies that are paid when you book hotel rooms. So when you book a hotel room, you pay like 3 per cent or whatever it is. And of course, that's gone for the most part. It is so small now.

And Tourism Saskatoon, like many of our DMOs have done wonderful work. They are truly very strong partners of ours. So as I said, we have flowed some money through to be able to do some marketing. And we are in dialogue with them all the time. In fact I was talking to the CEO of Tourism Saskatoon this week. I'm talking with the head of Tourism Regina on a regular basis. We're assisting a couple of the smaller DMOs as well with looking at their sustainability plans. We've worked with Swift Current this year and also Cypress Hills' grasslands destination area to help them in terms of how they can build some funding sustainability.

So yes, we are working with them and trying to see what we can do, what can we partner with them on in order to get them through this rough patch. And I also understand that Tourism Saskatoon are looking at some restructuring themselves in how, you know, they're working together with the partners there. So yes, we will continue to dialogue with them and figure out how

we can work together to be able to, you know, represent and help the businesses in Saskatoon that are so valuable to us.

Mr. Love: — So I'm just curious as a follow-up here, as I'm listening to your comments, which I do greatly appreciate. I want to make sure I'm using . . . Is it DM . . . What's the acronym that you use? DMM?

Ms. Taylor-Ash: — Oh, the marketing funds, you mean? The DMF [destination marketing fund]?

Mr. Love: — Yes.

Ms. Taylor-Ash: — Yes. Destination marketing fund.

Mr. Love: — Yes, destination marketing. Okay. Have there been any requests for direct funding from the Ministry of Tourism to support these municipal partners? And were those requests granted?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — We're just going to briefly consult with the rest of the officials and we'll be back.

So thank you, Mr. Chair. Thanks for the question. So I will kind of provide a kind of on-point response and Mary can add a bit more detail having, you know, obviously a lot more to add than I.

But I would say I did meet with Tourism Saskatoon. They did put forward a funding request that would have been significantly over half of the budget of Tourism Saskatchewan for the entire province. So no, obviously we weren't in a position to provide over half of the entire organization's budget to just one single destination marketing organization. And I told them that, that we weren't, but what we were prepared to do is work with them on a host of different areas, project specific and otherwise. And Mary can speak to some of that work that's happened both before and subsequent to that. That was about two months ago, I think.

Ms. Taylor-Ash: — Yes. Thanks, Minister. So yes, the destination management organizations or city marketing organizations that depend on this marketing levy are all, you know . . . Across the country everybody is in a bit of trouble, to say the least right now because of this. So we, as I said before, we are very interested in supporting the industry in Saskatoon. We have always worked closely with Tourism Saskatoon, and you know, we obviously are concerned that the funding, their sustainability, their funding model is not working right now. And they have to look at other kinds of how to find a funding model that is sustainable.

We are working with a few DMOs right now on that. And I'm in discussions with them and so are other members of my team. And we are very willing to work with them on projects and you know, partnerships, but it is not a core funding relationship, which I think the minister pointed out as well.

So yes, we are definitely going to work with them as we work with a number of our DMOs and discuss, you know . . . I think what will need to be discussed in the coming, you know, weeks and months is the sustainability of that infrastructure, not just for Saskatoon but throughout our province. And those discussions will also be happening with partners across Canada to figure out how we can have a better system that doesn't rely so heavily on

this. So, yes.

Mr. Love: — Yes, I appreciate those responses. And just to clarify, I wasn't just asking about Saskatoon. My understanding is that there's a number of different ways that these destination marketing organizations are funded, sometimes through municipal funding which we know, you know, they're going to be in a big strain in the future too as municipal revenue sharing will take a big hit as PST [provincial sales tax] revenues decline.

Also another area that I'm a critic for is Government Relations. So it's certainly something I'm looking at and thinking, okay, there's several models to this funding. Some organizations are maybe doing okay now; others are struggling. So I guess my question — just to clarify, I don't think it needs a response — was, you know, are there requests coming in from your municipal partners to provide stability at a time when, I know, like they're very . . . so much uncertainty right now. But you know, as a provincial government obviously we've seen in this budget, you know, willingness to take on that deficit to provide stability in the short term, and I'm just looking at how that will apply to municipal partners and tourism. So I think that your answer covered that.

Just to move on because I only have time for a couple other questions here. Another thing that I'm kind of cognizant of and thinking of is, you know, thinking about large events and festivals that draw a lot of visitors and also get people from inside our own province that, you know, spend their money and support local. And so if I can just ask two questions in case you do need to step out.

I'm curious how will festival organizers be able to know when their large events, you know, how will they be able to predict when those large events and festivals will be allowed in our reopening plan? Is there any scenario planning in place such as benchmarks, like other provinces have done? Is there any discussion, you know — for example like some provinces are looking at using hospitalization numbers, vaccination rates — is there any high-level discussion as far as what our province will do to plan for when these large events will take place?

And I'm going to tag my second question on here too because I suspect you may need to step out and talk about this one. As critic for Parks, Culture and Sport, the minister for Parks, Culture and Sport suggested that Tourism Saskatchewan has some funds set aside to provide gap funding for festivals that are looking at multiple summers of cancelled festivals and they're hoping to re-emerge in 2022 or '23. This is from last Thursday evening. So I'm just wondering if you can update myself and the committee on the funds that the minister was speaking of and how it'll be disbursed to festivals in our province.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Thanks for the question. We're going to take a minute. We'll be back as quick as we can, being cognizant that we're near the time here. So appreciate it.

[20:00]

All right, thanks, Mr. Chair. You know, being cognizant of the time, we do have responses. So I appreciate the question. I would just say on the first part which I will respond to — the second part Mary will respond to on the event support portion, me on the

planning portion — you know, what I would suggest on that, that's not our decision to make from Tourism. So Health are the ones that are leading all of the work that's going on there, so they would be the ones to be in a position to respond to that question. So we really aren't. But on the event support part, I'll turn it over to Mary.

Ms. Taylor-Ash: — Yes, thanks for the question. And happy to clarify what I think Minister Ross was referring to. We have a marketing and event partnership program, and we've had that for a while where we provide assistance to events and also provide assistance to tourism operators in order to market their business, that kind of thing.

So we invested in 2020 . . . The last fiscal 2020-21 we invested a total of 2.7, a little over 2.7 million in the 161 applicants that applied for that. And some of those were festivals. And that investment is provided to help with marketing efforts. So sometimes they improve their websites with this money. Sometimes they increase their digital readiness and preparedness with the money, you know, helping, improving their social media presence, those kinds of things.

We felt it was really important during the pandemic that festivals that were not able to happen were able to enhance their skills and improve how they were either presenting themselves or improve their business model. And so that's why we continue to provide funding. It was to improve what they were doing and then, you know . . . We knew as well with these applicants that they were solid. They were going to make it to the next year and hopefully be able to have their event, you know, occur again in the way that it had before.

We have just completed a spring intake, because this is an application-based program, and we will be looking at dispersing about \$1.2 million again with that program in the coming weeks.

The Chair: — Okay, thanks. Unfortunately, we've completely run out of time. So with that, we've reached our agreed-upon time for consideration of estimates for Tourism Saskatchewan this evening. We'll now adjourn consideration of the estimates for Tourism Saskatchewan. Thank you, ministers and officials. We've got time for some quick closing comments, Minister, and then I'll turn it over to Mr. Love.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Sure. Just very, very quick. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Thank you to you, sir, and thank you to committee members for being here this evening. It's appreciated. I want to really thank the building staff, Hansard, LAS [Legislative Assembly Service] staff as well for making this all work on an evening. It's appreciated.

And again, I just really want to thank Mary for your years and years of service to the province of Saskatchewan, to the public of Saskatchewan. It's been greatly appreciated and I can tell you I've greatly appreciated our ability to work together. So thank you to you, Mary.

The Chair: — Mr. Love, your last question. I know that . . . Sorry, your last comment. I know that you had a question, but . . . Oh, no, I just gave you an opening. Your closing comments. Thank you, sir.

Mr. Love: — I won't ask any questions right now. I know what time it is. But thanks to all committee members for a good night tonight. Thank you to the minister for engaging in meaningful dialogue. Thanks to our Chair and all the staff, building, and Hansard staff who make this all possible in a safe way.

And I will also extend a thanks here to Mary for her years of service, and congratulations from the official opposition. We certainly honour the work that you do in welcoming visitors to our amazing province and showcasing what we have here in Saskatchewan. So thank you for that, and thank you again everybody for another meaningful night here in estimates.

The Chair: — Thank you, everyone. It was a good couple hours. So this concludes our business this evening. I am going to ask a member to move a motion of adjournment.

Mr. Ottenbreit: — I move a motion to adjourn.

The Chair: — Mr. Ottenbreit. All agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

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

[The committee adjourned at 20:09.]