



# **STANDING COMMITTEE ON INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS AND JUSTICE**

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**STANDING COMMITTEE ON INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS AND JUSTICE**

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Ms. Nicole Sarauer  
Regina Douglas Park



[The committee met at 15:29.]

**The Chair:** — Good afternoon. Welcome everybody to Intergovernmental Affairs and Justice. I'm Terry Dennis. I'll be chairing the committee today. With us today we have Nathaniel Teed in for Erika Ritchie. We have Todd Goudy. We have Gary Grewal. We have Travis Keisig, Blaine McLeod, and Ms. Jennifer Bowes in for Nicole Sarauer.

[15:30]

**General Revenue Fund  
Tourism Saskatchewan  
Vote 88**

**Subvote (TR01)**

**The Chair:** — Today we will be considering the 2024-25 estimates for Tourism Saskatchewan. We'll begin our consideration with vote 88, Tourism Saskatchewan, subvote (TR01).

Minister Harrison is here with the officials. I'd remind them to identify themselves, and please before they speak, do not touch the microphones. Hansard will take care of that. Minister Harrison, do you have any opening comments?

**Hon. Mr. J. Harrison:** — Great, well thanks very much, Mr. Chair. And thank you to committee members and officials for being here today. And it really is my pleasure to speak to the work of Tourism Saskatchewan and highlight some of the activities that will build a thriving visitor experience economy and enrich the province's tourism experiences and destinations.

And by way of introduction of officials here today, I think the committee is well acquainted with Jonathan Potts, our CEO [chief executive officer] of Tourism Saskatchewan; behind, Amy McInnis, vice-president of marketing and communications; Denise Hauta, director of workforce development; and Rae Gallivan, chief financial officer and vice-president of corporate services.

And I'll maybe begin by highlighting some of the items from the 2024-25 operating budget as follows: the total operating budget of \$19.603 million supports Tourism Saskatchewan's 2024-25 business plan. This is a status quo budget that keeps the organization on the path to meeting its goals and fulfilling Saskatchewan's growth plan objectives. There was a slight decrease in this year's budget allocation as compared to 2023-24, almost entirely due to the removal of the one-time funding to support the 2024 Montana's Brier.

Saskatchewan's growth plan sets ambitious targets for Tourism Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan's growth plan sets a goal of 50 per cent increase in tourist expenditures by 2030, a jump from \$2.4 billion to \$3.6 billion annually.

Tourism Saskatchewan has strategies in place to achieve this goal and grow a robust economy that plays an even bigger role in Saskatchewan's economy by attracting high-spending travellers, by investing in advertising and partnership opportunities, increasing visitation and spending by US [United States] anglers

and hunters, providing industry support to increase the number of Saskatchewan tourism experiences and products, attracting large-scale events and business travel, amplifying the presence of Saskatchewan tourism operators through digital initiatives, and developing training programs and awareness campaigns to address industry-wide labour shortages.

Industry performance is a key priority for tourism. Saskatchewan's tourism industry's growing travel spending reached \$2.4 billion in 2022 and is expected to significantly surpass that figure when final 2023 numbers are released. This was above expectations and surpassed the \$2.2 billion in spending that was generated in 2019. In 2023 hotel occupancy rates were up 3 per cent and surpassed 2019's results by over 3.5 per cent. Revenue per available room, a key measure for the hotel industry, was up 24 per cent from 2019 and 15 per cent higher than in 2022.

With the reintroduction of a route between Minneapolis and Saskatoon in June, US air arrivals increased by 46 per cent in 2023. There has been a significant increase in US travellers arriving by car. As of December 31st, 2023 there was a 54 per cent increase in visitations by car over the same period in 2022.

In 2023 64,600 Saskatchewan residents held full- or part-time jobs in tourism during August, the peak of the season. Tourism Saskatchewan trained more than 17,000 people last year in courses that enhance capacity and skills.

Marketing is an important component of tourism. Tourism Saskatchewan is focused on long-term growth through the development of new and expanded markets. Actions include implementing strategies to generate awareness and demand in high-spend and niche markets using digital-first content marketing and brand-building partnerships, leveraging the evolved brand strategy's refreshed look in regional travel zones to differentiate the province from its competitors and drive demand from export markets, investing in the marketing of outfitted angling and hunting experiences in the United States, supporting the establishment of new direct air access routes through targeted inbound marketing support, growing Saskatchewan's event and business travel hosting capacity, and developing industry competitiveness resources to ensure operators are prepared to take advantage of new market opportunities.

Outfitting is another large contributor of tourism expenditures. American hunters and anglers are among the highest spending travellers, and they stay in Canada longer than the average visitor from the United States. Tourism Saskatchewan is marketing outfitted angling and hunting experiences in 15 key states to increase visitation and spending. 2023 US angling and hunting licence sales were up 26 per cent compared to 2022.

Saskatchewan's outdoor experiences appear on every major outdoor network in the United States and routinely outperform other destinations. Tourism Saskatchewan's support brought 27 outdoor media projects here last year. Leveraging the influence and reach of popular outdoor hosts and programs like *The New Fly Fisher* and *In-Fisherman* is a fundamental part of strategies to influence anglers and hunters to choose Saskatchewan for their next adventure.

Approximately \$1.1 million was invested to support the inbound marketing of WestJet's non-stop transporter service between Saskatoon and Minneapolis and the recently announced Regina to Minneapolis service. American anglers and hunters in Minnesota and key one-stop states were targeted through a co-branded campaign with WestJet to encourage bookings. The investment included 300,000 in support from Destination Canada's air route support program.

Attracting events is also essential to grow our economy. Getting events and business travel back on track is fundamental to tourism recovery. Tourism Saskatchewan has invested in research and consultation to create an effective event strategy for the province. The strategy will support the development and expansion of major events. It includes a focus on enhancing Saskatchewan's reputation as a major event host and increasing the economic impact of investments

Tourism Saskatchewan provided \$550,000 to secure the 2024 Montana's Brier. The event occurred in Regina from March the 1st to March the 10th, 2024 with a total attendance of over 100,000 spectators. The event is estimated to have generated between 10 to \$12 million in economic impact for Saskatchewan.

During the Brier, Curling Canada announced that the 2024 BKT Tires World Men's Curling Championship will be held in Moose Jaw in 2025. Tourism Saskatchewan committed \$300,000 to secure the event. The event is expected to generate 10 to \$12 million in economic impact for Saskatchewan.

Saskatoon and Regina each hosted a game in the Canada-USA [United States of America] women's hockey Rivalry Series in February 2024. The attendance at the SaskTel Centre was nearly 8,500. The Brandt Centre was a virtual sellout with 5,915. The Rivalry Series was broadcast nationally on TSN [The Sports Network].

In November 2023 U Sports announced that the University of Regina will host the 2025 Vanier Cup national football championship at Mosaic Stadium. The Vanier Cup has only been hosted in Western Canada twice in the 60-year history of the event. Tourism Saskatchewan committed \$45,000 to secure the bid, and the event is expected to have an economic impact of approximately \$4 million.

Further industry development is a priority for Tourism Saskatchewan. Tourism Saskatchewan leads several programs that enable operators to diversify products and attract new markets. Participating in these programs can help summer operations to expand into shoulder season and winter. In some instances the investments elevate businesses from market ready to export ready.

Funding is also available for the promotion of experiences and events. The tourism diversification program has been in place since 2019 and has inspired big-picture thinking and innovative projects that increase Saskatchewan's experiential tourism assets. Equally important is how the program has helped operators expand their product offerings, appeal to new clientele, stay open longer, and boost employment.

Projects vary in size and scope. For example, funding enabled a big-game outfitter to expand and provide a snowmobile trapline

tour. In their first year offering the experience, over \$50,000 in additional revenue was reported and two additional staff hired. The business has just completed its second year touring the trapline with clientele and is currently taking bookings for 2025.

Another example is a pottery business that renovated their heritage farmhouse to accommodate groups of up to six guests. This expansion allowed for offering all-inclusive three-day, two-night pottery-making retreats. In the first five months the experience generated \$24,000 in revenue. It's estimated, based on current sales and interest, that the three-year revenue projection will be over \$172,000.

Indigenous tourism is also vital. Tourism Saskatchewan values its relationships with the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada and Indigenous Destinations Saskatchewan. The organization is working closely with IDS [Indigenous Destinations Saskatchewan] to support its mandate.

In addition to supporting numerous Indigenous tourism businesses at varying stages of development, Tourism Saskatchewan is currently involved in several longer term projects with Indigenous communities including Beardy's and Okemasis and Mosquito, Grizzly Bear's Head, Lean Man First Nation.

On another front, workforce education and training continues. A robust, skilled tourism workforce is critical to building a competitive, service-driven industry that delivers on the promises made to visitors. Tourism Saskatchewan leads programs and activities that help businesses recruit and retain staff and help employees build confidence and skills that prepare them for meaningful careers in the industry.

New training is being created to address skills gaps in the industry, including the development of courses in front-line sales, storytelling, marketing, leadership, and ambassadorship.

Focus on youth has driven initiatives like presentations in high schools throughout the province from urban centres to remote northern communities. Career fairs held in partnership with industry education councils, Saskatchewan Polytechnic, and participating tourism businesses have been hugely successful.

A website, [workinsktourism.ca](http://workinsktourism.ca), continues to link educators and students to resources, classroom activities, and information about tourism jobs, entrepreneurial opportunities, and career pathways.

Tourism Saskatchewan hosted a series of free online webinars and workshops between the months of October and March to address a range of important topics from digital marketing and managing online reputation to employee recruitment tips. These resources help businesses learn ways to market and sell their products, meet customer expectations, and recruit and retain staff.

In conclusion, I appreciate the time that has been afforded to discussing Tourism Saskatchewan's leadership and work, and I'd now welcome any questions from the committee. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** — Thank you, Minister Harrison. We'll now open it up for questions. Mr. Teed?

**Mr. Teed:** — Thank you so much, Minister, for outlining the priorities and successes that we've been seeing in our Saskatchewan tourism industry. I'll kind of start with just some basic questions. As you went through the budget development process, what was your intent with this budget and how would you say it differed from years past?

**Hon. Mr. J. Harrison:** — Well I would say that's a good question. You know, really I would view how we have approached our tourism objectives over many years as being quite a consistent approach. We've had a significant degree of continuity in terms of leadership from, you know, obviously my privilege to have been minister for some time but obviously Jonathan as well, having been our CEO and with a long history in the organization and in the industry.

I think that really has enabled us to take a long-term view about growing the industry really with an objective of meeting our growth plan objective on tourism expenditure and what we need to do, working with our industry, to get there. So a combination of different elements to that which, you know, I laid out a number of in my introductory comments, but you know, largely around tourist attraction, around making sure that we can work with operators so that they can maximize their opportunity to both attract business from outside of the province but also make sure that that experience is going to be the top-notch experience that we all know we really can offer here.

But maybe I'll ask Jonathan to maybe speak to maybe some of the really, kind of, the long-term objectives that we've worked through in all of this, including event hosting and the different elements that go into it.

**Mr. Potts:** — Sure. Thanks, Minister. Jonathan Potts, CEO of Tourism Saskatchewan. Sure, I'll start with events. So we developed an events strategy a number of years ago. It's a key pillar of the government's growth strategy, and our goal as an organization to help the industry get to be a \$3.6 billion industry by 2030. So hosting major events such as the Brier, as the minister referenced, is critical to help Saskatchewan achieve those goals.

[15:45]

You know, from a budgetary standpoint, we're on track. We've refreshed that strategy this year. We've increased our focus on business events, which is a key piece to help grow the industry, especially in Regina and Saskatoon. We're focusing on Saskatchewan's sort of sectors of strength as it relates to business events, so things like agri-tech and agricultural products, things like resources and so forth.

So we've hired an international lead generator in Europe to help identify new events that really hone in on Saskatchewan strengths. So those could be industry strengths; those could be strengths in our research institutions. But really trying to showcase Saskatchewan as a primary destination for business travel. So that's a real key development, I would say, over the last couple of years and something we're really looking forward to, going forward.

**Hon. Mr. J. Harrison:** — Yeah, maybe if I could as well just maybe add on to that as well, as it goes together and we did talk

about it a bit in the introductory remarks. But really making sure that we have those international connections that make it possible for tourism experiences in addition to business travel and all of the rest of it. We talk about a number of those things.

But that has been why we have partnered with both the Saskatoon Airport Authority and the Regina Airport Authority, who have entered into agreements with WestJet on the flights to Minneapolis, as an example. And you know, we've been continuing discussions with the airport authorities about what might be possible into the future in addition to those routes.

But really it's an important part of that strategy, having the opportunity to access our airports through a one-connection flight. And it's been a challenge. I mean, historically it's been a challenge, not just for us but for smaller provinces across the country as well. So you know, I really applaud the airport authorities' leadership both in Saskatoon and Regina for their assertiveness in working with partners — ultimately WestJet being the partner on the Minneapolis flight — but working very assertively over a lengthy period of time to make that a reality so that Saskatchewan travellers going to other parts of the world, but also those who are seeking to take advantage of Saskatchewan tourism opportunities are able to do that. So I'd highlight that as well.

**Mr. Teed:** — I'll jump in. I just have a . . . [inaudible] . . . about the refreshed strategy. Would you say that that international market is kind of the key to that refreshed strategy around your event strategy you were mentioning?

**Mr. Potts:** — Yeah, absolutely, you know, partly for the reasons the minister mentioned — we want to make sure that our international connections are strong and remain strong and we're supporting those flights — but also because it's a real opportunity for growth.

We know that within the country we always punch above our weight, I think, when it comes to events and business events, but it's a challenge. There's increasing competition coming out of the pandemic. You know, more destinations are fighting for a smaller number of events. Bigger destinations are going after events that . . . Cities like Regina and Saskatoon used to compete against, you know, maybe Victoria and Halifax. Instead now Toronto, Calgary, etc. are in the fray as well.

So you know, domestically we are still competing. But looking at those international events again where we really have unique selling features for the province and for our two cities, we can actually stand out a little better there in some cases.

**Mr. Teed:** — As far as event strategy goes, I've heard some feedback from stakeholders specifically around, like you say, entertainment — you know, places like our big venues hosting concerts, entertainment, things like that — that they're finding it hard to lock down . . . Say like a touring band coming through Manitoba will drive through Saskatchewan but will assess, you know, the costs involved and our infrastructure. And they'll see if it's worth the stop and if not, they're moving on through to Calgary and Edmonton. So I'm wondering if you had given any thought to that in a refreshed events perspective.

**Hon. Mr. J. Harrison:** — Maybe I'll add just kind of a few

introductory comments, and I know Jonathan will have more to add. You know, with regard to, I think there can be a focus sometimes on concerts and bands that are touring around. I mean we do okay on that front. I mean we probably aren't going to be hosting an Eras tour concert but, you know, there are certain realities that come along with some of these things as well as far as the size of our market. But you know, we obviously are happy to support municipal governments that are seeking to do these things, but really we're not the lead on the attraction component for things like that.

You know, when we're talking event hosting, we're talking about things like the Brier, as an example, or things like the Vanier Cup or things like the World Juniors. Those are really areas where we're able to partner with municipal governments and really the proponent groups that lead the applications. We're not necessarily leading applications in this regard, but we are happy to work side by side with the proponents who are and can often play a bit of a convening function as well in bringing the different elements that would comprise a successful bid together, and you know, just given the fact that we really know the industry very well and know the players as well. But, Jonathan, if you want to speak to that further.

**Mr. Potts:** — Yeah, and the minister I think kind of nailed it there. We don't, at Tourism Saskatchewan, fund or support those sort of promoter-produced shows. So touring music acts, we don't get involved with those.

We will get involved, like the minister said, with sporting events primarily, you know, within the province, not touring shows, but we certainly support a lot of cultural events as well and business events like I mentioned. But we stay out of that sort of big name music market.

**Mr. Teed:** — No, and it's been great to see some of the sporting activities. I know, I think, the city of Regina so benefited from having the excitement of the Brier, you know, and we all wanted to see Saskatchewan win on home ice. But has it been a conscious decision to kind of stay out of the promoter-produced industry? Are there some reasons why?

**Hon. Mr. J. Harrison:** — Yeah, I don't think we've ever really been in that space before. And I don't think any provincial organization are particularly in that space. Actually I'm not entirely sure of that but I don't think they are.

**Mr. Potts:** — No, the minister is right. I'm not aware of any province or for that matter, any state — I can't speak unequivocally about that — but I'm not aware of any jurisdiction supporting those types of events. You know, they're strictly for profit I guess, and so using taxpayer dollars to subsidize those types of things might not be in the best interest of the public as much as we might want to see certain acts.

But yeah, you know, we look at things again that have sort of corollary benefits to the province. And whether it's, you know, supporting the sporting community or whether its supporting the business community, what have you, research community, if there's additional benefits rather than a show that moves in and moves out, that's where we try to do business.

**Mr. Teed:** — Okay. While we're on the line of kind of our

venues, maybe I'll ask, you know, the Saskatoon downtown entertainment district has been cited as a big project for Saskatoon, and will likely be a huge tourism opportunity I suspect for sport, promoter-produced events, all sorts of things.

I had the pleasure of having a tour of our facility at SaskTel Centre, and just seeing the state of the facility and one of the . . . you know, again some of the situation there is that events and sporting events and producer-promoted events are seeing a facility and they're maybe choosing to continue on or go elsewhere.

Has there been any support offered by Tourism Saskatchewan or the provincial government to the future plans of a downtown entertainment district?

**Hon. Mr. J. Harrison:** — Yeah, no, and Jonathan can probably expand on this as well, but as far as the planning or funding for the planning, I mean, that really is the lead of the city, of the municipal government. You know, there would ultimately, depending on where the city, city council agree to go into the future, I mean, any funding ask really would likely be routed through Government Relations. And that would have to do with infrastructure particularly.

So I think it would be fair to say really quite contingent on renewal of the federal-provincial infrastructure program which, you know, you've heard from us but you've heard from every province in Canada as well — and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and municipal governments even at SUMA [Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association] and SARM [Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities] — really pushing the federal government to renew the funding for, whether it be the investing in Canada plan or whether it be a new infrastructure program. Which, you know, I think have been historically quite successful in cost-sharing infrastructure, both in the recreational space and in the municipal space. Over the course of the last decades, is how it's always been done.

So you know, those discussions would really be contingent on that program being renewed, what the criteria would be for recreational infrastructure, depending specifically on what the municipal government is seeking to do. And that would be led by Government Relations within the province.

**Mr. Teed:** — Maybe I'll hop back to some of my starter questions here as I think I've gone down my rabbit hole of events strategy questions. What was the rate of inflation that you were factoring into this budget as it was being developed?

**Hon. Mr. J. Harrison:** — Well I mean for kind of the macro question, that really would be best put to Finance. I mean they were responsible for kind of the macro assumptions that went into that.

**Mr. Teed:** — Okay. I guess like, was there a percentage of increase? I know we saw a change with the allocation from the Brier. Was that the only change year over year?

**Hon. Mr. J. Harrison:** — Yeah, that was basically the entirety of it. There was I think some vacancy management elements that had no impact on operations, but the vast majority of the change was to do with the Brier funding.



And the way historically we have funded large-scale events has been through appropriations that have come through supplementary estimates or depending on the timing on which an application was made or there was a successful bid.

So a lot of it is contingent on things that are beyond our control, right. We didn't necessarily know we were going to be successful in bidding for the Brier. We were very happy obviously that we were successful. But when we do the actual budgeting for the event, we pay when we're successful on the bid. So we don't actually have a line item every year in the actual budget document for it for that reason.

**Mr. Teed:** — Are there any significant supplementary estimates for Tourism over the last year, other than the Brier?

**Hon. Mr. J. Harrison:** — Yeah, I don't think we had any supplementary this year.

**Mr. Teed:** — Is Tourism Saskatchewan finding inflationary costs to be a challenge? And would you say that asks for inflationary increases were put to the Ministry of Finance?

**Hon. Mr. J. Harrison:** — You know, I mean there are increased costs that are, you know, I think apparent through the entire economy. As far as our budget though, I mean we didn't really have any significant need to have an increased allocation given. You know, we think we're on a good path and we have the resources we need to reach our objective. So you know, really we're very comfortable with where we landed as far as the budget was concerned. Jonathan, feel free to add anything.

**Mr. Potts:** — Sure. I'm not going to disagree with the minister. No, we're pretty comfortable with where it landed. Like the minister said, we're on track on a number of different fronts, whether it be workforce development, destination development, marketing events. We've got our strategies in place. You know, we don't need at this stage a significant budget increase to help us achieve our objectives. We can manage within the existing budget.

**Mr. Teed:** — Thank you so much. I'm going to jump over to some questions about visitation. And so one of the main concerns that I've heard from stakeholders in the industry is that we see a large focus on angling and hunting outfitters, and it's amazing to hear that they are the highest spending. And so I mean no, any disrespect to those folks, but some of the questions I get are how are we working to retain those folks in our biggest cities when they're landing and possibly leaving our biggest cities quite quickly?

[16:00]

And perhaps it kind of follows along the questioning, and again it's so good to see Saskatoon and Regina connected to international markets, but I'm wondering if there are any plans that Tourism Saskatchewan has to ensure that when folks are taking those flights into Regina and Saskatoon that they are encouraged to spend the night, encouraged to stay, encouraged to spend some of those dollars in the cultural and entertainment opportunities in our biggest cities? Maybe that's a bit of a broad question.

**Hon. Mr. J. Harrison:** — Yeah, I'll maybe hit on at least a couple of elements of it anyway, and I know Jonathan will have more to add. But just, you know, with regard to the hunting and angling component, really this is an area where we have a very real competitive advantage with other jurisdictions in North America.

And really it's because we have the very best hunting and angling experiences that you're going to find in the world, really just very, very unique in a whole different number of ways. I could go through a number of them but really it's the opportunity, if you're an angler for example, to be on a lake in northern Saskatchewan where, you know, there might be 20 people within 5,000 square miles of you. I mean that's not an experience you're going to find in Pennsylvania.

And the quality of the actual experience is one that again you're just not going to find in the United States, and just one you're probably not going to find in every part of the country either. We think that we really do have a unique comparative advantage there. So on the angling side, that would be part of the answer.

On the hunting side, you know, honestly we have the best hunting in the world. This is where it is. And you know, I've talked about this in estimates in previous years, and my colleagues are waiting for hunting stories to start, which they are not. I actually haven't harvested a deer in a couple of years, but my 12-year-old daughter did this year. So it was her very first year she could hunt, so she was quite excited by that. My 15-year-old son has somehow, you know, got a trophy whitetail the last three years in a row as well, and dad has not.

So anyway, all that to say though that we have a unique opportunity and experience for residents here in this province. But for those who are prepared to take advantage of our remarkable outfitting industry, which really had faced an existential challenge during the pandemic with the inability to host those from outside of the country, we worked very, very hard with the outfitting sector to make sure that there was an opportunity for recovery. And there were several points when it was not entirely clear there was going to be.

So I mean this is an industry worth over \$120 million directly that employs thousands of people in the province, all over the province. Whether it be guiding, owners, entrepreneurs, there are thousands of people directly employed in this industry, which has an impact in, I would say it has an impact in the urban centres as well. But it sure does out in rural Saskatchewan where you have a lot of the businesses not just based but . . . or nearby. So this is a big deal.

So we really do work very closely with our outfitting industry on both the angling and hunting components. But you know, obviously we work closely with our agencies that are cast with similar mandates in both of the major cities. So that would be Regina and Saskatoon tourism agencies that have mandates and who we work closely with as well.

But Jonathan, you know, take it away. It's a broad question.

**Mr. Potts:** — Yes, thank you. Yeah, I'll start with fishing and hunting, just picking up where the minister left off. And to your question, you know, our fishing and hunting market is a big,

lucrative market, as the minister has attested to. And they come here single-mindedly. You know, if you're a hunter you're coming here to get that big buck or to go waterfowl hunting and so on. If you're an angler, you're coming for that big lake trout.

With that said, we know that the outfitted angling industry generates, I believe, over 6,000 room nights a year in Saskatoon. So they don't just fly through and hop in a car; they typically spend the night. And these are well-to-do American clientele. So you know, the packages can range, I believe, in this province as high as 12,000 US dollars for about a week. So you know, when they come to Saskatoon they are going out for a steak dinner with a good bottle of wine and so forth, right. So a lot of money gets left behind in the cities when they do go fishing and hunting. So that's just covering that market.

We do a lot of work, as the minister mentioned, with Discover Saskatoon and with Tourism Regina. This past fall we actually co-hosted with Destination Canada, Discover Saskatoon an event called GoMedia, which is a major international media event, travel media event bringing together top travel media from around the world. I believe we had 10 different countries represented.

We hosted three familiarization tours before and after the event. One in southwest Saskatchewan — sort of a western, you know, cowboy, dinosaur, Grasslands National Park sort of theme. One culinary tour, which was very urban focused.

And now I'm going to forget the other one, but that's okay. Oh, Indigenous, pardon me. So an Indigenous-themed one which obviously, with the event being based in Saskatoon, had a strong Saskatoon component with places like Wanuskewin, Dakota Dunes, and so forth. So you know, we look at events like that to help generate interest.

That's generated over 10 media stories around the world already. We were in . . . When I say "we," the province were in Korean *National Geographic*, a 10-page spread a few months ago. We just appeared in a 10-page spread in an Australian national newspaper yesterday, I believe. And we were in *Le Monde* and so forth, right. So those types of events are very useful to partner with our cities. Again there's lots of great content produced about, as it relates to the cities about cuisine of the province, farm-to-table experiences, Indigenous experiences, and so forth.

Additionally we partner with, you know, the two cities and operators in the cities on events like Rendez-Vous Canada which, as opposed to travel media, is related to travel trade around the world. And we have appointments with travel trade from across Europe overseas in places like Korea, Japan, and throughout the United States as well. So we do a lot to try and bring the right travellers to our cities. It's just a different market than that fish and hunt market.

**Mr. Teed:** — Yeah, like certainly different markets. There's different strengths that we have that certainly we should continue to play to for sure.

I came from kind of the arts and culture sector and worked at Remai Modern prior to taking this position. And one of the things that Remai Modern was seen as was kind of they looked to the Bilbao in Spain. You know, build it and they will come.

And so my focus has kind of been on certainly some of the areas that have been struggling the most, as you mentioned, in the unique challenge of getting people back to the province has been our arts and culture sector.

And certainly folks in that, stakeholders in that industry are looking to Tourism Saskatchewan for some of that support, you know, as they're not seeing the numbers return as they feel like they should be. You know, people aren't returning to seats. The costs are going up. And they're really looking to support from different ministries as to how are they going to navigate this kind of post-pandemic world.

So I appreciate, you know, the strong focus on these kind of unique natural beauties that we have, but I'm wondering if Tourism Saskatchewan has put any thought or budget allocation towards supporting, or any allocation in a sense, to support those industries in our cities?

And they're not even really alone to Saskatoon and to Regina. You know, I think of the SaskPower wind festival, Windscape festival, yeah. And these are kind of the arts and culture things that are all over Saskatchewan. Thoughts on that?

**Hon. Mr. J. Harrison:** — Sure. I'll maybe have just some introductory observations and then Jonathan can probably speak more specifically. But no, one of the things we've been encouraged by given the tremendous upheaval caused within the entire sector over the course of the pandemic . . . You know, I kind of spoke to the specifics in outfitting but really I mean it was an industry-wide impact that was disproportionate to other industries within the economy, which is why we actually had more significant support programs for industry in the tourism space during the pandemic, including a dedicated support program.

But you know, we have been encouraged in that we are now seeing the hotel occupancy rate back above where it had been pre-pandemic. We're seeing the overall value of tourist expenditure being significantly higher actually than where it had been before the pandemic. Take your point that it might not be entirely evenly distributed given the composition, but I'm not entirely sure that it's the case. I don't have the data all in front of me, but you know, there may have been a bit of disproportionality in some of the expenditure.

But you know, overall we've been very encouraged because there were a lot of points where, like I said, it wasn't entirely clear we were going to get there, and the amount of competition in the space — '22, '23, into '24 — has been really intense. And you know, you've probably seen, even just kind of casually watching television and seeing it on social media, but you know, individual municipalities even are doing things on the advertising front they probably hadn't done before. I'm not entirely sold on whether the value is going to be there for some of those expenditures. I don't know that for sure. I mean, they're going to have to make those decisions.

But you know, we are really targeting on areas where we view that we have, you know, significant comparative strength. But with regard to kind of maybe some of the specific elements, Jonathan, you can well speak to it better than me.

**Mr. Potts:** — Sure. Thank you, Minister. Yeah, and the question's well taken. We do quite a bit of work with a lot of cultural institutions in the province, including the one you mentioned, some locally here in Regina, certainly cultural festivals. And you know, I mentioned before that we don't support promoter-led music events, but we certainly support a lot of music festivals around the province, so things like the SaskTel Jazz Festival and so forth, right. So you know, we've always been engaged with that part of the cultural community.

I can tell you that through our destination development programs, we've been working, even very recently, in the last few weeks, with some cultural attractions on developing new experiences, on developing new ways to engage the public — maybe parts of the public that they haven't engaged with before — generating new revenue streams, you know, and helping them to stabilize in some cases.

And I think even in the minister's opening notes he mentioned, you know, on a very small scale, a pottery studio that we worked with and, yeah, not a traditional or typical tourism operator but somebody with a real cultural skill to sell and to share. And you know, that's turning into a key revenue stream for that individual, right.

So we're always looking for ways to partner with the cultural community. Typically it's through our development programs but also through, whether it's our marketing and events partnership program, which supports again those music festivals but also supports marketing for institutions like Remai Modern but also development programs. We have funding there as well to help create those new experiences.

[16:15]

**Hon. Mr. J. Harrison:** — So and maybe I'd just kind of add to that. Jonathan spoke really well to kind of the specific programmatic options that we have for some of the organizations, which absolutely exist. You know, one of the . . . and I'm not going to get too far into it just because it's not our department, but Parks, Culture and Sport obviously play a really significant role in this space that, you know, we have options on the programming front but really the lead is with Parks, Culture and Sport.

**Mr. Teed:** — You know, in the interests of time, I had a few questions in regards to Regina Folk Fest, a large tourism attractor. And I know that Regina Folk Fest has gone into a pause year. I'm wondering if there are any specifics that you can let us know of to ensure that we know that Regina Folk Fest will return in 2025 and continue to have that output.

**Mr. Potts:** — Sure. I won't provide sort of the inner workings of our dealings with them but I can tell you that our director of events and partnerships is engaged with their leadership on a couple of different fronts. So you know, we're working with them to the extent that we can, and as to the minister's point, you know, what's appropriate for Tourism Saskatchewan to be involved. But certainly, you know, that's an asset for the city that we'd like to see come back strong.

**Mr. Teed:** — Thank you. I kind of chatted about the impacts on the cultural sector, you know, butts in seats and costs. The third

one that they continue to bring up is the PST [provincial sales tax] on all things culture and entertainment. And so I'm wondering if there's been any stakeholder feedback to Tourism Saskatchewan on the inclusion of arts and culture and entertainment and tourism of the PST?

**Hon. Mr. J. Harrison:** — Yeah, I would say that that's really kind of something to put to Finance with regard to the PST. That's theirs.

**Mr. Teed:** — Any advocacy work from Tourism, or was there any asks into Finance to see that removed?

**Mr. Potts:** — Yeah, no, other than at the very front end before it was introduced, we've seen no advocacy and had no feedback.

**Mr. Teed:** — No feedback from stakeholders or industry?

**Mr. Potts:** — Not significantly at all.

**Mr. Teed:** — I will ask a bit about then our destination marketing organizations. Can you give us a little bit of a breakdown on some of the supports that you're offering to those DMOs [destination marketing organization]?

**Mr. Potts:** — Sure. So first of all, as mentioned, you know, what we try to partner on is activities. So I mentioned GoMedia with Saskatoon this past year. We partner on outward-facing events and promotional opportunities for the province, like Rendez-Vous Canada that I mentioned, which is targeted to travel trade.

One thing I want to be clear that we don't do is support operations. And we got out of that business — as the minister mentioned, I've been around a while in this organization — but we got out of that business probably 11 or 12 years ago just because we were funding a lot of overhead and not a lot of activity, as it turned out. So we try not to go down that path. And there are other funding sources municipally for organizations to access.

We do though again partner on a number of different things. As it relates to Saskatoon, we're supporting events this year such as the FIBA [Fédération Internationale de Basketball] 3x3 women's event basketball series, and the YXE Games that they're creating around that event.

You know, I mentioned we've supported a number of different types of events over the years, like Jazz Festival, Rock the River, you know, Shake the Lake in Regina, most anything you can think of there as well as a number of business events.

With regards to the city of Regina, as people know, there were some struggles over the last year with Tourism Regina. They've got great new leadership there and strong leadership with the Regina Hotel Association, Economic Development Regina. So we're working with all three of them on a business event strategy for the city. Saskatoon has one already and is doing well there. But Regina, you know, we're working to help coordinate some of their efforts to access that international business event market a little more effectively. You know, mentioned things like the Brier.

We also this past year, with some support from PrairiesCan

[Prairies Economic Development Canada] actually captured a lot of content — a lot of content — again related to business events. So you know, video and still photography and so forth, on hosting venues in the cities, cultural attractions, restaurants, and so forth, so that the cities can help sell themselves when they are seeking to bring those events here.

**Mr. Teed:** — Any involvement in any of the process around like the sound stage or the film industry, would you say?

**Hon. Mr. J. Harrison:** — That's really Parks, Culture and Sport.

**Mr. Teed:** — Last year we discussed some of the educational programs that Tourism Saskatchewan offers. I'm wondering if you could give us an update on some of those and if there were any new educational programming that you are offering.

**Hon. Mr. J. Harrison:** — No, appreciate the question, and I know Jonathan will have some of that.

**Mr. Potts:** — You bet. Yeah. So first thing I'll say is that — and I've got our director, workforce development, from Saskatoon, Denise Hauta, here, but I might call on her at some point — but we went from training 12,000 people in the industry last year, roughly, to 17,000 this year. So we saw tremendous growth there and really proud of that success.

We operated six ready-to-work programs across many parts of the province this year as well. Those are typically, you know, training people with sort of job-entry-type skills. It's usually delivered, that training, on First Nations or possibly to new Canadians, and I can say that all six programs this year had that focus. We have a target of 80 per cent of those people working six months after the training, and we've been successful again this year and consistently throughout the years in meeting that target. So we're really happy about that.

I'm just trying to think of what else I might tell you right now. Oh, actually we do have some new programming. Again the team has really taken a focus at looking at high school students, so we're doing a lot of education with that market. Not everyone is destined obviously for university straight out of high school, and we're trying to educate students across the province about different careers in tourism and many great careers that they can pursue for years or for their lifetimes.

So Denise and her team have been doing great work in Regina and Saskatoon and some rural areas of the province, getting that message out and working with kids to show them other ways that they can get engaged in tourism and start their careers.

**Mr. Teed:** — You know, I had the opportunity of visiting the Avonlea museum and I was just so surprised to see how many of the young people from that community were like so invested and doing the tours. And you know, you could just tell that at some point along the line something like that had like encouraged them to get involved in their, you know, kind of the local tourist opportunity they have in the area.

Are the six programs available in the business plan or the annual report? Would I be able to find those there?

**Mr. Potts:** — I believe they're all listed there, and otherwise we

can certainly provide them to you.

**Mr. Teed:** — I think we've got a few more minutes. I just had a few questions. Could you give a little bit more of a breakdown on some of the work that you're doing with the Indigenous tourism file?

**Hon. Mr. J. Harrison:** — For sure. Yes, go ahead.

**Mr. Potts:** — Yeah. So personally I sit ex officio on the board of the new Indigenous tourism association in the province, which is called Indigenous Destinations Saskatchewan. Over the last couple of years we've worked closely with a number of stakeholders throughout the province as well as ITAC, which is Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada, to get Indigenous Destinations Saskatchewan established.

So happy to say that in I believe June of last year, the executive director was hired for that organization. We've provided support since that time for the development of a strategic plan which is just being completed, some governance work, development of website, and some marketing materials and so forth to get the organization up and running.

We're looking at very soon finalizing a memorandum of understanding with IDSK [Indigenous Destinations Saskatchewan] to provide a three-year support plan for the organization in partnership with the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada. We expect PrairiesCan will be involved as well. And yeah, we're very engaged on that file.

I would also add that on the development front we have 10 different projects that we undertook in '23-24, I think for a total value of around \$350,000, with Indigenous operators, with Indigenous communities across the province to, you know, help establish new tourism experiences or to enhance experiences that were already being delivered. We're engaged with a number of operators on the marketing front, and you know, engaged on planning exercises with a few other communities as well such as in The Battlefords.

**Mr. Teed:** — The 10 projects, would you have a list of those?

**Mr. Potts:** — I do, but I don't have them with me.

**Mr. Teed:** — No, that's all right. No, I think it's just important work. Apart from your involvement, you said there was just the \$350,000 investment. Are there other dollars allocated in that direction?

**Mr. Potts:** — Yeah. You know, that's not a quota by any sense, right. So as again Indigenous operators, communities, etc. come forth, we work with them to find solutions whether they be planning solutions, you know, financial support, etc., right. So you know, that was just on the development side. On the marketing side, I would have to take a quick look at the actual number, but we support a number of different operators there as well. So yeah, I mean it's a moving target. We are very focused on developing Indigenous tourism experiences in this province.

**Mr. Teed:** — Thank you. Are you looking for anything specific? I know we've chatted about the strengths of our kind of natural beauty and the opportunities that we have around fishing and

angling. Would you say there are opportunities there with partnerships with First Nations? Or is there any specific direction you're looking at for those projects or the money that you're handing out on that front?

**Hon. Mr. J. Harrison:** — Yeah. Maybe I'll just offer . . . only a couple of minutes left here. It's a good question, and it's something we worked really hard on. I can tell you Jonathan has worked really hard on with our partners on this. We think this is an area where there is a tremendous opportunity for growth and there is a tremendous opportunity for First Nation and Indigenous groups, you know, whether it be companies, whether it be development corporations to really make a mark in this space and attract a whole new, different type of tourist to the province.

So short answer is, absolutely we are committed to working with First Nation and Indigenous groups to make this an even more important part of our tourism portfolio.

**Mr. Teed:** — You know what, with two minutes I think that's all the questions I have if that's all right. Do you want me to do any closing comments now or I'll wait?

**The Chair:** — I'll get to you. Having reached our agreed-upon time for consideration of Tourism Saskatchewan, we'll adjourn the consideration of these estimates. Minister Harrison, do you have any closing comments?

**Hon. Mr. J. Harrison:** — Just very briefly, thanks so much for the questions. Very good questions. Appreciate the conversation. Thanks to the committee for their time. And really thank you to you, Jonathan, and through you to our entire team at Tourism Saskatchewan who do a wonderful job, a great job working for the betterment of this province every single day.

**The Chair:** — Thank you, Minister. Mr. Teed?

**Mr. Teed:** — So I want to echo those thanks. Appreciate this conversation, the thoughtful answers. And just excited to see about all the work which you and all of your staff at Tourism Saskatchewan are doing to promote. And so I just want to thank you very much and thank you all, all the officials that came out and committee members. Appreciate this opportunity.

**The Chair:** — Thank you, Mr. Teed. I too would like to thank the minister and his staff for all the work that they've done throughout the years in promoting our province and tourism, as well the opposition and the committee members and the staff and Hansard too, as well. I'd like to thank everybody.

That completes our business for tonight. I would ask a member to move a motion of adjournment. Mr. Keisig has moved. All agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — Carried. The committee stands adjourned until Monday, April 29th, 2024 at 3:30 p.m. Thank you.

[The committee adjourned at 16:30.]