



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Standing Committee
on
Alberta's Economic Future

Ministry of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women
Consideration of Main Estimates

Monday, March 15, 2021
7 p.m.

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Second Session**

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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Gochring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP), Deputy Chair
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Also in Attendance

Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)

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Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Participants

Ministry of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women
Hon. Leela Sharon Aheer, Minister
Lora Pillipow, Deputy Minister

7 p.m.

Monday, March 15, 2021

[Mr. Neudorf in the chair]

**Ministry of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women
Consideration of Main Estimates**

The Chair: All right. Welcome, everyone. I would like to call this meeting to order. The committee has under consideration the estimates for the Ministry of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2022.

I'd ask that we go around the table and have members introduce themselves for the record. My name is Nathan Neudorf. I'm the MLA for Lethbridge-East and the chair of this committee. We will begin, starting to my right.

Mr. Reid: Roger Reid, MLA for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Rowswell: Garth Rowswell, MLA, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Jackie Armstrong-Homeniuk, MLA, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Ms Rosin: Miranda Rosin, MLA for Banff-Kananaskis.

Mr. Deol: Jasvir Deol, MLA for Edmonton-Meadows.

Member Irwin: Janis Irwin, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Ms Goehring: Good evening. Nicole Goehring, MLA for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

The Chair: And the deputy chair of this committee.

Now we'll go to members participating virtually. When I call your name, please introduce yourself for the record. Mr. Toor.

Mr. Toor: Good evening, everyone. MLA Devinder Toor, Calgary-Falconridge.

The Chair: Mr. van Dijken.

Mr. van Dijken: Glenn van Dijken, MLA, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Walker.

Mr. Walker: Good evening. Jordan Walker, MLA, Sherwood Park. Thanks.

The Chair: Due to the current landscape we are in, all ministry staff will be participating in the estimates debate virtually. Minister, if you could please introduce yourself and those around the table with you.

Mrs. Aheer: Good evening, everyone. With me I have to my far, far right down at the end there Amanda LeBlanc. She is my press secretary. Beside her I have Brett Sparrow, who is our senior policy adviser. Next to him I have my chief of staff, Mandi Johnson. Then to my direct right I have the deputy minister, Lora Pillipow. To my left I have Nilam Jetha, the assistant deputy minister of status of women and strategic integration. Then to my far left over there is Melissa Banks, assistant deputy minister of creative and community development. I have other ministry staff behind me as well. Do you want me to introduce those as well, Chair?

The Chair: Not at this time. Thank you, Minister. I would just ask that if any of your officials are called upon to speak, when they go

to the podium, if they could please introduce themselves again at that time for the record.

I would like to note the following substitutions for the record: Mr. Toor for Mr. Barnes.

Before we begin, I would note that in accordance with the recommendations from the chief medical officer of health, attendees at today's meeting are advised to leave the appropriate distance between themselves and other meeting participants. In addition, as indicated in the February 25, 2021, memo from the hon. Speaker Cooper, I would remind everyone of committee room protocols in line with health guidelines, which require members to wear masks in committee rooms and while seated except when speaking, at which time they may choose not to wear a face covering.

A few housekeeping items to address before we turn to the business at hand. Please note that the microphones are operated by *Hansard* staff. Committee proceedings are being live streamed on the Internet and broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV. The audio- and videostream and transcripts of meetings can be accessed via the Legislative Assembly website. Those participating virtually are asked to turn on their camera while speaking and to please mute their microphone when not speaking. To be placed on a speakers list, virtual participants should e-mail or send a message in the group chat to the committee clerk, and members in the room are asked to please wave or otherwise signal to the chair. Please set your cellphones and other devices to silent during the duration of the meeting.

Hon. members, the standing orders set out the process for consideration of the main estimates. A total of three hours has been scheduled for the consideration of the estimates for the Ministry of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women. Standing Order 59.01(6) establishes the speaking rotation and speaking times. In brief, the minister will have 10 minutes to address the committee. At the conclusion of her comments a 60-minute speaking block for the Official Opposition begins, followed by a 20-minute speaking block for independent members, if any, and then a 20-minute speaking block for the government caucus. Individuals may only speak for up to 10 minutes at a time, but time may be combined between the member and the minister. The rotation of speaking time will then follow the same rotation of the Official Opposition, independent members, if any, and the government caucus, with individual speaking times set to five minutes for both the member and the ministry. These times may also be combined, making it a 10-minute block. One final note: please remember that discussion should flow through the chair at all times regardless of whether or not speaking times are combined. If members have any questions regarding speaking times or the rotation, please feel free to send an e-mail or message to the committee clerk about the process.

With the concurrence of the committee, I will call a five-minute break near the midpoint of the meeting; however, the three-hour clock will continue to run. Does anyone oppose having the break? Seeing none, we will proceed with that.

Ministry officials, at the direction of the minister, may address the committee. Ministry officials are asked to please introduce themselves for the record prior to commenting.

Space permitting, opposition caucus staff may sit, appropriately distanced, at the table to assist their members; however, members have priority to sit at the table at all times.

If debate is exhausted prior to three hours, the ministry's estimates are deemed to have been considered for the time allotted in the schedule, and the committee will adjourn. Points of order will be dealt with as they arise; however, the speaking time and the overall three-hour meeting clock will continue to run.

Any written material provided in response to questions raised during the main estimates should be tabled by the minister in the Assembly for the benefit of all members.

The vote on the estimates and any amendments will occur in Committee of Supply on March 17, 2021. Amendments must be in writing and approved by Parliamentary Counsel prior to the meeting at which they are to be moved. The original amendment is to be deposited with the committee clerk, and as a courtesy an electronic version of the signed original should be provided to the committee clerk for distribution to committee members.

I now invite the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women to begin with her opening remarks. Minister, you have 10 minutes.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Chair, and good evening to everyone. I've already introduced my staff, so I will leave that in this portion. I'd like to acknowledge that today we're coming from Treaty 6, 7, and 8 territory and also that this land holds a deep importance to the Métis people of Alberta. I'm here today to present the details of the Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women 2021-2022 budget.

My speech will be available in French on my Facebook page. As the minister responsible for the Francophone Secretariat I'm so proud to be able to offer this information to the many French-speaking Albertans of our province. Mon discours sera fait en français sur ma page Facebook. En tant que ministre responsable du Secrétariat francophone, je suis fière d'offrir cette information aux nombreux Albertains et Albertaines d'expression française de notre province.

Just over two weeks ago I had the immense privilege of announcing the renaming of the Federal Building plaza to the Violet King Henry Plaza in honour of our very first black female lawyer in Canada. It will be a place for us to gather and remember how important it is for us to fight racism.

I will now provide a brief overview of the ministry's work. Our ministry touches upon and helps improve the lives of all Albertans. The ministry supports 26,400 nonprofit voluntary-sector organizations, that deliver services of critical importance to Albertans. The sector succeeds because of the 1.6 million dedicated volunteers who support Alberta's nonprofits every single year.

My ministry also enables hundreds of thousands of Albertans to discover and celebrate their heritage, their culture through amazing historic sites, museums, and archives.

The arts make a significant contribution to the economy and quality of life in Alberta, so we support artists through the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. We remain committed to developing an arts profession act.

Of particular importance to us is our focus on multiculturalism, inclusion, and women's initiatives. All Albertans, regardless of their race, origin, gender, and sexuality, must feel welcome, safe, and valued. Recent hate crime incidents have demonstrated that now more than ever we have to work together and that racism will never be tolerated in this province.

My ministry is committed to ensuring Alberta's Francophonie is strong and thriving. We continue to implement Alberta's French policy and multiyear French policy action plan.

Sports and recreation are a significant part of Alberta's culture and play an important role in mental health. From local recreational programming to initiatives like Podium Alberta the ministry is helping Albertans to discover and pursue a more active and healthy lifestyle.

I'd also like to now take the time to look at our budget numbers. The total budgeted operating expense for Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women for 2021-22, including general operating and capital grant spending, is an investment of \$230.4 million. Budget

2021 invests in arts, culture, sport, and heritage industries, that are an important part of Alberta's economic recovery and competitive advantage.

Our investment in community and volunteer support services this year is \$99.2 million. These dollars fund nonprofit organizations through our community grant programs and provide capacity-building supports for the nonprofit, voluntary sector.

7:10

The community initiatives program, or CIP, supports the projects and initiatives that enrich communities across Alberta. CIP is receiving \$37.1 million. Budget 2021 shifts funding from the community facility enhancement program, or CFEP, to the community initiatives program to continue to support the stabilize program. This program invests in nonprofit live experience organizations and venues so they can resume in-person live events when it's safe to do so. The stabilize program provides up to \$37 million in one-time funding over 2021 and 2022. Part of this funding is an investment to ensure that our performing and presenting arts venues can reopen to preserve Alberta's cultural identity and to support tourism. As we work with our very wonderful partners, we even have more details on additional funding that will be coming in the weeks ahead.

We have also been working diligently throughout this pandemic with our federal counterparts to help ensure funding to this sector. On March 2 we were pleased with the announcement of \$181.5 million in federal funding for the live arts and music sectors in 2021-22. We continue to partner with the Calgary Exhibition & Stampede and Edmonton Northlands in a fiscally responsible way to support community events and programs that will get Albertans back to their communities. Our budget includes for major fairs operating grant funding of \$6.8 million.

Budget 2021 invests \$25.6 million in assistance to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. The COVID-19 pandemic has hurt the lives and livelihoods of artists and arts organizations across Alberta, and we are going to keep working with the foundation to support the arts in Alberta during this time. The foundation has shown great leadership in supporting all sectors of the arts community during this past year, including minorities and other less-represented groups.

To further support and lift up our arts and nonprofit communities, I was very proud to release a tool kit that will help organizations to change and adapt their business models during the pandemic. We've had an overwhelming response to its launch, and I'm so proud that we've been able to provide our arts community with the tools to manage through this period. However, it is very important to note that Alberta still continues to receive the lowest amount of federal arts funding in the country. We will continue to engage our federal counterparts to address the long-standing federal funding disparity for Alberta artists.

We've maintained our investment in cultural industries because they are critical to Alberta's economic recovery and competitive advantages. Cultural industries include books, magazines, sound recording, and postproduction. Alberta's cultural industries contribute about \$1.1 billion in GDP and create 12,450 jobs for Albertans. The overall budget for cultural industries is \$26.5 million, which includes \$19.8 million to the Alberta media fund. This figure reflects sustained support for the sector and upholds previous commitments under former screen-based production grants. The Alberta media fund grants for the screen-based sector are back to business as usual and really supporting our economic recovery. Any funding decrease to cultural industries is attributed to projected losses of dedicated revenue from COVID-19 closures and restrictions impacting the Jubilee Auditorium.

Budget 2021 invests \$48.4 million in heritage. This funding includes \$3.2 million in heritage grant funding. The heritage division preserves and celebrates Alberta's unique history. Its work includes operating our network of museums, archives, and historic sites. The division helps preserve local heritage and provides funding to individuals and organizations dedicated to maintaining Alberta's beautiful history. The funding decrease to the division is mostly due to projected losses of dedicated revenue from COVID-19 closures and restrictions. Being fiscally responsible, we are keeping our heritage alive and accessible to all Albertans to enjoy now and in the future.

Budget 2021 invests \$20 million in sport, recreation, and physical activity programs. We continue to strategically invest in these programs because they enrich the lives of all Albertans. We are working with our partners to build the capacity of many organizations as we respond to the province's economic challenges. The ministry is helping its sector partners become more self-sufficient and sustainable by encouraging them to diversify their revenue streams. Support for our high-performance athletes through Podium Alberta remains unchanged. We continue to work with Health to support a safe return to play, including the well-designed and -managed bubbles such as Curling Canada or the Western Hockey League. We also provide free office space at the Percy Page Centre for more than 50 sport, physical activity, and recreational organizations.

Alberta sport-sector stakeholders have shared in the \$32.5 million announced for provincial and territorial sport organizations through the federal government's emergency support fund. Alberta received \$3.64 million in the first wave of support, an additional \$549,000 in September, and \$1.51 million in November, for a total of \$5.7 million.

Our continued investment in francophone communities, multiculturalism, and women's initiatives demonstrates our commitment to greater cultural inclusion and diversity. The Alberta government continues to strategically invest in the Francophone Secretariat. Its budget is \$1.4 million. The secretariat is a vital link between government and the province's rapidly growing French-speaking community, and it leads the crossministry co-ordination of French policy implementation. The secretariat's priority areas for Francophonie are health, justice, early childhood, and education. Information in French is made available on Bonjour Alberta.

Alberta must be a place where we are responsible for the collective well-being of each other. The budget for status of women and multiculturalism is \$4.1 million and is dedicated to initiatives supporting this outcome. Our goal for Alberta is to be a place where all people can fully participate and contribute to the province's future. We are committed to finding ways to eliminate barriers for women of all backgrounds and to enable them to succeed in the workforce.

We are so honoured to work with our partners and stakeholders who are critical in preventing and addressing gender-based violence, including family violence, sexual violence, and violence against indigenous women and girls. This includes supporting numerous organizations through grants and annual operational funding. We are investing in multiculturalism and antiracism initiatives to build a more diverse and stronger Alberta.

I really want to take a moment to thank all of the incredible folks in the associations and nonprofit associations who work really closely with us.

The Chair: Wonderful. Thank you, Minister. I'm sorry to interrupt, but that concludes our 10-minute time frame.

For those of you with visual and online, I do try to raise my hand with one minute left so you have a little bit of warning.

For the hour that follows, members of the Official Opposition and the minister may speak. Do the members and the minister wish to share time?

Ms Goehring: Please, Minister.

The Chair: Minister, are you willing to share time?

Mrs. Aheer: We'd actually like the block, please.

The Chair: All right. So the timer will be set for 10-minute intervals, and you have up to 10 minutes to speak.

Ms Goehring, you may start.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Minister, for joining us today. It's unfortunate that we're not able to go back and forth, so I guess I will start.

As you know, culture is a major industry in Alberta and a driver of community, diversity, and identity. Many that are part of the community were arguably some of the first to be negatively impacted by COVID and are likely to be the least to return to some sort of normalcy. There's mention of this understanding on page 111 of the fiscal plan; however, it's difficult to identify actual supports aside from the limited access to the stabilize fund. Major fairs are seeing another \$2.2 million cut year to year. Alberta Foundation for the Arts is seeing a further \$1.4 million year-to-year reduction. Cultural industries have been cut by over \$12 million and another 27 per cent year to year.

Business, community, family have all been impacted by COVID and are relying on this government for meaningful support. I've heard from so many individuals, organizations, businesses, and artists that are so worried and not only want to understand the decisions that are being made but are wanting to be included in the economic recovery plan. I've received a flood of questions and will be asking them on behalf of those impacted by the culture budget.

With that, I would like to start with the correspondence your office and all MLAs received from the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues and the Federation of Calgary Communities regarding this budget and their concerns. Myself and my colleagues have been fielding concerns in our constituencies, and as the culture critic I've been contacted by community organizations and ag societies from across the province. According to the letter, which I have copies of here and will be tabling in the Legislature, it shows that grants from culture under the community facility enhancement program are down 47 per cent since 2018-2019. These grants served to keep vital community centres operating, and they are the heart of our community, centres that are aging, Minister. These centres are meeting places. They host farmers' markets, dance classes, dances, fundraising events, playschools, Scouts, and so much, much more, yet as noted by the community federations, the ministry has chosen to reduce the CFEP grants by 26 per cent since last year, more than a quarter. You are choosing to literally cut out the heart of our communities.

I should note that these community members are listening. They have asked me to ask you these questions, so please keep that in mind when you answer. Why? Why are you choosing not to support the hearts of our communities? When a community league needs a new roof, they call a local contractor. When they need repair to the electrical, they call a small-business owner. Why are you advocating for major infrastructure investments for large corporations but won't provide the vital grants that will support communities and local entrepreneurs?

Aside from their letter, they have provided additional questions that they would like answered. Why does the ministry continuously

cut the CFEP program, which is a major source of funding for community infrastructure for civil societies?

7:20

Why is the ministry and yourself specifically, through the chair, not meeting with the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues or the Federation of Calgary Communities, who represent 162 leagues in Edmonton and 152 associations in Calgary? Both are nonpartisan organizations and represent tens of thousands of engaged Albertans of all political persuasions, including your own.

The overall fund pool has been reduced by almost 50 per cent over two years. Is there a plan to accommodate or address this significant cut to CFEP? Is this reduction meant to be permanent? What funding sources are municipalities expected to pursue to replace these cuts? Note that they claim the money has been moved to stimulus and that CFEP will be restored next year. Are communities able to access stimulus?

On page 63, line 2.3, the CIP budget has changed. It now includes initiatives transferred from other budgets. What is the breakdown of actual CIP funding that supports new programs and initiatives? Do you have any understanding of the impact cutting infrastructure funding has on smaller community-based nonprofits? Do you recognize that community infrastructure will collapse with this significant cut? Is there a plan on how to support existing and future community infrastructure worth over \$500 million in Edmonton and over \$450 million in Calgary to ensure it doesn't collapse? Why target the nonprofit community and voluntary service sector at a time when they have been one of the hardest hit during COVID? They, largely through volunteer efforts and with no cost to the government, have continued to support Albertans and the most vulnerable communities during the pandemic.

Young people and professionals are leaving the province to find better quality of life elsewhere, i.e., British Columbia. Has the government considered the role of community facilities and the activities they support enhancing quality of life and keeping and attracting business and skilled workers? What is the government's long-term plan to maintain current community facilities, building on the commitments successive governments have made towards community infrastructure? What commitment are they now prepared to make to those communities whose facilities require repairs, maintenance, et cetera? When can they expect to receive funding in the future? What messages do you have for communities currently lacking facilities? What can they expect to receive in financial support, or is this not part of the government's plan moving forward? Does the government care about communities and the resulting Albertans' quality of life enough to invest in supporting community-based organizations?

Agriculture societies are also asking some of these questions, Mr. Chair. They want the minister to know that they are the number one community support hub in most rural Alberta communities, and they're not eligible for support. They are at risk of losing capacity to offer community engagement through infrastructure and loss of volunteers. There was a small community that made an ice rink to support minor hockey. Unfortunately, with the public health regulations, children and youth were no longer able to participate in hockey. They have a very old arena that did not have the infrastructure in place to actually drain the ice and incurred a monthly cost of ice upkeep of around \$2,000. With no revenue able to come in, this agricultural society that runs the community arena was at an even greater deficit through no fault of their own and excluded from any access to funding support.

Rural communities rely on these societies and are at risk of losing them. Likely, these small communities will be the first to offer community activities and gatherings when it's safe to do so, and

they require the confidence of the community to do it. They need to be able to reflect that they have been part of the recovery plan, and unfortunately they have not been consulted with, and the budget does not reflect the support that they can access. If there is something that's missing, Minister, please identify specifically where in the budget these communities are being supported.

In Calgary and Edmonton the community leagues are there. In rural Alberta it's the agriculture societies. They're often the hub of a community and offer affordable ways to get engaged. Ag societies and community leagues have been clear that they want to be part of the recovery by offering to support community however they identify is needed. They offer food banks, COVID outreach, et cetera, all of which are great for the community. However, none are revenue based, which continues to put them at risk of closing their doors. The increase in the CIP, or the community initiatives program, is basically all because \$15 million was committed to the stabilize program in 2021-22. If we take out these dollars, CIP-based funding for this year is actually lower than previous years over the course of your term. Organizations will actually be receiving about 26 per cent less. That is significant. Why are you seeming to pick winners and losers when it comes to civil societies and creating boutique recovery programs that aren't available to all organizations in the sector?

Specifically to the stabilize program, if you start in the business plan, page 26, 27, and 28, I'm concerned that there's very vague information and only three pages. When we talk about the stabilize program, I've sent a letter to your office on behalf of industry asking for considerations to be made to accommodate for-profit art venues and have not received a response. Many from the industry have done media releases and have started a campaign in an attempt to be heard by this government. Here is a direct quote.

#ValueABVenues campaign to draw attention to Alberta's live music venues in crisis . . . Our industry has experienced complete devastation from the pandemic, and we will be among the last to come back. As we move forward working with the government to better understand our industry, we need support to ensure the survival of our ecosystem's infrastructure to ensure that the foundation of the industry, the people, are able to remain in place so we do not suffer an industry brain drain. When the infrastructure and the foundations crumble, we do not get this back.

With that, Minister, I will cede my time and listen to your response.

The Chair: Minister, you have up to 10 minutes.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much for bringing some really great questions forward. I'm going to talk about CFEP initially, but I just wanted to address that in terms of community halls and community centres, I wanted to thank – one of the most overwhelming things that I can think of is working with all the community organizations. Speaking directly to many, many groups, especially in rural areas, about their capacity, building community back, and especially under this situation, I just want to thank the thousands of volunteers and the manpower hours that have gone into the round-tables that we've held. We've held a significant number of round-tables for a lot of different – as everyone knows, this ministry has a lot of partners. It's very diverse. It's a beautiful group of people and a lot of different perspectives at the table.

There's certainly not one Band-Aid solution that will help out all of these organizations, which is why, when we looked at the stabilize program, for example, to start there, it was really important that we started off with one part of the sector. I know that there's been discussion that we haven't consulted, but we've consulted extensively. We'll continue to do so because those dollars, the first chunk that we're putting in, are for the live sector experience

because, as you can imagine, when we're talking about live artists and live performers, which I am one of, it's one of those things that keeps you up at night. I thought long and hard about where I would be in this situation, having lived in that sector and having worked in that sector, what would have been necessary. One of the things is making sure that these venues that support these artists are going to be surviving through this to make sure that they're able to promote not only our locally grown artists but also, once we're able to open up and able to bring people back into this province, our cultural centre.

The initial intention of the stabilize program was to take a look at – the taxpayer in Alberta has spent billions of dollars on infrastructure that really belongs to them, but the government is responsible to help maintain those because they're sitting idle, and if they shut down, not only the investment dollars but also the future ability to perform in those places could very much be at risk. That was one aspect that we took. To your point, there are many more pieces and people within the sector that need to be addressed, and those assessments – we will be addressing those as we go along as there are dollars slotted in for other organizations.

One of the things we were really, really proud of when it comes to the live artists – I need to give a huge shout-out here to Andrew Mosker at Studio Bell, to CKUA, and the organizations that helped us put on the spotlight production. That was an amazing opportunity for our local, home-grown artists to be able to perform here and to receive an honorarium but also to have a tip jar and be able to get their music out there and really showcase what they're doing. One of the things that was really quite amazing is that if you look at the AFA, for example, and the work that they do with artists, they're looking at interesting ways to help.

So we created in our ministry the pivot online tool, which was specifically around helping musicians and artists of all backgrounds to be able to find a way to work and monetize through this crisis. What was really amazing was seeing the quality and the ability of these musicians to be resilient and to be able to move forward even given the circumstances. I just want to make sure that we understand that everything that we do is to try and help support.

7:30

Then the other thing that I wanted to mention, too, on the for-profit side of things, one of the things that I had also read, too, is that the for-profit is also very, very dependent upon being able to bring musicians into Alberta from outside of Alberta, so largely a huge amount of the impact that is happening in those venues is because they're not able to bring in acts from outside of Canada. A lot of their frustrations, as you know, I'm sure, having researched this before you asked the questions, are with the ability to bring in musicians or artists from outside. For example, if we're looking at festivals – the Fringe Festival, the folk festivals – all of those are dependent upon a lot of these larger numbers and big names to be able to bring in people to be able to have these festivals. So there are multiple spaces. I really appreciate the conversation, and we're going to continue to consult.

I also wanted to talk about the CIP grants. The increase to CIP, the reason that we're doing that – I know you probably know this, but I'll reiterate it. Our wonderful Infrastructure minister is spending the most that has ever been spent in Alberta on infrastructure. Infrastructure is on cultural spaces, too. We're going to be looking at how that is being used to help out our sector. But, also, with the CFEP it's a small change for this year just to be able to help out with the CIP programs. These small communities – I mean, if you think about enriching communities, like you were saying in your questions and when you were bringing forward your concerns, you're right. These community organizations work

together to respond to local needs, and they are going to be essential to the relaunch and recovery of our province post-COVID.

You know, I'm constantly amazed by the ability of these organizations to be able to stretch their dollars but more by their willingness to be able to work with us. I certainly am happy to meet with any organizations that haven't met with us so far. Our round-tables continue, and we try to get to everybody on our list. Please have them reach out to us. Thank you for making us aware of that. We always appreciate that. That's wonderful information. I'm happy to reach out and have those conversations, for sure.

But if we look at civil societies and the role that they play in putting their communities back together, those CIP grants are directed specifically to make sure that we're investing in community-led initiatives. It's one thing for the government to go in and put an idea into an initiative, but when it's led by community, not only does it mean that the community has buy-in, but usually a municipality is participating, and they know that they're going to be impacting the most people that they can for those dollars that are being spent. It includes operating, project-based grants, enhanced capacity advancement programs, multiculturalism, indigenous, and inclusion grants – that's the MIIG grant – major sporting and cultural events, and other capacity-building grants. These operating grants have been a real lifeline to these communities along with the stabilize program continuing.

Also, just to be clear, back in May 2020 we actually reallocated dollars at that time directly towards community halls and community centres and organizations – I think it was \$3.7 million – because of exactly what you were talking about, with those community centres and organizations needing that help. The tool kit that we have here for artists is also for nonprofits. We've really had an amazing percentage of people be super positive about being able to use those tool kits. We had 530 participants and 242 views. Not only that, but this ministry, as you know, builds capacity in communities. We have dedicated folks that work right in this ministry that work directly with organizations that are doing their grant funding, to look at them and see how it is that we can best leverage the dollars that we have.

There is no way to get around the fiscal situation that our province is in, that we are in. You know, I wish I could say that it was different. There are contractions in the private sector, there are contractions everywhere, but I am so proud of the group of people that are sitting around me right now, who have looked deep and hard into the situation to find out how best we leverage those dollars. I have to tell you that my experience in the round-tables that I've had, whether that's with Stampede or Northlands or any of these organizations, has been nothing but immense for the hard work with us and gratitude. We tend to look at what we have and not what we don't have, especially at a time in COVID when we have lost friends and family. We've lost time with each other. We don't get to sit beside each other at concerts. We don't get to enjoy each other's company in real time. There is so much to be grateful for. Quite frankly, when I look at this, when I look at the investments that will continue to come from this government at this time, when all of us have been through so much, I sit here feeling that my cup is very much full and looking at what it is that we can do and not at what we can't do.

I wanted to also talk about the reallocation that went from the CFEP grants. It's just a one-time allocation, and it's at \$5 million. It will just help to bump up the CIP programs, that are much needed by those communities at this point in time, and then that will go back to what it was before.

The other thing I wanted to talk about, too, was the volunteers. You were mentioning the voluntary sector. One of the things that we're very proud of is Alberta Connects, the care program that we

put out at the beginning of COVID. What we found initially with our volunteers was, of course, that many, many of our volunteers are senior citizens, who, obviously, became a vulnerable population right off the bat once COVID really came into full force. With the volunteer care connects, we were able to bring people together to volunteer in their communities. Do you know what? We had over 1 million . . .

The Chair: I hate to interrupt, Minister. That concludes the first 20 minutes, roughly, of time.

For the second set of 10 minutes, Member Irwin.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Chair, and thanks to everyone for being here tonight. You know, it is incredibly troubling that the status of women ministry has been cut by 7 per cent, as indicated on page 64 of the estimates. This is after already being absorbed into the larger ministry and after multiple, consecutive years now of cuts. It's troubling at any time, but the fact is that this is happening at a time when we've seen precipitous drops in women's employment. We're in the midst of what's been labelled a shecession. We've called on you, Minister, through the chair, to address the need for women's voices to be centred in economic recovery plans, yet the minister has refused to date to address it.

We know that women – women entrepreneurs, women needing child care, single women, so many women, and the list goes on – are suffering in this economy. We know that racialized women are getting particularly hit hard. So it's troubling to me because you had an opportunity in this year's budget to address the supports needed for women. The minister, this ministry have had multiple opportunities to stand up and to fight for women. But the government address didn't even mention women once, and this government struck an economic recovery plan that ended up being mostly a manel. I could continue with countless examples, but I know that time will not allow it.

I want to point out the fact that your business plan has removed nearly all of the performance metrics. Only one remains that actually addresses women, and that one is about partner violence. That's absolutely important – don't get me wrong – but why are there no measures to track labour force participation? Previous governments included these in their business plans. In fact, this ministry even did in last year's business plan on page 40. Why, you know, in the midst of a pandemic or any time, really, would you remove these critical metrics?

You even had a new indicator last year. There was one that talked about females and males in management positions in Alberta. I'm asking the minister: why would you remove that one this year?

I'm genuinely curious: does this minister believe that women are doing just fine one year into the pandemic? What is your understanding of how women are faring? We've not been able to hear that from you in the House to date.

Beyond women and the economic recovery, one of the topics that is incredibly important to me and to my colleagues is the issue of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls and two-spirit folks. Your business plan, the ministry's business plan, page 27, mentions that you are going to be working with indigenous communities and government partners to address the recommendations of the inquiry. I have to ask: how is this work being tracked? There's no other mention of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls and two-spirit folks again in your business plan. There are no metrics. I'd like to know: what funds specifically are being allocated to this work? What has this work looked like, you know, concretely on your end?

I can tell you that I sat in on budget estimates with the Minister of Indigenous Relations, and according to him there does not appear

to be any defined funding to address this work. I know, Minister, that we have to kind of look at this work crossministerially, so I was really happy to ask that question there, but it was quite clear that there isn't. So I would like to know: what funding specifically has been allocated? If there isn't any, you know, will you be advocating? The challenge will be that those 231 calls for justice are going to require resourcing. They absolutely will. That's something that governments across this country are grappling with right now.

7:40

In fact, I know that you had an opportunity in January to attend a federal-provincial-territorial ministers virtual meeting, and from what I gather, from what information is public, the need to take action was made clear, particularly in relation to the experience of violence and the experience of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls and two-spirit folks. I'd love to hear as well, you know: what did you glean from that meeting, and what were you able to commit on Alberta's behalf?

Next I'd like to move on to the topic of gender-based analysis plus and intersectionality. I note that on page 27 of this minister's business plan, you know, there's a note about supporting multiculturalism, diversity, and inclusion and a list of ways that you want to do that. I would argue that one of the best ways to get at an outcome such as this would be through an intersectional approach, yet we know how your Premier feels about intersectionality. That's quite troubling, because your previous ministry's business plans talked about the key role of gender-based analysis plus. I remember asking you last year, and you talked about that being replaced. But now all that work is gone, and all mentions of it have been removed from this year's business plan.

Again, I'm going to refer to that FPT meeting that you had. At that meeting they reiterated the importance of the collective work, again, across Canada, taking a cross-country, crossjurisdictional lens to this, the use of gender-based analysis to really guide initiatives through the pandemic and the need to really work together on this. Again, I'm so curious: how were you able to defend Alberta's approach to gender-based analysis plus and the rejection of intersectionality as a critical approach to tackling a number of these issues? I'm curious: are we the only jurisdiction that has abandoned an evidence-based approach like gender-based analysis? You know, I have to ask as well: given that those policy lenses have been removed, what analysis, if any, is being done on policies, programs, and proposed legislation, again, now that gender-based analysis plus seems to be absolutely gone?

Next I'd like to move to the topic of LGBTQ2S-plus supports. On page 27 of your business plan you do mention LGBTQ2S-plus participation but, sadly, no metrics assigned once again. So I would just like to know: how will you ensure that representation of the LGBTQ2S-plus community will be addressed? What activities specifically are you engaged in, and what funding, if any, is being specifically allocated? I couldn't find that in the government documents.

Switching gears to gender-based violence, the same page of the business plan, page 27, you do mention initiatives to prevent gender-based violence. Again, I know, Minister, you very much, multiple times, talked about the need to take a serious approach to gender-based violence, but without any metrics, how will you track your own successes? I'm certain you want to be able to show that you've been successful in tackling such an important issue. Why would those measures, again, be removed? Last year's business plan specifically noted how much money, how much funding was being allocated: \$881,000 was noted in the 2020 business plan. Again, I don't see a specific breakdown related to gender-based

violence. What is that breakdown, and what are those funds being used for?

I want to as well touch on something that, again, this minister has been quite vocal on, and that is the issue of human trafficking. I just genuinely am curious why all references to human trafficking have been removed from this year's business plan. I noted in last year's business plan multiple references to, again, a topic that I know you've been quite passionate about. Why would that have happened? I know that the task force, from my understanding and from what I can see, again, publicly, is still being engaged in this work. If that work is ongoing, why would you not want to include that in this year's budget? Is there no funding being allocated? If not, why not? What are the timelines for that work and the key outcomes that they're focused on?

Finally, with my last minute I just want to touch on STEM. I noticed no references to STEM. Last year you specifically again focused on STEM, so the removal of explicit mentions of STEM and your government's attacks on postsecondary research institutions have me concerned that, you know, it's going to be very challenging to see any sort of growth in women's participation in these fields. I know that you might mention the women in STEM award and Women Building Futures and some of the things that you've provided us before, but again, if that's so important, then why are there no references? Why are there no metrics to show women's participation in STEM fields? Without any sort of data, without any sort of clear tracking, it's going to be really, really hard to assess this government's progress, and perhaps that's exactly what you want.

With that, I will end my remarks.

The Chair: Thank you, Member Irwin.

Minister, you have up to 10 minutes.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you so much, Chair. I'm going to just start with a correction regarding STEM. It's on page 27, outcome 2, under initiatives supporting key objectives. It says right there in capital letters: "gender-based violence and increasing the participation . . . of girls in STEM programs (science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics)."

Going on from there, I wanted to talk about a few of the initiatives that we are doing. But before I start with that, I just wanted to clear up that we modernized our business plans this year. We're committed, obviously, to continuous improvement of business planning and reporting through the integration of fiscal and financial and nonfinancial results. This includes clarifying relationships between budget spending to the results achieved and the links between spending and the outcomes, objectives, and initiatives identified.

The business plans have been streamlined to ensure more targeted and relevant information that better conveys to Albertans the value of budgeted spending such as how to describe that the actions will positively impact specific economic sectors or, in this particular situation, social sectors and also the reduction of red tape, which is very important, especially in sectors of need, given the COVID crisis. The streamlined approach will also ensure greater emphasis on performance measurement, which also helps to drive the change in continuous improvement in the program performances.

Just to be clear, when we're talking about the GBA plus, those performance metrics were previously included and are continued with every single table that we sit at. Understand – and let me be really, really clear – that our voice is at every single table and that we impact every single piece of legislation that comes across. We have incredibly strong women in our caucus that are constantly,

constantly working – they're absolute rock stars – constantly integrating information, not only from their communities but as women in their communities, to make sure that that piece of information, that lens, is on everything we do, whether that's through multiculturalism, GBA plus, LGBTQ2S-plus, the indigenous file, all of those things that are so important to the well-being of our communities and the safety and security of all people who live in this province.

The assumptions that were made in the opening comments are disingenuous and lack any sort of data to actually be legitimate, especially given the fact that our lens is at every single table. We are accountable to Albertans, and we are protecting lives and livelihoods. All the ministries will continue to track previously reported measures, and they'll continue to internally assess whether the government is achieving its desired outcomes.

To be clear, I was trying to go through, like, all of the various organizations that we had met. Like, it's been a very, just an unbelievable – I'm sure I was mentioning this in question period the other day. You know, the engagement throughout COVID has been something else. It's very profound, and it's very busy. I think that all of us, no matter where you sit in this House, opposition or in government, have found that it's been very meaningful to sit and engage with a lot of different organizations and groups, and it's been very impactful to work that we do.

7:50

Over Black History Month, which is an amazing opportunity to be a jumping-off point to black history being part of everything that we do every day – same thing with International Women's Day; I think we should declare that every day should be an international women's day, but that's just me – you know, we talked to Black Canadian Women in Action, the de Sedulous Women Leaders group, black women entrepreneurs, black women's branding. We went to different women's groups and entrepreneurs. We're the very first province to have a Women's Entrepreneurship Day.

You know, going back to – the member had mentioned about the FPTs. I just wanted to mention that one of the main pieces with the status of women FPT and the work that was being done there was actually on the STEM file. If you go back, I think, since 1962, the advocates for STEM and women getting into these roles have been strong.

We're at a point in our lives and in the world and where Alberta is right now where this is our moment, our moment to jump in, and I have so much faith. I have faith in the women that I talk to. I have faith in the incredible women that are out there – they've become teachers and caregivers on top of doing their jobs or given up their jobs to come home and take care of their families – and making sure that the world that they go back to is full of opportunities for them as we relaunch and recover. Truthfully, no matter what your partisanship, this is not a partisan issue. This is an issue of whether or not as a province we work collaboratively together to acknowledge women in the workforce.

Now, let me be clear. We have a \$23 billion budget for health; 80 per cent of the people in health are women health care workers. That money is going directly into making sure that our front lines are protected and that they have everything that they need and that we can hire, whether that's contact tracers, whether that is folks that do immunizations right now. These are all on the front line, and these are all women's jobs. To be clear, the most important part of that is that we're making sure that we're investing in that to make sure that those women have those jobs to go to and that they're acknowledged and honoured for those jobs.

Secondly, getting kids back into school was as much for their mental health, and getting teachers back to work as well: over 80

per cent of our teaching faculties in this province are women. Those women had jobs to go back to because this government took a stance on getting education open, and we were one of the first provinces to open child care immediately, with proper COVID standards, and make sure that child care was available so that the women on the front line had child care. Not only could they go and do their jobs and take care of their children and educate their children if they were at home, but they had daycare to go to.

Further to that, the STEM pieces of this. We have so many young girls, you know, between grade 6 and grade 9 that show an amazing propensity for sciences, and then as they get into high school, there seems to be a gap even though their marks are quite high. They're not going into these really, really incredible jobs and opportunities. There are incredible opportunities out there.

Infosys has just come into Alberta. This is a tech company, and if you look at what's happening right now, Canada coding is actually coming into Alberta to work with youth, especially girls, dedicated to girls, to get them coding so that as they're coming out of this and they find that interest, they're going to be able to go into these jobs and plow the next pathways of the future for the women ahead of us. I'm telling you that we're in a time where this is our moment to move forward and not go backwards, and it's a shame when partisanship takes over versus what is actually happening and the importance.

The disproportionate impact on women cannot be understated, but that is the problem. What is the solution? The solution is not pointing fingers. The solution is funding health care. The solution is making sure women can go back and teach at school or run their jobs. Out of every 100 men in Alberta, 80 women are entrepreneurs. I was actually really happy to hear the member talk about the private sector. Please, I hope there are more questions about that because the private sector, let me tell you, is where it's at, and that's where women are. Do you know that we had more businesses open in COVID? Those were women-led businesses. I went and visited these women on the ground. They are resilient and amazing.

But you know what needs to change? You know what the question is that you should be asking? Why are banks not investing in women? When we look at venture capitalism and angel funding, why do they invest more in men and not in women? Women are 51 per cent of the population. We are worth investing in. Those are the questions you need to ask.

Why are we not looking at the organizations and making sure that that culture shift is happening, not just in government? We have GBA plus every single day, all day. In fact, we include inclusion and diversity in that as well. But what is happening out in the corporate world? What are our expectations? Are we looking into those? Are our expectations changing that inclusion and diversity are not just buzzwords? They're action words that are expected by a shift in culture in corporations, public sector, in all of those organizations, not only to look at gender but to look at ethnicity, to look at sexuality, to make sure that we're speaking language and influencing people to come into our spaces and be at the table.

The member mentioned that there were only two women at that table. Well, my goodness, you haven't met these women. They're not only two women and they're at the table – and I'm sorry that you feel the need to not acknowledge the incredible talent that is at that table. That table will continue to grow and be added to. I'll tell you that the incredible work that is being done there to make sure that women are supported as we go forward in our business plan, in our budget is about getting people back to work.

I'm interested in why the member didn't mention about the, you know, over 16 per cent unemployment in ages 19 to 25. Are you not concerned about that? That's a major . . .

The Chair: Sorry to interrupt, Minister.

We will now begin our third set of 20 minutes. Mr. Deol, you have up to 10 minutes.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to start with some of the comments the minister has made in her response to Member Irwin, talking about the private sector and not creating the culture, investing in women entrepreneurs, and the banking sectors not coming forward. What I have learned in all my life working in social activism: the government policies and government directions are the ones that create or help create a culture. The private sector has not set examples. They're going to follow what we propose, how we move.

I wanted to start my comments, actually, going back to the ministry business plan on page 25. This is how it reads: "The ministry consists of the Department of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women . . . [for] Arts, Alberta Advisory Council on the Francophone, and Alberta Anti-Racism . . . Council." I just wanted to put this in commas. That means the Alberta Anti-Racism Advisory Council is an essential segment of the ministry. The Alberta Anti-Racism Advisory Council must be fully functional for the ministry in achieving its goal to promote diversity, inclusion, and equity.

What is troubling here, not only in general but specifically even – a lot of scenarios to discuss. The COVID-19 pandemic is one aspect, and in the wake of rising hate crimes what I see or, like, am not able to see – the ministry has not dedicated specific points for the provision of the Alberta Anti-Racism Advisory Council. My question is, like: how should Albertans believe that the work the government is doing or the ministry is serious in combatting racism in the province?

I just wanted to highlight some of the points around this. Basically, there are no indicators to support multiculturalism. The indicators are missing. Further, Alberta does not currently have GBA-plus programs despite agreeing to one, and this impacts policy and budget considerations. The minister has said that they have a new program called IDEA. But this is exactly what the members of indigenous and racialized communities say, that we need to move away from this. The question around this is, like: how are you tracking antiracism initiatives without having specific metrics around this? How are you supporting racialized Albertans who have experienced hate attacks recently, just in the past months, not long ago, incident after incident?

8:00

The business plan states that \$1.8 million "will promote multiculturalism, diversity and inclusion, including the John Ware Mentorship . . . for Black Youth." How much of that is going to support that program? I'm referring to the \$1.8 million. How much of that is going to support the Anti-Racism Advisory Council? What specific promotions should we be looking for? So a lack of a number of, you know, clarities.

There have been many concerns regarding the impact. I have been hearing from my community, stakeholders. I've done a number of media on this around the updated curriculum, the impact that will have on racialized Albertans and indigenous people, particularly given the interim updates that have been released. I'm asking the minister through the chair: how are you promoting and protecting inclusion and diversity and equity in the Alberta curriculum? What input have you had? Have you spoken to members of racialized communities and indigenous communities and advocated for their inclusion in the curriculum in the way they want to be represented as part of your work in supporting multiculturalism under key objective 2.4?

Line item 2.6 of key objectives of outcome 2 on page 27 reads, "Support the Alberta Anti-Racism Advisory Council to identify ways the Alberta government can combat racism and inspire Albertans to celebrate our diversity" but has no funding allocation information to the council in the estimates. The performance measures are missing on page 26 of the government business plans. Once again, how do you plan to achieve the goal to combat racism and promote diversity and inclusion in Alberta without adding performance metrics in the plan? Looking at page 26 of the government business plan again, how can the number of adults visiting a heritage facility support the Alberta Anti-Racism Advisory Council or the government to combat hate-motivated crimes in the province?

Line item 3.3 in the government estimates on page 63 shows funding allocation for cultural industries cut by \$12 million. This is another cut by 39 per cent year to year and almost down to half of the 2019 budget. It will have devastating effects on the cultural industries when, in fact, the industry needs more support due to the COVID-19 pandemic and a rise in hate crimes. Visual and performing art is crucial in spreading love and harmony in our society, primarily funded under the Ministry of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women, and more importantly, when a large number of Albertans have lost jobs due to the COVID-19 pandemic and slow economy. The film industry helps creativity and promotes talent, and this growing sector across Canada is imperative to diversify the economy. How do we justify these cuts when this industry needs more support than ever before?

Alberta is experiencing an increase in hate-motivated crimes, as I already said. The incidents took place in Edmonton, Calgary, Red Deer, and many other parts of the province. White supremacist groups like the Ku Klux Klan openly organized events, held tiki torch events, even violating Alberta's health orders. The Premier and the UCP government have failed to show leadership, condemn the racist acts and groups, and take concrete actions against these groups. They have done nothing to stop the events. This study shows that hate-motivated crimes have increased 300 per cent in Alberta. Line item 8.2 on page 64 of the government estimates shows that the funding for multiculturalism is cut by 2.1 per cent. Now, a cut to multiculturalism funding means that the government is completely out of touch and not serious about combating racism. How do you think it will help promote diversity and inclusion in our province?

I think I do have 10 seconds or four seconds. I will cede them. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Deol.

Minister, you have up to 10 minutes.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much. I just wanted to say with regard to the tiki torches, again, I unequivocally cannot believe that in 2021 that this is happening in our province. It's disgusting, and I think we've been very clear about that. Having said that, I've been subjected to white supremacy in my own riding when I was a little girl. I've been impacted heavily. I was called an abomination by a group of people because my dad is Southeast Asian and my mom is Caucasian, and evidently I contaminated the bloodline. I have personal experience with this. I find it extremely disingenuous that a member would assume that a person who they don't know anything about would have no experience in this.

Let's start from the space of what antiracism is all about. You know, I'm going to quote somebody who I personally look up to, and that's Martin Luther King. Martin Luther King said, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that." That means that when we look at

antiracism, division, fear, anger, and frustration, that is the belly of racism. That is where it is bred, that's where it is living, and that's where it comes from. The collaborations that need to happen in this province to shift – the word "tolerance" just drives me crazy. To tolerate is not enough. To completely wipe the notion of having any sort of cultural bias has to be the ultimate goal at the end of the day.

More than that, I wanted to say thank you to ARAC for the incredible work that they've done. ARAC works through the secretariat that we have set up for them through the ministry to have whatever they need in order to meet and do the incredible work that they're doing. It is supposed to be a safe place where these incredible individuals – we have Abe Silverman, for example, who's on that committee, who's a survivor of the Holocaust. You know, we have incredible people on that committee who have personal, visceral things that have happened to them in their lifetimes. This isn't a joke; these are real people bringing real and important ideas to the table to truly dig in, work with their communities, engage at a level.

This is about sensitivities. Even within our own culture we have cultural sensitivities. Can you imagine – one of the things that I think I'm most proud of that we've accomplished was making sure that COVID material went out in 12 different languages, including a version of Hebrew, to make sure that leaders of communities and folks were able to make sure that some of the hardest hit communities, many of them who are on the front lines, had as much information as they could, to understand that when you're living in multigenerational families, like what I come from, it's okay to isolate and take care of yourself so that you can get better. Having COVID care teams on the ground, with MLAs going out with them to speak in the languages that make sense to them – you can imagine that in this crisis it's hard enough to understand it in English, let alone, you know, if English is your second language.

8:10

I have to say, you know, that I hope that everyone in the Legislature will acknowledge the renaming of the federal plaza to the Violet King Henry Plaza. The significance of that name in a place that only seven days earlier had had a rally of white supremacy cannot be understated. Families, children, people will come to the federal plaza when we open up this beautiful province of ours, and they will see the name of this exquisite woman who broke barriers like nothing that any of us have ever had to encounter, travelled into two different countries. You know, I spoke to her daughter, and her daughter told me that when she moved to the United States, she was too qualified to work in many of the organizations that she did. The organization that she did work in was so toxic – and she had cancer at the time – that it probably impeded her ability to get better. She was not acknowledged for the work that she did until that person passed away and they could actually acknowledge her for the work that she had accomplished.

Those are the kind of stories that come from this province and things that we should be proud of and the jumping-off point of where we have to go. If we're going to continue to point fingers at each other, if we're going to continue with the rhetoric of anger and frustration and breeding the place of racism, we will not go forward. We will not go forward if the intention is going to be that this is an ideological choice versus an absolute imperative of any government or anybody. To the point that the member said, that governments have to lead by example, absolutely they do, but then they have to take that example and they have to make the expectation happen out in the world. What is the expectation? That we are going to help to learn about what unconscious bias is by having youth groups come together and talk about that, to talk about the strength.

I'd like to address what the MLA brought up about education. I hope that you are listening to what the Minister of Education is saying, but just to be clear, the Minister of Education spoke with Minister Simpson, and Minister Simpson assured her that the Northwest Territories is simply going through their normal curriculum review process. They do this every five years. Please, I'm begging you. Do not politicize this. This is a normal event. They're looking at several different curriculums, including Alberta's, and they're going through the review process. He actually informed her that he was looking forward to reviewing the K to 6 curriculum. It will be completely transparent, and our lens has been on there from the beginning in terms of black history education, in terms of indigenous education, in terms of making sure that we understand the missing and murdered indigenous women and girls.

This is not just a topic for us; reconciliation and change happens when you actually work together in collaboration with the groups. The Minister of Indigenous Relations and myself put together a panel of incredible women from across the province to help us understand what our responsibilities are in this and how we do that. I'm not going to lead that discussion; I'm not First Nations. I leave that to the experts and in the hands of the women and the people on the front lines who've experienced that first-hand. Our commitment to addressing the key principles of reconciliation are first and foremost in our minds, and the minister has been very, very clear about that, so I want to start with that correction.

I would also like to go on to a couple of other things that we're really proud of. The MIIG grants, the multiculturalism inclusion and indigenous grants: this is a grant that we combined together because we wanted to have a much broader ability to be able to impact community. Antiracism work does not just mean that you have the legal antiracism on it; it's to the point of collecting data and figuring out the impetus of a program, how that works, and how it is helping that community to grow and expand.

I have to say that we expanded Culture Days from a weekend to a month, and we spent the month travelling this beautiful province learning about everything from the Métis language to jiggling, to working with different organizations of culture. It was, quite frankly, astounding, especially going into rural communities that are working really hard to elevate LGBTQ2S-plus minority communities that live there, because a lot of rural communities love the fact that new Canadians are coming out there and bringing their risk capital and investing in these small communities and really, really breathing life into rural communities.

We also did a program called the VOICE program. This is a program that we ran with the Edmonton football team. I want to give a shout-out to Commissioner Randy Ambrosie, who was a heartbeat behind this entire program, where we work with male athletes that are semiprofessional and professional athletes that are actually doing the work on consent, doing the work on understanding the situations that young folks can get themselves into, and understanding the responsibility that they have to not only mentor young boys but also mentor young girls on autonomy and having strength over your own body and understanding how precious a person is. I attended that course along with my press secretary, Amanda, for 10 weeks. It was a life-altering experience. I want to thank Colleen Pirie for that, too. You can talk and you can use language and semantics all you want; this is real action at work. This mentoring program will be heading into the schools. They're going to be working with us. We're really looking forward to following up with them and finding out the data about that.

The LEAD program. The LEAD program combines the STEM program along with the Persons Case program. This was essentially a combination of work between myself and the Minister of

Advanced Education where we looked at: how do we really engage with communities to make sure that they're working on gender discrimination, racism, elevating women's equity and equality, and so many other things that are necessary but also really, really, you know, showing to these young women . . .

The Chair: Sorry to interrupt, Minister.

There are approximately 30 seconds left for Member Irwin.

Member Irwin: Oh, my goodness. Where to begin? I mean, this minister just noted that we're angry. You better believe that we're angry. We're angry for the multiple black Muslim women who have been attacked in our city without a word of condemnation from your Premier. We're angry for racialized folks who are waiting for tangible action from this government. To imply that my colleague, a racialized person himself, was making any sort of judgment . . .

The Chair: Sorry to interrupt, Member Irwin. That went very, very quickly. I apologize. That does conclude the 60-minute block for the Official Opposition and the first portion of questions.

We will now move to the government caucus for 20 minutes of questions from members. Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk, you have up to 10 minutes.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Chair. If it's all right with you, I'd like to share something with the group today. Today in Leduc a 17-year-old female student is dead, and a fellow student is in police custody after a violent assault at a school in Leduc. RCMP say that the attack happened this morning in a classroom at Christ the King school in Leduc, which has about 350 students from grades 9 to 12. The girl was airlifted to Edmonton, where she died of her injuries, and her death is being investigated as a homicide. Bob Young, the mayor of Leduc, said that the girl was stabbed, and all schools in the area were locked down until police made the arrest. Police say that a 19-year-old man who is a student at the same school was later taken into custody. The RCMP say that the two students were known to each other but will not say if this attack was targeted. This is truly incomprehensible that this act should happen in the close-knit community of Leduc, said the RCMP.

This is life altering for the family and the friends of the deceased and the youth and staff at Christ the King and the entire community. If there is ever a time to support your neighbours and hug your loved ones, this is it. The school's police resource officer was not present at the time of the attack. Obviously, the major crimes investigators are taking control of the case, and officers were not looking for any more suspects.

In respect, Chair, of the deceased child today, I ask your permission that we have a moment of silence in recognition of her loss and the terrible act in Leduc.

The Chair: We will honour that request. We will have one minute of silence. The clock will continue to run.

Thank you, members. That concludes one minute of silence. I would ask the government member to continue with her questions. She has just under seven minutes left.

8:20

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Chair. To the minister. According to government estimates page 64, line 8.1, approximately \$2.3 million is being allocated to status of women for addressing gender-based violence and increasing the participation of women and girls in STEM programs: science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics. What is Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women doing to deal with gender-based violence?

The Chair: Are you going to cede your time?

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: You know what? I'll cede my time to Ms Rosin. Sorry. That was my only question.

The Chair: Please proceed, Ms Rosin.

Ms Rosin: All right. What a surprise. Well, thank you, Minister, so much for being here and for all of the work that you have done in this budget and over the course of the year in preparation for it and sustaining many of these cultural organizations and community organizations over the course of one of the most difficult years probably in their lives. I've got a few questions for you. I understand that we're doing block times, so I'll kind of cut to the chase so that you can have ample time to answer them.

On page 60 of the estimates document item 3.3 of your budget is for the Alberta media fund, which supports film and television production and postproduction here in Alberta. I'm wondering if you can speak to, for every dollar that is invested in the film industry in Alberta, what kind of a typical return we see on those dollars and what form that return might come in, whether that is literal dollars, hotel stays, tourism promotion, anything like that. The film industry has been a lifeblood and a huge aid for the constituency of Banff-Kananaskis. The name alone for my constituency might give that away, but movies from *Superman to Planet of the Apes* to, I believe, even a scene from *Game of Thrones*, which people might not know, have been filmed out in my neck of the woods. I think most notably would be *The Revenant*, which is one of the more recent ones. We see films constantly coming to my constituency, and that's because it is so beautiful that the whole world wants to be here and wants to put it on the big screen. I'm just curious if you can speak to what kind of return we typically see on film investments in Alberta.

Going off that, I can also see – you can correct me if I'm wrong, but I believe that we have reduced funding to the Alberta media fund in this budget by nearly 50 per cent over the last two years, so I'm wondering what the reason for this is and if possibly this is because we have created the new film tax credit and if some of those funds have been rolled over to that new program. I understand that that's possibly part of Jobs, Economy and Innovation, but just if you can speak to whether that is the case and if that is why the funding to the Alberta media fund itself has been reduced over the past couple of years.

Depending on your response to that, since introducing Alberta's new and long-awaited film tax credit, obviously recognizing that economic conditions have been a little bit different over that past year and many film companies have struggled to produce over the past year or get people across the border safely to set up operations, I'm just wondering if you can speak to what sort of investments we have seen made in Alberta's film or television industry in Alberta since the introduction of that new grant and how those new investments compare to previous years, before the tax credit existed.

Again, I recognize that these numbers may not be what we expect them to do because of COVID-19. It threw a little bit of a wrench in the production plans of many. But I am just curious to see if we have seen an uptick in investment activity since the introduction of that grant or if we have any projected numbers for the future and if there have been any film productions announced over the past year or projected for the future, if we have any numbers as to what the cumulative return on investment was from those film and television productions just over the past year and how that affects your budget and the overall government budget.

In a different vein, another thing I wanted to talk about was supporting sport in Alberta. Naturally, with the constituency of Banff-Kananaskis, winter sport and year-round sport is a huge part of the livelihoods of many of my constituents. In fact, we have the Canmore Nordic Centre, which initially was built for the 1980s Olympics and now serves to train and house many athletes. In fact, Canmore now has more Olympians per capita than anywhere else in Canada, which is a statistic that myself and many others are quite proud of. I am just wondering – again, this is on page 61 of your estimates document, item 7, which is about supporting sport in Alberta – if you can speak to how much grant funding your ministry spent last year on major winter sporting events such as the cross-country ski world cups.

Then I'm wondering if you can speak to how much funding has been allocated to major winter sporting events in your new budget, and I am also wondering if you can speak to what the average return on investment is for these major sporting world cup events in Alberta. Again, that investment and that return can be realized in terms of dollars spent in communities, jobs created, tourism publicity received, hotel stays, anything like that.

With that, I will conclude my questions. Thank you.

The Chair: All right. Minister, you have up to 10 minutes to respond.

After this 20-minute block is complete, we will have a short five-minute break.

Minister, you have up to 10 minutes.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you so much, and again thank you for the questions. Yeah. You know, I wanted to say to the MLA for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville: thank you so much for your beautiful acknowledgement of this young woman that we've lost. It's absolutely horrible. Thank you for giving us a moment to acknowledge her and her family. All of our love and condolences to the family and the community. It's just absolutely horrible news.

To jump into the questions, I'm going to start with the Alberta media fund piece. You're correct in your assumptions. I know that questions had come from MLAs across the way there regarding that. I'm sorry that I didn't get to answer that question, so I'll answer it now. The film tax credit, the Alberta media fund: the \$12 million that you see that is changing is because we have commitments to the Alberta media fund that were under our ministry, and slowly we're transferring those over to Jobs, Economy and Innovation. You'll see that there will be a constant decrease of those dollars as we go along as that ends up moving over to the film tax credit. We'll have some really great news coming out about that film tax credit very shortly here. We're very excited to work.

You know, we were talking to Luke Azevedo, and his idea is that 2021 actually could be shaping up to be probably one of the best local film and television times that the industry has experienced in a long time. This is a fellow who has worked long and hard in this sector and advocates very hard for the film industry, so we're really happy to see that. The possibilities of some of the biggest in the world coming to Alberta, not only just for the productions but actually making this place their home, is actually quite significant.

There's another film that was filmed out in your area, Member for Banff-Kananaskis. It was called *Land*, and I hope you have a chance to see this phenomenal film. It was made in Alberta. The director is Robin Wright, and she directed and debuted it. The *New York Times*: it was their critic's pick. What they talked about a lot with respect to the film industry was about our incredible crews that we have here and the uptake on that. When we were talking earlier about jobs and especially women in jobs, these are the tech jobs and

things specifically that we're talking about that are going to open up incredible opportunities for the women in this province that go into these opportunities to do tech and other jobs. There are going to be so many opportunities for people to be able to find incredible work in this province. I'm actually very optimistic about the work that is coming in because the film sector has just been going along tickety-boo even with all of the protocols and everything.

We're trying to work – our YYC pilot program was initially very important to the success of the film industry because of our rapid testing and the pilot project that we had at the airport for people to be able to come in and be in the province and actually work here. Based on new variants and changes that are happening, of course, that had to shut down. However, having said that, we've been able to work with the federal government on some exemptions and bubbles that will help these film sectors to really, really flourish here. They're coming because of wonderful people, they're coming because we have a low-tax advantage, and they're coming because we have the most beautiful spaces, as I'm sure the Member for Banff-Kananaskis can attest to.

8:30

To talk about sport, if you're asking about last year, I think it was about \$750,000, but in terms of major sporting and cultural events the grant stream will continue to follow these types of events. Sport is going to be focused on national or international amateur sports events sanctioned by the national sport organizations or international federations. Some of the money that we got from the federal government – and we did a lot of work with federal government lobbying on behalf of the province of Alberta so that our PSOs were funded, because a lot of the national sport organizations were funded, but they weren't coming back into the province. We worked with them on flexibility to make sure that those dollars would be there.

Culturally, the focus is on national or international cultural events that are recognized by the respective governing bodies, so the sanctioned events are eligible for those particular grants, and they've been awarded or approved by these legally recognized governing bodies. It's quite a process, actually, to go through this to get these large organizations to come in. I know that the Nordic centre is looking to do some upgrades, and this is one of those world-class spaces that is just wonderful and will bring, hopefully – fingers crossed, toes crossed, everything crossed – back into our area, with vaccinations, these areas are going to be packed full of people soon, coming to see our beautiful places and use our natural outdoors to really, really enjoy this beautiful part of the world.

I was going to say, too, that sport has to be part of the national and international major multisport game program in order to be eligible. In 2021 we've had 12 applications that have been received for the funding. The funding recommendation for the projects was \$705,000 approximately, \$706,000 almost. Funding of \$250,000 was earlier approved for Tourism Calgary's request for support of Canada Curling hub. We did awesome in the recent curling initiatives and the competitions that we had. So proud of these organizations; they did an excellent job of functioning within COVID protocols. Also, we approved Tourism Calgary's request for support of curling as Canada's hub initiative. One application was funded through the CIP project base for \$45,000. There were three applications withdrawn because, of course, events have been cancelled, which is unfortunate, but it's just the way of the world right now. One application was cancelled due to COVID health restrictions, one was withdrawn, and I'm not sure what happened with the other application. If you want more information on those, I can happily share that with you.

You wanted to talk about the average return of investment on the film sector. It's 1 to 5 or 1 to 6 depending on the organization. We also started the Alberta media fund, which is a smaller media fund in our ministry, of \$1 million to really, really help these new producers and scriptwriters and folks come forward. I don't know if you knew, but there's a young man named Caleb Ryan who just did a film called *The Vagrant*. It is spectacular. I think it was a \$35,000 film. We didn't actually help him out with that film, and this is the issue with the gaps, that not a lot of these organizations know that these media funds exist, so we're working really hard to reach out into the community to make sure that people like Caleb Ryan are able to access those dollars. The film is actually going internationally, and he is being recognized as an up-and-coming director. It is a powerful, powerful story. Also, so many are coming. We're trying to really, really reach out into the community, especially into communities that don't normally look for these grants.

One of the things that we've been talking about, whether that's with the Alberta federation for the arts or with the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation – a lot of times grants will go back out into the same areas and be used by similar people over and over again; we really want to make sure that we're going into communities that would not normally know even how to access these grants so that they have the ability to create film, create content. And especially with these large organizations that are coming into our province, these new up-and-comers are going to have amazing mentoring opportunities to work with some of the best in the world as they go forward with these projects.

Here are the rest of the projects, 2021 examples of projects that are coming up, for the Alberta made production grant. We have a Bonnyville project, and we have one in Calgary-Buffalo; they don't have names for the projects yet, just numbers. We have one in Edmonton-City Centre and another one in Calgary-Buffalo that's called Horned Serpent Productions; they're an awesome group there. Then Spruce Grove-Stony Plain has Sixblix Flicks, and they're putting a production together. A third one in Edmonton-City Centre. Then Edmonton-Ellerslie has GIFT Productions. They're using the Alberta made production grant to really, really recognize for these small-budget productions. Then Lethbridge-West has also got a production coming in here. Then in the cultural industry, operating, we have applicants from Edmonton-Riverview, Edmonton-Strathcona, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock, Calgary-Buffalo, Edmonton-Gold Bar, and Calgary-Varsity.

So as you can see, these projects, the industry operating grants, and the production grants are really, really making some significant impact, especially in the smaller part of the sector, which, when we actually did our consultations, was a really important piece for the media sector, to make sure that these organizations are really getting a sort of a hand up to get started. We have so many women and people of minorities that are really . . .

The Chair: I'm sorry, Minister, to interrupt. That concludes 10 minutes.

There is approximately one minute left for Mr. Reid.

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Minister. Just one quick question just to wrap up this block. With the changes in this year's budget, could you outline for us just what funding is available through the community grants through your ministry?

The Chair: Minister, you can proceed. You have about 35 seconds.

Mrs. Aheer: Okay. There is a funding increase to CIP from \$19.7 million in 2021 to \$37.1 million for the Budget 2021. This is the community initiatives program. Then we're empowering local

citizens and community. We are also making sure that that \$37 million helps out with the stabilize program plus making sure that community has access to being able to build really, really important pieces, especially now.

It's really jobs-focused, so the more that we can get programs going into these communities that are jobs-focused, that are working with building capacity in communities, depending on what their needs are. I mean, they're certainly better positioned to tell us what they need than I am. The other grant funding streams: of course, we have the major cultural and sporting events, multiculturalism indigenous inclusion grants, impact capacity . . .

The Chair: I apologize, Minister. That concludes the 20-minute block for the government caucus to ask questions.

At this time we will take a five-minute break. I ask that you report back at 8:43 promptly. Thank you very much.

[The committee adjourned from 8:37 p.m. to 8:42 p.m.]

The Chair: Thank you, committee. Now we move to five minutes of questions from the Official Opposition, followed by five minutes of response from the minister. Please remember that discussions should flow through the chair at all times, regardless of whether or not speaking time is combined.

Ms Goehring, you have five minutes.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I left off speaking about the live music venues for profit. I have to say that I'm a little bit frustrated that the majority of my questions were left unanswered, unlike those of your colleagues. I think what I'm going to do is go through the questions that are being asked, continuing with those from industry, and try to get some answers for them because they are watching, Minister.

Like I'd mentioned before, the live music venue has created a campaign to draw attention to some of their concerns. They've also brought forward some very specific recommendations. You indicated that you would like to meet with some of those industries that haven't met with you yet. However, they've been asking for over a year. Hopefully, today you can provide some answers on what they're asking. They've asked for an expansion of the eligibility criteria for the provincial and other support programs to include for-profit music venues. That would fall, I would think, under the stabilize program. They would like exploration of programs to insulate venues from increasing operational costs as we work towards recovery. They would like to explore an Alberta live music support fund to provide emergency relief to venues and artists and financial assistance for pandemic retrofitting. I would like to know if the request from the for-profit venues has been considered to qualify for the program. And have you reached out to them as of yet to discuss their recommendations and tasks?

Sorry; I'm just giving the minister an opportunity to write the question down so that she can respond in her round. Thank you.

The Chair: Fair enough. I would just encourage all members to please continue to tie questions to the budget or estimates as best they could, please. Thank you.

Ms Goehring: That's in relation to the stabilize program. Thank you.

Further to that, to being excluded from the stabilize program, live venues and choir groups have been asking whether restrictions also include gathering safely with an audience, like those eligible in a spiritual setting. The wording under outcome 1, bullet 1, under initiatives supporting key objectives states, "when it is safe to do so." Can you please provide clarity as to why it is safe to gather in

a religious setting to sing but that others cannot gather with the same restrictions safely in a live music setting?

Venues are in crisis and, without support, risk closure. We've already lost 16 venues in the province. When asked about this lack of support, the ministry's office consistently points to small-business supports from another ministry, yet it's your business plan that has key objective 1.3, "to grow [the] creative and cultural industries by 25 per cent." Is that 25 per cent from where it is today or pre-pandemic? How will you track the success of your initiatives, and how do you plan to grow the sector if we lose the venues?

I'd like to talk a little bit about key objective 1.4, to "establish a Creative Partnerships Alberta program to connect the arts, philanthropy and business sectors." Are you aware how the arts industry works in Alberta, and do you know that these partnerships already exist right now? For example, have you ever been to the Winspear Centre? It was built due to what was at the time the largest philanthropic donation in the history of Canada for arts. And you must have been to Symphony Under the Sky and would be aware that the ATB is a major sponsor. Have you ever been to the sponsor's lounge or to the sponsor's events? Are you saying that businesses and donors aren't doing enough to support the arts in Alberta? If not from donors, where do you think the matching funds that arts organizations provide are coming from?

Festivals and major fairs. Festivals were told that they would have guidelines or timelines by the end of February on how they can proceed, but they have not received anything, and recently the Premier seemed to indicate that there was no timeline on when this information and guidance could be forthcoming, even indicating perhaps they will have to wait until June. How does this uncertainty work within your ministry's goal to grow the sector by 2029, and have you been making it clear to your fellow cabinet members how vital it is to this sector that they have both financial support and clear guidelines in order to be here for Albertans when we need them to be?

On page 27 of the business plan, key objective 2.2, there is reference to supporting Alberta's heritage resources, yet overall cuts to heritage are 13 per cent year to year. I'll get to this more in my next time.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Member Goehring.

Minister, you have up to five minutes to respond.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, and thank you to the member for the questions. Some of your questions that you're asking actually need to be attributed to AHS and the decisions that they're making. I fully, fully respect the questions, and they're questions that we're also asking to try and figure out how best – but you have to also understand that the sectors themselves are also nervous about opening up.

When we've spoken about choirs and that we're trying to create orchestra bubbles and other things like that in order to get folks back to work, it's one of those things – it's an interesting discussion. When we talk about a workplace, for example, a lot of people see a workplace as a desk and a cubicle in a room, but for our artists and for our musicians and our orchestras and choirs, to your point, they have a very different workplace, don't they? It's not a desk, and it's not a cubicle; it's a stage or a practice room or many other things. It's a very good question, and we are working with them every single day to try to understand. It's a fine balance between getting folks back onto those stages and getting bums into the seats that can actually, you know, support a lot of this. I, personally, cannot wait to be one of those bums in seats to see these concerts. The other

piece, too, is of course balancing COVID restrictions along with that.

You know, with respect to your question around festivals and those guidelines, again, I wish I had more clarity for you, but we are working with all of those festivals to find out what's in their best interests. Actually, we were just talking to the Fringe the other day, and they're coming to us with a plan, a really incredible, thoughtful, and innovative plan, to be able to, depending on the runway – festivals don't just start. Like, we could say that they could open tomorrow, but they need runway, and they need time to be able to set up. A lot of them, like I was saying in my earlier discussion, are dependent upon the ability to travel in and out of the province, to be able to bring groups and organizations in, so it's a lot more complicated than just having them open or just even having the protocols. But I really do appreciate the questions. They're necessary questions, and they're ones that we're asking, too. I hope to have more news around that, and we'll keep advocating on behalf of the sector.

8:50

We've been working in collaboration with many groups in the sector to have sort of a return to a place similar to what we did with sport, so the cultural organizations are giving us a lot of ideas on what that could look like. As you know, for example, museums opened up, like, just after the first wave of COVID ended. They were sort of first in the re-entry but are around third or fourth in re-entry this time. It's simply because we just have to make sure that we are as safe as possible. If you look at museums from the aspect of the retail perspective, we might be able to work within those protocols to, hopefully, get those museums opened up sooner and at least have family cohorts be able to go in. So we're working on that, too. These are really great questions.

In terms of the creative partnerships you're right. I'm a part of the arts sector. So much of what I was able to do in my life came within the arts sector, especially with festivals and whatnot that were funded by the private sector. The Glenbow Museum is another one of those ones that had the largest installation of private-sector dollars into it, to the artwork that was up, I think, until 1997.

But it's more than that. It's actually about looking at how we leverage the dollars that governments have. With economic downturns and the way that economies move, we're trying to find other ways to be able to fill gaps at times when, you know, you might not have \$100-a-barrel oil or you might not have the economy that you had four or five years ago, and being able to have sustainable funding for these organizations is really important. So the name "creative partnerships" implies that, and it's really new. Like, this is a baby; it's young. We're still working on it, and it's going to take a lot of consultation with the sector to figure out what that means and how we best support them. But it's imperative, I believe, at this time that we think outside the box. The status quo just isn't going to do anymore, and we don't know what our world is going to look like or when we're going to come out of this.

To your point about the for-profits I just wanted to give a shout-out to the not-for-profit organizations. They actually really, really came to the table for the for-profits because, of course, one cannot survive without the other.

In terms of what you'd asked about with eligibility requirements and expiration of operational and the live music support funds, we're actually meeting with the for-profits here in the next little bit, but we actually met with them consistently within all of our other organizations and all of the other round-tables right throughout the sector. We've been getting a lot of feedback, and it was just a matter of runway and making sure that we were able to . . .

The Chair: Sorry, Minister. That feedback is actually strategically timed to give you prewarning that your time is up. That's our fault, not you.

Now we go to the government caucus. Mr. Reid, you have up to five minutes.

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Minister. Minister, I want to give you another chance to speak a little bit more about the stabilize program. Looking at your business plan for '21-24, key objective 1.2 on page 26 is the implementation of the stabilize program "to support the continued operation and re-opening of live experience presenting and performing arts, sport, and rodeo organizations." Even in my small rural communities these live events are the lifeblood of our communities in terms of economic infusion into local businesses, folks staying at hotels as well as just the mental health and well-being of citizens. The first question is: what is the stabilize program? Again, give us a little bit more definition and how it will help with recovery. The second part of that question is: what work in collaboration or consultation have you put into the creation of this program, and what is the goal that you are trying to achieve?

The next question is related to the sports and cultural event relaunch program as outlined in Alberta's recovery program. I'm just wondering what you and your ministry have done to set the ball in motion on that. Again, we're fortunate to host a number of large outdoor sports events that are looking to relaunch this summer and looking to government for the support to make that happen.

The third question I have for you. According to your ministry business plan 2021-24 on page 26 key objective 1.3 is to "grow Alberta's creative and cultural industries by 25 per cent [or] (\$1.5 billion) by 2029." I'd like to know what your ministry is doing to support arts in the province. Again to the minister: how will your department go about achieving these goals, and how will you be measuring them for success?

With that, I'd like to cede the balance of my time to Mr. Walker, please.

The Chair: Mr. Walker, please put your video on. You have approximately three minutes of time.

Mr. Walker: Well, thank you, Chair. Thank you to Mr. Reid for ceding the time to me, and of course thank you to the minister, through you, Chair, for being here today. It is always a privilege to be a member here on estimates, including for the Ministry of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women. You know, we've gone through a lot of headwinds in the last 18 months or so, certainly in the last year, with COVID-19, and when I think about what keeps people going and improves their mental health and, frankly, their spiritual well-being, it is our culture scene, it is our multicultural scene, and, of course, supporting our great Albertan women, who touch all of our lives. I just want to thank you, too, Minister, for all the great work you've done, especially on the multicultural file. We share a passion there, for sure, as you know personally.

My questions are going to focus on the community initiatives program as well as what is happening with recreational facilities in regard to the community facility enhancement program, which has been so important to so many communities, including our multicultural community. As well, I will eventually, hopefully, have time to get into STEM.

I first just to want ask in broad strokes – I know that so many communities, including our great South Asian community, which you're a part of, too, have really enjoyed the community initiatives program, and for years and years, Minister, I would say, through the

chair, they've deeply appreciated how much it has contributed to the vibrancy of their community culture. According to government estimates on page 63, line 2.3, the community initiatives program, or CIP, funding increased from \$19.7 million in 2020-2021 to \$37.1 million for Budget '21. Can you explain, Minister, why this funding increased? We heard from the opposition members all doom and gloom. I mean, come on. I would say, through the chair, that the facts here are in Budget 2021, and I'm curious to hear the minister's thoughts on this funding increase.

Seeing as I continue to have some time, my next question, Minister, will be on the government estimates, page 64, line 2.6, under the capital grants program; \$18.5 million, as I read, was allocated to the community facility enhancement program. How does this budget reflect our need to contribute . . .

The Chair: I apologize, Mr. Walker. The five minutes are up.

Minister, you have up to five minutes to respond.

Mrs. Aheer: Okay. All right. I'll see what we can get in here. We'll start with the CFEP. You're right; there was a reallocation of CFEP dollars that went into the CIP program. Part of it is because our wonderful Minister of Infrastructure has put more funding into infrastructure in this province than has ever been seen, \$10 billion, and I believe \$1.9 billion is allocated in this next budget. We're going to be working collaboratively with him on many of the projects because, actually, there are certain dollars that come through us. We work tremendously close with Infrastructure on a lot of the projects that are coming, like, for example, the Calgary Zoo, Vivo in the past, Telus, a lot of these other organizations. It's not just coming from our ministry; it's a collaboration with Infrastructure. We're really excited to work with him on that, and he, to your point, very, very much understands the importance of cultural venues and also the maintenance of those. A lot of taxpayer dollars have gone into a lot of these cultural venues.

Happy birthday, by the way, MLA Walker. I believe it's your birthday today, Jordan. Happy birthday.

Mr. Walker: Thank you.

Mrs. Aheer: I also wanted to say that when you look at the stabilize program, to go back to MLA Reid's questions around stabilize – you were talking about rodeos – this was one of those discussions that actually came up, especially with the ag societies. A lot of these are independently run rodeos but have had taxpayer dollars put into them in order to get them going. Sometimes that's in facility grants, sometimes that's in operational grants, and sometimes that's in grant programming that's going towards a particular cultural event. Also, the imperative piece is what they do and the dollars that they bring into their communities as a result of those rodeos. I don't know how many of you have had the chance to spend time at a rodeo. I'm a bit of a rodeo person. I love them. Strathmore rodeo – I'm sorry; I have to get a shout-out to the Strathmore rodeo – is just one of the best. I mean, you're literally right beside the bulls and the riders and everything, and it's very exciting.

9:00

These community organizations are central to building community capacity, so when we looked at – we were sort of looking at the whole idea of the festivals and all of that, as to how we could help them keep their heads above water in the interim so that they're able to come back, and it might mean rejigging for them the timing that they would normally do that. Also, we have a tremendous amount of athletes that are involved in this as well, the bull riders, the animals themselves. A lot of these folks are needing to be able to at least practise and create bubbles in order to be able

to get back to competition, so we're looking at a couple of different things.

Again, the stabilize program: the whole reason and the consultation that went into this was massive, not just my personal consultation but the rock stars in this ministry that have met with all of the people in this sector to find out how best we could support, because the whole point of the live sector stabilization is to be able to grow the sector by 25 per cent, grow it by \$1.5 billion.

Those live sector places like the Winspear, like the member had mentioned – and, yeah, I've been really blessed to be at the Winspear many times – they won't exist if we don't help them. Yes, they've had dollars come into them from the private sector, but being able to leverage dollars with government in partnership is truly imperative in terms of our go-forward of making sure that our venues are there to carry us forward when we relaunch, because we're going to relaunch with a bang. I hope we're ready because everybody is going to want to go.

The other part is that you were asking about the sector strategies. Our lens from our ministry is on pretty much every other sector strategy. As you can imagine, for the lens of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women the imperative is making sure that all communities are being impacted the best way possible. One of the members had asked a question about funding for our for-profits, for example. Well, the entire reason we had the small and medium enterprise relaunch grant was in order to be able to help those organizations. Again, it's just bridge funding. There's no way that we can ever compensate for the losses that these organizations have gone through. This has been horrible. I mean, it's a global epidemic. Everybody is impacted.

But I have to give a shout-out to the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation and the work that he's done and the work he's done with our ministry collectively to find out how best to make sure that we could fill some of those gaps. Of course, we realize that there are other gaps, so we're looking forward to working with those people in the sector to try and find those and assess it and see what we can do about that.

The capital grant on the CFEP part of it: yes, you're correct. I think, like you were saying, also about the CIP grants in multicultural communities. So many communities apply for these grants because – you're right – they're building community, they're educating people about the beautiful fabric that built this province, which is . . .

The Chair: Sorry to interrupt, Minister.

It is now back to the Official Opposition. Ms Goehring, you have up to five minutes.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Chair. On page 27 of the business plan, key objective 2.2, there is reference to supporting Alberta's heritage resources, yet overall cuts to heritage are 13 per cent year to year. In speaking with the Archives Society of Alberta, they've identified two key questions that they would like asked related to this and their budget.

Question 1. Since 2019 the Archives Society of Alberta's budget has been reduced by approximately 22 per cent, resulting in the cancellation of the only provincial grants program available to archives. Many small communities depend on this grant to operate, and they note that 23 of this province's 44 archives are located in rural settings. Archives are also struggling as they are seeing budget cuts in the municipalities and postsecondary institutes which they serve. Archive staff are overstretched since, due to the pandemic, they are serving their communities remotely rather than in person. A research request which took 15 minutes in person is now taking hours. How is this government supporting archives now?

Question 2. What archives collect is unique and especially pertinent during a pandemic. Last spring 25 per cent of archives reported that they have received information requests about past pandemics such as SARS, polio, or the Spanish flu to make sense of community response to the current pandemic. Some of these information requests have shaped policy regarding COVID-19. How can you ensure that archives are supported to document COVID-19 for future generations when this province's archives do not have the funds to do so?

Regarding heritage, current funding for 115 provincial responsibilities is more than \$2 million below the level that existed for 73. How does this translate into supporting the preservation of Alberta's heritage? Are you planning on downloading the responsibility for these assets to municipalities and taxpayers?

The French community. I've also been contacted by the French community regarding their ability to secure support for their unique programs that provide opportunities for participation in sports. Given that you're responsible for both the French community and sports development in the province and that your key objective 2.1 on page 27 of the business plan is to "enhance the capacity of sport, physical activity and recreation organizations to support Albertans with safe ways to enjoy being active" and that one of your initiatives on the same page is to develop services in French, why are you not supporting la Fédération du sport francophone de l'Alberta?

The next few questions are based on consultation with la FSFA. They indicate that their financing is coming from: Canadian Heritage, 75 per cent; casinos; and the city of Edmonton. "The biggest challenge that we have is the lack of funding from the provincial government of Alberta to help us stabilize human resources especially. Our goal is to provide more services and programs for our sensitive populations: seniors, girls, women, and newcomers. At this time we are doing what we can, but we are very limited. We are just 2.5 employees to serve more than 10,000 persons of all ages across the province."

The board presented a few of their projects: the awareness campaign Elle Bouge, which is Alberta supporting women in action; Alberta Francophone Games; sport competition for immersion and francophone students grades 7 to 12; comic books about an active lifestyle for elementary students; lots of projects with schools, virtual soccer, et cetera. They were able to complete a virtual soccer conference for students about healthy and active lifestyles. They have ongoing abilities to reach out to the community but are feeling that they're not being supported. They're also feeling that they're not being listened to. They indicated that getting women active is a priority as only 20 per cent of women nationally are physically active. They want to know what this government is doing to support them.

Thank you.

The Chair: Sorry. You still have 50 seconds.

Ms Goehring: Oh, okay. Thank you. They provided some testimonials. Regarding the Elle Bouge campaign, Lucy from Edmonton: "Thanks for highlighting French-speaker women from Alberta. This project is a success. Help me to continue to have a healthy, active lifestyle and make me feel good, and congratulations for the national visibility." For the virtual conference they received a few student testimonials from French schools in Canmore: "Thanks for this conference. I continue to try and believe in my dreams to become an athlete. This conference motivated me to continue to work hard to achieve my goals. This conference gave me the will to believe in myself." Hearing testimonies like this,

Minister, speaks directly to the importance of this organization, and they want to know why you're not supporting them.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms Goehring.

Minister, you have up to five minutes to respond.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much, and thank you again for the really thoughtful questions. If you don't mind, we'll go backwards from French policy. One of the things that this ministry is very, very proud of is the work on French policy and working collaboratively with the AFCA. Actually, happy month de la Francophonie. We're right in it right now.

Ms Pillipow: En français.

Mrs. Aheer: Yeah. En français: la mois de la Francophonie. Merci beaucoup.

We're so excited about this work and really acknowledging this beautiful group. It's one of the fastest growing populations in this province. To acknowledge the French people in this province – it's a beautiful, amazing, resilient, thoughtful group of folks that are super active on many different fronts. My colleague mentioned a bunch of different things, whether that's through music, whether that's through education, very, very many different fronts. We've been really honoured to work with them.

The dollars that are spent in this province on the Francophonie community are there because we support the community so much, and it's not just in my ministry. We have the privilege of having the secretariat, but actually those dollars are spread out right across the ministries to make sure that the French language is not only acknowledged but that, for the very first time in the history of government, every single document that comes out from this office is completely translated into French. That is a huge undertaking, and I want to thank the secretariat and the thoughtfulness that goes into that to make sure that folks receive the services that they need. Especially during COVID it's been really, really important to make sure that those nuanced pieces of information went out in French.

9:10

As far as, you know, supporting the French community, the action plan recognized the Société historique francophone de l'Alberta as a provincial heritage organization, and this has been a long-standing request by the Francophonie. It was a great initiative, and, again, they're very, very vocal and wonderful advocates on behalf of the community. I just, again, feel very honoured and blessed to be able to work with this very powerful group of folks.

We're continuing – this kind of goes into one of the questions on archives as well, but we're working on archival work with the Oblate of Mary Immaculate in the province of Alberta and the Saskatchewan records in the Provincial Archives of Alberta and exploring opportunities to promote some history of this work, so that's actually really exciting as we go forward.

Then, of course, promoting Francophonie heritage contributions and vitality, we also – of course, as you know, many of our black Albertans are also French speakers depending on where they come from, so making sure that we're reaching out into these wonderful communities, again, en français to make sure that they have all of the supports that they need right across is super important.

Also, at the Royal Alberta Museum we also maintain and promote French content on media in exhibit and text and graphics and panels, so I think in terms of supports for the province and in terms of supports for the Francophonie community this isn't just a priority; this is a privilege for us to be able to maintain and continue on with this, and we'll keep doing that work. If there are folks,

again, that haven't had a chance to speak with us, if you could share that with us, we would love it. We try our best to make sure that we speak with everybody, but we do miss folks at times.

Then I wanted to chat with you a little bit about the archives. A lot of what's happened with archives, you know, to your point about the staffing issues, is that the archives have been closed because of COVID. If you look at line 6.9, it restores the funding to the Société, including the archives. I don't know if you saw that in the budget, but it does restore that. It's really important to note that as we go through this and as we come out of COVID, we'll be able to make sure that that is available.

I don't know if a lot of people realize how important the archives are here in Alberta, and – you're right – many of them are in rural locations. We actually visited a bunch of them when we were out for Culture Days, and a lot of them are actually run by volunteers. It's amazing, the amount of work – they're in the process, many of them, of digitizing, trying to digitize mounds and boxes of information and trying to get them online so that, you know, museums can share content and whatnot. It's amazing, actually, the work that's going on, and a lot of that work has actually been happening during COVID because there have only been a few people that have actually been able to work. A lot of these places are quite small as well, so . . .

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. That concludes your five-minute time and the 10-minute block.

Back to government caucus and Mr. Walker for you to complete whatever time you're able to.

Mr. Walker: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you again to the minister for her thoughtful, wholesome answers. If I didn't earlier in my comments, I also want to thank, Chair, the minister's staff for being here. We know how hard all ministry staff work, including the minister's ministry, especially over this last year where everyone is working double and triple time as per getting out COVID supports and being extra mindful to support Albertans through this pandemic.

I would also say, Chair, thank you so much to the minister for wishing me a happy birthday. I really appreciate that. A funny thing is that at the doors, when I was door-knocking back in the campaign, the most often comment I would get is: how old are you? People would think I'm younger than I am, but I feel very fortunate. I deeply appreciate that.

I also appreciate, Minister, your comments on our beautiful francophone African community. We just celebrated Black History Month in February, and we thank you for all the amazing events you put on. You're doing a tremendous job. Like you, I'm very connected to the francophone African community, and they are very excited and joyful to be working with your ministry on a number of initiatives. Obviously, living in Alberta, where English is the majority language, that is an extra hurdle when you're coming with a minority language, so I deeply appreciate the supports your ministry provides through the Francophone Secretariat there.

Minister, going on with my questions as per the estimates, I would say to you, through the chair, that we're going to be focusing now on an important institution where people find a lot of joy and great entertainment, and that is the zoo, specifically the Calgary Zoo. We have a lot of beautiful zoos here. In Alberta are the two gems in Edmonton and Calgary, for example.

Then I wanted to go back to focusing on STEM and the participation of women and girls, which is so very important and our government strongly supports, as evidenced by our, I believe, \$10 million support to Women Building Futures, an organization

which helps reduce barriers and increase participation for women in the trades and in industry.

I will begin with the Calgary Zoo, Minister, which we know is so important to Calgarians and all Albertans, quite frankly. I have enjoyed being there myself. According to the government estimates, page 64, it mentions that approximately \$4.5 million was allocated for the support for the cultural infrastructure program. That's line item 2.6. Now, through the chair, why was only the Calgary Zoo Canadian wilds redevelopment approved for funding specifically?

Then, Chair, moving on to STEM, it's critically important to support women in the trades, science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics because we know society only prospers as do our women and our female leaders, et cetera. I know you know that better than anyone, Minister. Now, on page 27 of the business plan, under the Initiatives Supporting Key Objectives, it mentions: "In 2021-22, \$2.3 million is being allocated to addressing gender-based violence and increasing the participation of women and girls in STEM." Coming from that line of questioning, Minister, I would ask you, through the chair: can the ministry elaborate on the STEM program and its importance for women and girls?

Further to that, can the minister describe the measures that were considered while determining the budget for this program?

Then, critically important – and I'll end on this question, Minister; I've really enjoyed this conversation we're having – how will this funding play a role in the very important fight against gender-based violence? That is my critical, final question there.

Thank you so much for your time.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Walker.

I would just like to remind everyone that I have allowed considerable latitude, but I do remind all members to continue to tie their comments and questions back to the estimates or the business plan, please.

Minister, you have up to five minutes.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Chair. I'll try again to get through as much of this as I can. I'll start with the zoo. The zoo in Calgary is actually not just a zoo; it's what they call an internationally accredited zoological and conservation facility. The northern wilds piece of it had been deteriorating, so there was a call out to try and fix it, especially because if you think about – you know, for me, when I go to the zoo, I want to go and see the giraffes and elephants and penguins, of course, and other things, but we have so many tourists that are coming from other places of the world, and they want to see wolves and bears and beavers and muskox, things from the Canadian wilds and the plains. This was a really refreshing and sustainable piece of investment.

Again, this is what I was talking about to the member before. This is in collaboration with the Minister of Infrastructure. We do these projects together. They're developing it, and also I think that it's going to create around 250 jobs, which is really incredible. With a lot of the funding that we're looking at right now, it's really imperative that it's tied to jobs funding.

9:20

They're looking at additions and signage and all that, but one of the most exciting things is that they actually had a cofunder for a polar bear exhibit, which is really amazing. I don't know if you folks remember. Maybe I'm older in this group, but I remember when the polar bear was at the Calgary Zoo, and of course the enclosure became too small for this massively beautiful creature. They're going to be bringing that back. There are many polar bears that are in need of assistance, and this is going to be a great way to

be able to help out some bears and make sure that they end up in an exhibit where they are well loved. Like I said, people from all over the world come to see these amazing creatures.

The project for the Calgary Zoo estimated that it's growing its annual revenues by \$13.4 million, so we're looking at about \$65 million until about 2023 and about 100 permanent full-time equivalents. That is amazing. The construction jobs are one piece of it, but to see that those jobs will have carry-over for permanency is actually really, really important. This is a major tourist attraction. Alberta is a cultural hub. People come here for many aspects, and that zoo is pretty spectacular, so we were excited to get involved with them on that.

Next I think you'd asked about the STEM program. You were talking also about Women Building Futures. This is a lot of work that I've done in collaboration with the Minister of Advanced Education. It is spectacularly important not only that we acknowledge how much women have been disproportionately impacted by COVID but also the ability to rebound and to relaunch and the success that is going to be needed. We're 51 per cent of the population, so there is an absolute necessity to make sure that we are not only advocating on behalf of women in the sector but also making sure that there are going to be jobs available. It's one thing to say that we're disproportionately impacted, but if we don't have solutions and jobs to go to, that's not going to change.

You know, if you look at the RBC report – a lot of people get upset when they see these reports, and they're frustrated, but actually, for me, I find it a real blessing. You can't change things and fix them if you don't have data. As hard as it is to read those numbers, it's really an important piece of what we need in order to understand and facilitate where those dollars are going to go into relaunch; hence the reason so many dollars went into the small and medium enterprise relaunch grants, because so many of those relaunch grants are going towards women.

I have one minute. I'll answer gender-based violence in my next one because I don't believe that one minute can even begin to cover the work that's done. But I would like to give a shout-out to the Minister of Community and Social Services and the work that she's done alongside us during COVID not only on human trafficking and the task force and Paul Brandt but also on the work that she has done in making sure that dollars have gone into our shelters and all of the front-line workers that are working there to keep our women safe through this terrible, terrible crisis.

I didn't even get feedback. [An electronic device sounded] Oh, there it is.

The Chair: You did have about 15 seconds left, Minister, so that's fine.

We will carry on back to the opposition caucus. Ms Goehring, you have up to five minutes.

Ms Goehring: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I would like to move on now to the Alberta media fund. How much of line 3.3 is allocated for the remainder of the outstanding screen-based production grant? The total is \$19.8 million; 2019-20 estimates indicated that \$16.3 million is what would be remaining.

On to the fiscal plan. On page 57, referring to the uneven recovery in employment across industries chart, we see that information, culture, and recreation is the only industry that has been hit with job loss and zero recovery. Specifically, between February and April of 2020 this industry lost 17,600 jobs. Then from April 2020 to January 2021 an additional 4,200 jobs were lost. This is the only industry that has had back-to-back net loss with no recovery. The total net employment loss is 21,800. Minister, these aren't numbers; these are hard-working Albertans' livelihoods that

we're talking about. What is the plan to have these hard-working Albertans return to work before many more flee to other provinces where they are being supported?

In participating in the Jobs, Economy and Innovation estimates, the minister indicated that he'd be working with Culture to increase tourism. However, he was not able to articulate what the actual plan was. Can you please provide details? Please be specific.

Regarding other initiatives on page 63 of the estimates and then loosely defined on page 60, can you please provide details of this line item? Who applied for this money, what were the criteria for these funds, who was provided the funds, and how does someone go about applying for money going forward?

We've talked a lot about the importance of arts in our communities, and we've heard from many organizations across the province that they're not feeling supported by this government. We've seen many community initiatives come forward. You made reference to the industry being innovative, which is incredible, but it shouldn't excuse not providing supports from this provincial government.

I've recently been made aware that EPCOR has extended its heart and soul fund for another year and will provide an additional \$1 million in financial support to the arts, culture, and charitable sectors as they work to continue delivering essential programs and services. Is the provincial government providing any funds for this initiative, and if so, can you identify where?

I would like to go back to the community leagues. They've been following the estimates, and they are on social media talking about the questions being asked. Unfortunately, I'm seeing that they're not talking about the answers that they've received. I find it a little bit disheartening to hear in your first response to my questions that you were delighted that I was bringing forward new organizations that you hadn't met with. Considering that some of these organizations, like the community leagues, represent 312 civil society organizations, I'm confused why you haven't met with them. They've provided a letter asking for budget questions regarding CFEP. They've outlined what their budget concerns were regarding grant funding, and they're not receiving any response. They haven't heard a clear answer about what supports under CFEP are available to help support them, so I would just like some clear answers. They're watching. They have these questions. They're pleading to hear how they're going to be able to move forward. They're not seeing the information in the budget, and they're certainly not hearing the answers.

With that, Minister, I really hope that some clear information is provided, and I will cede my time over to Member Irwin.

The Chair: Member Irwin.

Member Irwin: How much time do I have?

The Chair: Just under a minute.

Member Irwin: Perfect. I will just start with one of my questions that I did not get an answer to previous, the piece around the continued lack of metrics. I know you've explained that business plans have been trimmed, but you just said to all of us that you can't fix things if you don't have data. That's your quote. I wrote it down. Why are you not tracking labour force participation? Why did you not fight for at least there to be some metric related to employment or labour force participation?

I did also ask you: do you truly believe that women are doing fine one year into the pandemic? Perhaps you could elaborate a little bit more as to exactly how you feel women have been faring.

The Chair: Thank you, Member Irwin.

Minister, you have up to five minutes to respond.

Mrs. Aheer: Yeah, I'll start backwards here. In terms of metrics on labour force – sorry; I didn't get a chance to answer that question – labour force participation is actually under Labour and Immigration, and we do track multiple metrics when it comes to that. You were asking about my business plan. My business plan works alongside, as a lens, with Labour and Immigration to make sure we are tracking that.

Are women doing fine? I don't know who is doing fine right now. Are you doing fine? That's the question I ask to every single person every single day. I think it's a rhetorical question, and I think that on any given day, given what you wake up with and given your situation, we have families that are fighting for their livelihoods. We have domestic violence on the rise. We have family violence on the rise. We have no clue for sure what's happening with child abuse in the households. We have sometimes multiple members of a family having job losses. We are in the middle of a global pandemic. I don't think anybody is doing fine. The incredible women and men of this province deserve the opportunity to rebound and relaunch and have the opportunities in this province that we know we're capable of.

9:30

Are women resilient? Yes. Do they have the ability to bounce back? I have complete faith in the ability to do that, but I also believe in hope. I also believe in getting things done. I don't believe in rhetoric; I believe in work. I'm hoping that, through the engagements that we have done and the work that we are doing, we will be able to create spaces and shift the culture in terms of making sure that more women are at all of our tables.

This is ongoing. It's like anything. Black History Month isn't just about a month; it's a jumping-off point to make sure that we are always engaged. When we do International Women's Day, it is a point of connectivity; it is not only the day. It gives us a launching point to make sure that we're doing the right things. You know, are women doing okay? Is anybody doing okay? This is going to be a collective, we're-all-in-this-together moment to make sure we are all okay, and we cannot accept just the status quo, which is why our budget didn't do that. Our budget talked about the world in general and the ability to relaunch and rebound, which is inclusive of every single person in this province and leaves out nobody. I hope that answers that question.

For the community leagues, I believe that we did receive a letter a week or so ago from them. I'm sorry that we haven't gotten back to them yet, but, you know, we are going to. Very happy to have received that letter. For those of you who are listening online, I'm super excited to meet with you and have some communication around what your needs and concerns are. Looking forward to that.

You were talking about tourism. As you know, tourism really does fall under Jobs, Economy and Innovation. Also, to be clear, the member keeps saying that people are leaving our province. Boy, oh boy, when I look at the numbers, I sure see a lot of people coming into our province. I hope that we are all cheerleaders for our province. I hope that we are cheerleading for our success. I hope that every member that is here utilizes the various tool kits and abilities to be able to help people to the very best ability that we can, whether we're in opposition or in government. We have to do this together.

Like, when you look at the numbers relative to the people that are coming into the province, we've seen a lot of people come into our province. We deal with newcomers all the time, we deal with organizations all the time, and the numbers are – I don't have them

in front of me because this isn't my portfolio. But if we're comparing people leaving – and I don't know if the member has statistics particular to people leaving our province. The beauty about the way that our provinces are and that things are transferable is that people may leave, but we also get a whole bunch of new folks coming in. This is the land of opportunity. This is where you make things happen. If you can see it, you can be it. I believe that. So let's be what we can be for folks so they can see themselves reflected not only in their government but see themselves reflected in the private sector, in the public sector, in corporations.

You know, I always feel very galvanized by the organizations that I meet with because the . . .

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. That concludes that 10-minute block.

Mr. Toor, if you can turn your video on, you have up to five minutes.

Mr. Toor: Can you hear me, Chair?

The Chair: Yes, we can.

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the minister, and thank you to your staff and the whole department for the great work you are doing there. I'm especially delighted to see the budget.

Questionwise, I want to start by asking a question about the Alberta media fund. If you look at page 63 of the budget, line 3.3, it provides \$19.8 million to the Alberta media fund to support cultural industries in the province. My question is on how the government continues to invest into the arts while facing an unprecedented economic crisis.

You know, Minister, I think every industry is suffering, especially when you look at the cultural industry businesses. They are suffering, too. My question is: what are you doing to keep the lights on for cultural industries, who are struggling due to this pandemic, too?

When you speak about Calgary, I think a lot of businesses faced closures, and some people are facing some restrictions, so they can't open. If you talk about the Jubilee auditoria, they've been closed because of the COVID-19 pandemic. How are the auditoria continuing to support Alberta's art and culture communities while they've been closed for so long, and what will the funding for the Jubilee auditoria included in the capital plan be used for?

If you look at the estimates, again, the same page, page 63, budget line 4.2, it says: investing \$25.6 million in assistance to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. How do you intend to support the sustainability of arts organizations in an atmosphere of such fiscal restraint?

Those are the questions, Minister.

We all know that we are facing a very tough crisis. This is tough for every industry, and arts and cultural industries are facing it, too.

I just want to add to my question regarding the Alberta media fund. Is there any provision to especially help ethnic media? Ethnic media was suffering, and I have heard that there have been so many closures and that they were asking for help. Is there any budget proposal to support cultural or ethnic media that can help the struggling industries?

Chair, I'll cede my time to the next MLA from our side.

Mr. Rowswell: Okay. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Mr. Rowswell, you have two minutes.

Mr. Rowswell: Two minutes? Thank you.

A lot of the topics I wanted to cover have been touched on, so I'll just kind of try to fill in the gaps a little bit as we go along here. Looking at the business plan on page 27, under initiatives supporting key objectives: "The ministry's investment of \$48.4 million in museums, historic sites, interpretive centres and archives," which you've touched on, "in 2021-22 will enhance Albertans' quality of life and support the recovery of Alberta's tourism [business]." Obviously, tourism is a big industry for us, and these can play a very significant role in that recovery. I was just wanting to ask specifically about the impacts of Budget 2021 on the Royal Alberta Museum and other museums and historical sites as I don't think that's been touched on in a major way by any of the members at this point.

The other part about museums and heritage facilities: you know, they require renovation and upkeep, which costs money. I was just wondering what the government is doing to maintain and improve these facilities. Are they all government owned, and is it their responsibility? Does that fall on you, or how do you co-operate with other ministries relative to maintenance and how to improve the facilities?

The other part. According to the government estimates, page 64, line 7.4, sport, physical activity, and recreation funding is decreasing from \$21.7 million in the budget in 2020 to . . .

The Chair: Thank you, Member Rowswell.

Minister, you have up to five minutes to respond.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you so much. Before I get started, there is actually an acknowledgement that I wanted to make. I don't know if you all heard, but Bob McPhee – he's a legendary musical director – passed away this weekend. He was a mentor to a lot of my friends who are conductors and those who run orchestras. He was a huge fan of Calgary Opera and worked in that area. He said in his last statements: when you can go see a live show again, go, and I'll be with you. I just wanted to share that with you from an absolute pillar of the arts community.

Okay. There is a lot here, so let me start with the Jubilee auditoria. Due to mainstage closures, obviously, there has been limited ability to have shows and events. Since early March we've been able to do some infrastructure upgrades and some work there, so that's been good. A lot of our facilities have taken this time to actually do those sorts of things, and it was a good use of dollars, especially to create jobs at this very difficult time.

9:40

The society continues to prioritize programing. They have something called Jube school. I don't know if any of you have ever tapped into that. It is just absolutely fantastic, and they managed to move a good chunk of that online. I think they were working with – it was in the hundreds of thousands, I think, of students that were impacted by those programs. But, also, they were able to have something called tech like a girl, one of my most favourite programs ever. They work on robotics. They work on building batteries. I went online to some of the programs that they were doing, and it was pretty amazing. Sometimes what they do is that they send kids out. They're able to also social distance and work within the school systems. They've been very thoughtful and creative in their approach this way.

Also, the Jubilee auditoria held an outdoor concert last year here in Edmonton. The Edmonton Opera did an outdoor concert on the roof. I was just a blithering mess listening to that beautiful music. I hadn't heard singing in so long, going across the parking lot of the north Jubilee Auditorium. It was amazing. So they've been able to sort of utilize their spaces to the best of their ability. But there's no

line item coming in there. We're down millions of dollars as a result of that. We tried to do some work on no-charge rent and labour cost recovery rates, which, you know, provided exposure and opportunities for Alberta artists. Joal Kamps will be using the pivot online tools and also be really elevating the Jubilee Auditorium in some of the work that is being done for the for-profit sector to try and help them to be able to monetize at this time when we can't have audiences. So I'm really excited about that.

You know, these events require much-needed audiences for their revenue, so we had some artists come in for some of our little concerts, a hundred people at a time. We had I think it was the land's end trio or quartet come in. They're amazing, if you haven't listened to them, an Alberta group. We also had some other Alberta artists from Honens, one of the Honens winners in piano, and members of the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra and historian laureate Amber Paquette.

It's been really, really amazing seeing how people are pivoting and trying to make the best of the situation, but in terms of the dollar figures it's a tricky time because, as I said, bums in seats are how we get dollars into these facilities. Let's just hope that our vaccinations come in fast and furious here and that we can get these spaces opened as soon as possible.

You were asking about the museums, about the Royal Tyrrell Museum and the reopenings. We had a very, very good reopening in the first set of openings, so we're hoping that as we work with AHS, they will help us to understand, you know, what is needed now with new variants and making sure that we can have family cohorts and whatnot go through. Like, the RAM and the Tyrrell Museum are huge spaces, so social distancing should be fairly straightforward, but I'm not a scientist, and I'm sure as heck glad I'm not the one who's making the decisions around our health decisions. I'm very grateful to Dr. Deena Hinshaw every single day for her work and her advocacy and working with us to try and figure out what's the best safe return to the museum. We are working on that every day . . .

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. That concludes that time block.

Now back to the opposition. Mr. Deol, you have up to five minutes.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Through you, I have very quick questions around line item 2.3 on page 63 and another line item, 2.7, on page 64. These were the two line items that Member Walker, actually, really cheered on. I see the funding, \$37 million, on page 63, line item 2.2, community initiative programs. That funding that Mr. Walker was cheering about is actually less than the '20-21 forecast, and the four point half a million dollars, another cheering point for Mr. Walker, is almost actually a 67 per cent cut from the previous years to this program. So I would be happy to, you know, learn and get the answer from the minister, through you, Mr. Chair, on this. Why are there huge cuts when these areas actually need real supports?

One more question around the business plan allocation of \$1.8 million to multiculturalism. There's a pattern of things in our province. We have seen some of the appointments and hiring practices of Mr. Paul Bunner, Chris Champion, and Leighton Grey and then the series of racist attacks in our province and the growing groups, you know, conducting racist activities in our province. I remember the former Alberta Anti-Racism Advisory Council co-chair begging for support to be able to voice their concern and asking for accountability. Given these things, my question again: how much of the \$1.8 million is being specifically allocated to the Alberta Anti-Racism Advisory Council, and how are you planning to combat racism in Alberta?

Thank you. I would like to cede my remaining time to Member Irwin.

Thank you.

The Chair: Member Irwin, you have two minutes, 40 seconds.

Member Irwin: Much thanks. Given that this will be my last chance to speak on this, I just want to repeat the very first comment that I made, and that's, you know, that it is quite troubling that the status of women ministry has been cut by 7 per cent, as noted on page 64 of estimates. I think that's, again, quite alarming at any time, particularly in the midst of a pandemic. I can see that the minister is jotting some things down. I'm happy to be corrected if that is incorrect, but that is the calculation that I see in front of me.

One of the things that I really was disappointed to not get any comment back on was the piece around missing and murdered indigenous women and girls, two-spirit folks, so I'd like to repeat my comment that I had the opportunity to ask the Minister of Indigenous Relations as well, and I wasn't able to get a lot of clear answers as far as funding. To repeat, you know, you've mentioned missing and murdered indigenous women and girls and two-spirit folks once on page 27 of your business plan; of course, no metrics. So what funds, if any, are being allocated to this work? Perhaps you are working crossministry with the Minister of Indigenous Relations, but it's been quite clear. I've had the honour of joining missing and murdered indigenous women and girls' walks multiple times, and I've met with so many family members and survivors. They've all shared just how critical it is that action be taken, and we know that the calls for justice will require resourcing. So if you could you please give me some clarity on that, through the chair, Minister.

I want to just, as well, get a little bit more clarity on some of the pieces around STEM. You know, how is your ministry working to ensure that women and girls that are getting into STEM and the trades are able to stay, again, without having those clear metrics? I really think this work is important. I think most folks in this room today have pointed out the importance of investing in women and girls and LGBTQ2S-plus folks and underrepresented populations, investing in supports for them, but we don't see those supports across sectors, and we also don't see, again, the metrics there. How will you measure those folks being able to stay in underrepresented fields? Again, I'm hoping I can get some clarity on some of those questions that I asked prior.

The Chair: Thank you, members.

To the minister for up to five minutes to respond.

Mrs. Aheer: Yeah. Sorry. Lots again, lots to unpack there. The STEM program is actually quite new, but this is actually about making sure that there are scholarships available to give girls a pathway, and it doesn't just start at high school, going in. Like, we're hoping that the conversations have come up significantly more to really, really empower young girls to understand that they have every, every opportunity to go into places where they may be underrepresented and really looking at tech and looking at manufacturing and agriculture and all of these other wonderful industries that, you know, produce a ton of our GDP in our province and making sure that they have access to that.

9:50

This is about action; it's not just about words. These are actual programs and funding that are going into making sure that these incredible young girls are feeling super excited about going into this. Again, really blazing a trail for our future generations that are – these young people are our future. If the future is in tech and in,

you know, new industries that are coming in, we have to really, really make sure that we're encouraging them. I'm really happy to see that Coding Canada is here and that they're going to be working with these young girls and getting them coding.

I just wanted to make a correction with regard to status of women. We do have efficiencies within that ministry, but that comes mostly through supplies and services and attrition. The decrease that you're talking about isn't just with status of women; that's across the ministry of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women. So just be careful about that. I just want to – we are finding efficiencies, though, within our ministry. That is actually our responsibility, to make sure that the dollars are getting out to those front lines but that we're also finding efficiencies from within. That is what a fiscally responsible government does, and that's what we're doing.

Especially, I would consider that given the circumstances – we've had a 28 per cent contraction in the private sector in terms of taxes coming in to this government. I feel extremely blessed, looking at this budget, knowing what we've been able to do given the circumstances. We just came through a year of COVID. We just came through a year where our populations are not working. We just came through a year where we don't really know what's going to happen. Yet here we sit with this absolutely amazing opportunity to engage or reach into our communities and do better by people.

In terms of combatting racism, I hope that you're all bringing people to our plaza, to Violet King Henry Plaza, to stand against the face of racism. I hope that that is something that we can all do collectively. I wanted to say – the member keeps bringing up about these courageous women who went through what they went through in the Muslim community, wearing their hijabs, and the horrible, horrible racism that was launched against them. I want you to consider that our Minister of Justice, when he looks at that, that could have been his daughter or his wife. These are really, really significant and horrible things that have happened to these women.

This isn't just about pointing out that that happened. There is a systemic problem that needs to be dealt with. When you look internally at how you do that, that comes with engagement with the community. That comes in elevating the ability for people to feel safe to be in their communities and making sure that those perpetrators are brought to justice. Those things will all happen. The Minister of Justice is also ending carding in this province, one of the most racist things that could have happened, especially for indigenous people and people of colour. He has also brought in Bill 38, which brings forward the potential to have a police force inside the indigenous nations. One of the things that no government has ever been able to do, our Justice minister, working collectively alongside this ministry, has been able to make sure that those things happen.

Sorry. Is there an echo? No. I can still talk. Okay. Sorry. I thought that you gave me the one-minute. All right. The \$31.7 million, the stabilize program: that money that came in over and above what we had on our ministry is actually new money. So I need to make that correction as well. Please understand that this is because our Premier, our government understands that the sector has been knocked out by the knees. We were first to go out, and we'll probably be the last to come back in.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. I did – that last minute went very quickly.

We now go back to the government caucus. Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk, there are five minutes, 25 seconds left in the meeting.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Chair. To the minister, I want to thank you and your ministry for all the hard work and advocacy that you do. You do a wonderful job, and I just

wanted to let you know what I think. According to government estimates on page 63, line 2.4, is \$2 million being allocated to other initiatives program. What is funded under the other initiatives program? Also, it's clear that the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women works to improve the quality of life for all Albertans.

In the business plan on page 26, outcome 1, key objective 1.1 supports red tape reduction by implementing freedom to care to support nonprofit organizations and the volunteer sector in identifying and navigating existing regulatory exemptions in creating a common-sense exemption. Minister, could you please outline what red tape impediments currently exist, and can the ministry elaborate on navigating the existing regulatory exemptions and the importance of introducing the common-sense exemption? What were some of the challenges faced by industries that led to the creation of a common-sense exemption, also?

Also, key objective 1.4 of the business plan, page 26, focuses on establishing a creative partnerships Alberta program to connect the arts, philanthropy, and business sectors. Minister, can you further elaborate on the creative partnerships Alberta program, and how will it benefit in connecting the arts, philanthropy, and business sectors? What does the ministry do to ensure successful implementation of the program? How is the ministry going to monitor the creative partnerships Alberta program to ensure that these partnerships are mutually beneficial?

Key objective 1.5 of the business plan on page 26 highlights the implementation of new legislation to support economic recovery and job creation such as the arts profession act. Minister, can the ministry discuss the importance of this kind of future legislation, and can you tell us more about the arts profession act and how this act will benefit Albertans?

I know there's a lot to unpack under there, but I cede my time to you, Minister.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Member.

Minister, there are approximately two minutes, 50 seconds left.

Mrs. Aheer: Okay, so here we go. I know that one of the other members asked about the other initiatives, so thank you for asking again so that I get a chance to answer. I'm going to just give you some ideas of where other initiatives have gone: the Volunteer Centre of Calgary, Edmonton Ski Club, the Golden Bear Football Alumni Association, and the Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton; policywise, also the VOICE program, that I talked about earlier, with regard to mentoring young men, also things like the Grey Cup, and stuff like that. There are lots and lots of opportunities that come out of there, and it just gives us a chance to be a little bit flexible with those dollars so that we're able to be able to help out with some of these great initiatives that don't necessarily fall under the

mandates of some of the other grants that we have. I'm so sorry that I wasn't able to answer that earlier. Thank you for asking that question again.

You were asking about the creative partnerships. It's similar to what I said to the other member, that creative partnerships is really about out-of-the-box thinking. We have a lot of collaboration that needs to happen with respect to that because, to the point of what was mentioned earlier, the private sector does do a lot of funding into a lot of these organizations. However, when you have ebbs and flows in economies, you have ebbs and flows in the resources that you would depend upon in your province, you have an economic downturn like we have now, and then on top of that you add in the COVID crisis, we have to start looking at other ways that we can help to fund to fill some of the gaps when we have situations like this, like I was saying earlier. We have at least a 28 per cent contraction in the private sector in this province. That translates to a lot of tax dollars coming in that we just don't have access to at this point in time.

The priorities have to be, obviously, for many, many different reasons and where our lens really comes in, into health care and making sure that health care is funded so that we keep our population healthy so we have the ability to rebound as fast as possible. You've probably seen that we have the highest rates of vaccinations in the country. Our Minister of Health is rolling them out as fast as we can. We're doing birth dates right now. I'm 50, so I can't wait until I get a chance to go and get poked with Covishield. I think that's the one I'm going to have access to. I'm not sure. Sorry; I kind of jumped from creative partnerships to that.

The other thing. The freedom to care act is a platform commitment. We're actually working through the consultations on that right now, but it should be very supportive in terms of making sure that volunteers are able to do the job that they need. One of the examples that I always use is that – I don't know if you remember – during the floods in High River we had Hutterite colonies come out with sandwiches to try and feed the volunteers that were out there, but because of government regulations we were unable to have those sandwiches served to these incredible volunteers. Another example is in my own riding, the Harvest Healing Centre . . .

The Chair: I apologize for the interruption, Minister, but I must advise the committee that the time allotted for the consideration of the ministry's estimates has concluded.

I would like to remind committee members that we are scheduled to meet next on March 17, 2021, at 9 a.m. to consider the estimates of the Ministry of Advanced Education.

Thank you, everyone. This meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 10 p.m.]

