



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Second Session

Standing Committee
on
Alberta's Economic Future

Ministry of Tourism, Parks and Recreation
Consideration of Main Estimates

Wednesday, April 9, 2014
3:30 p.m.

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Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Participants

Ministry of Tourism, Parks and Recreation
Hon. Dr. Richard Starke, Minister
Cameron Steenveld, Senior Financial Officer
Dana Woodworth, Deputy Minister

3:30 p.m.

Wednesday, April 9, 2014

[Mr. Amery in the chair]

**Ministry of Tourism, Parks and Recreation
Consideration of Main Estimates**

The Chair: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. It's 3:30, and we must begin. First of all, I would like to call the meeting to order and welcome everyone. The committee has under consideration the estimates of the Ministry of Tourism, Parks and Recreation for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2015.

I would ask that we go around the table and introduce ourselves for the record. Minister, please introduce your staff when we get to you.

I'm Moe Amery, MLA for Calgary-East and chair of this committee.

Mr. Fox: Good afternoon. I'm Rod Fox, MLA for Lacombe-Ponoka and deputy chair of this committee.

Mr. Stier: Hi there. Pat Stier, MLA, Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Rowe: Bruce Rowe, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Strankman: Rick Strankman, Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Woodworth: Dana Woodworth, deputy minister.

Dr. Starke: Richard Starke, MLA, Vermilion-Lloydminster and Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

Mr. Steenveld: Cameron Steenveld, financial officer of Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

The Chair: Minister, would you like to introduce your staff behind you?

Dr. Starke: Certainly. This is the hard part. Starting in the row immediately behind me, from the right: Darren, who assists with – and I have no idea what Darren's last name is. I just call him Darren.

The Chair: Please wave when your name is mentioned.

Dr. Starke: Lloyd Bentz, who's the executive director working with Alberta Sport Connection; Graham Statt, who's the assistant deputy minister responsible for the parks division; JoAnn Kirkland, who's the acting assistant deputy minister for the tourism division; Roger Kramers, who's the executive director of the sports and recreation division; those two folks are from *Hansard*, I think; Tammy Forbes, who's my chief of staff; Bill Anderson, who is my press secretary; Mary Lou Reeleder, who is the head of TPR communications; Susan, who's also involved with our communications; and Brad. Thank you. I'm better at dog names than people names. I apologize for that.

The Chair: Okay.

Go ahead.

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Actually, that was way better than what I thought, so good job.

Jason Luan, MLA, Calgary-Hawkwood.

Mr. Eggen: Hi. I'm David Eggen. I'm the MLA for Edmonton-Calder.

Ms Blakeman: Laurie Blakeman, and I'd like to welcome each and every one of you to my fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms Kubinec: Maureen Kubinec, MLA, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

The Chair: Good. Well, thank you very much.

Well, we have been joined by – please introduce yourself.

Mr. Anglin: Joe Anglin, MLA, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

The Chair: Great. Thank you, all.

Please note that the microphones are operated by *Hansard*, and we would ask that BlackBerrys, iPhones be turned off or set to silent or vibrate and not placed on the table as they may interfere with the audiofeed.

Hon. members, as you know, the Assembly approved amendments to the standing orders that impact consideration of the main estimates. Before we proceed with consideration of the main estimates for the Ministry of Tourism, Parks and Recreation, I would like to review briefly the standing orders governing the speaking rotation. As provided for in SO 59.01(6), the rotation is as follows. The minister may make opening comments not to exceed 10 minutes. For the hour that follows members of the Official Opposition, Wildrose, and the minister may speak. For the next 20 minutes the members of the third party, Alberta Liberals, if any, and the minister may speak. For the next 20 minutes the members of the fourth party, NDs, if any, and the minister may speak. For the next 20 minutes the members of any other party represented in the Assembly or any independent members and the minister may speak. For the next 20 minutes private members of the government caucus and the minister may speak. For the time remaining we will follow the same rotation to the extent possible; however, the speaking times are reduced to five minutes.

Members may speak more than once; however, speaking times are limited to 10 minutes at any one time. A minister and a member may combine their time for a total of 20 minutes. For the final rotation, with speaking times of five minutes, once again a minister and a member may combine their speaking time for a maximum total of 10 minutes.

Please note that if ministry staff are asked by the minister to respond to a question, they should identify themselves for the record before responding.

Members are asked to advise the chair at the beginning of their speech if they wish to combine their time with the minister's time.

If members have any questions regarding speaking times or the rotation, please feel free to send a note or speak directly with either the chair or committee clerk about the process.

Three hours have been scheduled to consider the estimates of the Ministry of Tourism, Parks and Recreation. With the concurrence of the committee I will call a five-minute break near the midpoint of the meeting.

Committee members, ministers, and other members who are not committee members may participate. Ministry officials may be present, and at the direction of the minister officials from the ministry may address the committee. Members' staff may be present and, space permitting, may sit at the table or behind their members along the committee room wall. Members have priority for seating 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 we will adjourn. Otherwise, we will adjourn at 6:30 p.m.

Points of order will be dealt with as they arise, and the clock will continue to run.

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

Vote on the estimates is deferred until consideration of all ministry estimates has concluded and will occur in Committee of Supply on April 16, 2014.

Before I ask the minister to begin, we have been joined by Ms Sarich. Please introduce yourself for the record.

Mrs. Sarich: Good afternoon, and welcome. Janice Sarich, MLA for Edmonton-Decore.

The Chair: Ms Blakeman?

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. If I could ask the co-operation of the minister and his staff. For any of the documents that the chair has mentioned that would be tabled in the House, if they could be tabled as quickly as possible so we have an opportunity to peruse them before we're expected to vote on the ministry on April 16, that would be much appreciated.

Thank you.

The Chair: We've also been joined by Mr. Sohail Quadri. Please introduce yourself for the record.

Mr. Quadri: Sohail Quadri, Edmonton-Mill Woods.

The Chair: Great.

At this time I'd like to ask the minister to start with his opening remarks. You have 10 minutes, Minister.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair and committee members. I'm honoured to present the estimates for the Ministry of Tourism, Parks and Recreation. My ministry includes Travel Alberta and the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation, which is now operating as the Alberta Sport Connection. Joining me at the table, as previously introduced, are Dana Woodworth, deputy minister, and Cam Steenveld, senior financial officer.

More than 4 million people have made Alberta their province of choice, and another million are expected to call our province home in the next decade. People choose to live here because of our strong economy and because of our high quality of life. Through Budget 2014 Tourism, Parks and Recreation will build Alberta in both of these areas. My ministry's works are tributes to the prosperous, active Alberta, where we cherish our breathtaking landscapes and proudly share our history with the world. While we have three distinct areas of focus, they are all interrelated. The dedicated staff in my ministry work together across government and with our many partners to achieve our goals.

For 2014-15 the ministry's operating amount to be voted on is \$170.5 million. The majority of the increase in our operating budget is self-funded through the tourism levy and revenue generated by our provincial parks. I've allocated \$29.2 million to capital to reduce the risk of flood damage in provincial parks and to support the 2019 Canada Games.

Now, we can all agree that Alberta is one of the most breathtaking places on Earth. Vast and varied in its landscapes with a multitude of festivals, sporting events, and cultural opportunities to offer travelers, Alberta truly is a must-experience destination.

However, in a competitive global marketplace, we must work hard to maintain our market share and even harder to increase it.

Alberta's essential support to tourism is funded through the 4 per cent tourism levy on temporary accommodations, not from general taxation revenues. Businesses in our tourism industry asked for this model, and we continue to support it. Today tourism employs an estimated 139,000 Albertans working in more than 19,000 businesses across the province. New records are being set in the accommodations industry, with Alberta lodging operators seeing revenues of \$3.8 billion in 2012, up from \$3.4 billion in 2011.

3:40

In 2011 tourism generated more than \$3.6 billion in total taxation revenue to all three levels of government, money that helps fund the programs and services Albertans need and want. Tourism also fosters pride in our communities and our province and offers us experiences that enrich our lives. Telling Alberta's story on the world stage enhances our reputation, which encourages investors and skilled workers to continue building Alberta. Through Alberta's tourism framework we will grow tourism to a \$10.3 billion industry by 2020, creating more jobs for Albertans and further enhancing our quality of life. The tourism framework provides a common vision and priorities for the many players in our tourism industry, setting our pathway to growth. To maximize the potential of tourism to diversify our economy, we need to invest in both marketing Alberta experiences and expanding the number of authentic experiences available to visitors.

Budget 2014 allocates \$56.3 million for Travel Alberta to market our province here at home and around the world. Simply put, more travelers equals more revenue for businesses, more jobs for Albertans, and more investment in our communities. While Travel Alberta reaches outward to market our province, it also reaches out to tourism partners within Alberta to help us outshine the competition. This month the Travel Alberta road show is making stops in Drumheller, Red Deer, Bonnyville, and other communities around the province to provide educational and networking seminars for the various partners involved in tourism. Last year more than 7,800 tourism partners participated in Travel Alberta learning opportunities, and in 2014 the agency will enhance its training programs.

In 2014-15 Travel Alberta will continue to market in areas of the world with the most potential for the highest rate of return on investment. With 65 per cent of our tourism expenditures coming from Albertans, Travel Alberta is also committed to promoting Alberta to Albertans. While Travel Alberta focuses on promotion, the department focuses on product development. That means working with our partners to create new experiences to attract visitors and enhance the amazing events, festivals, and activities already available in our province; \$25.5 million of the tourism levy has been allocated to the department for tourism-related activities. This includes enhancing the development of new and emerging destinations, supporting major events such as the FIFA Women's World Cup and Red Bull Crashed Ice as well as festivals and events in communities across Alberta, and providing timely and relevant information to travelers to ensure they have the best possible experience.

Through Budget 2014 Tourism, Parks and Recreation will work with our partners to grow tourism in niche markets. For example, sport tourism is one of the fastest growing segments of the Canadian tourism industry, and we are positioning Alberta as the destination of choice for holding sporting events, a destination that delivers superior experiences for athletes, spectators, and visitors.

Earlier this month the Canadian sport tourism congress was held in Alberta for the first time. Our government played a role in bringing the event to Edmonton. Two weeks ago the publication *SportBusiness International* named Calgary as one of the world's top five ultimate sports cities.

Now, the last time we were together, we discussed my department's investment in the Rocky Mountain Legacy Trail. This popular 20-kilometre paved trail connects the towns of Banff and Canmore. Each year Canmore's newspaper, the *Rocky Mountain Outlook*, conducts a reader survey. I'm very pleased to report that *Outlook* readers voted the Legacy Trail as the best use of taxpayer dollars. The trail provides an opportunity for both Albertans and visitors to our province to get outdoors, connect with nature, and be active. With obesity rates and sedentary lifestyles rising, it is more important than ever that we encourage more Albertans to be more active more often. That is another area of focus of my ministry.

Budget 2014 dedicates a total of \$27.9 million for sport, physical activity, and recreation; \$18.8 million is allocated to the Alberta Sport Connection, bringing the ASC's total budget to \$21.5 million. The organization's name reflects their new, single focus on amateur sport and their mission to enhance, advocate, and inspire participation and partnerships as Albertans strive for excellence in sport. Alberta Sport Connection's work will be guided by the Alberta sport plan, which is currently being renewed. We've already received input from thousands of Albertans and expect to release a draft plan for review later this spring. Once finalized, it will be our game plan for promoting excellence in amateur sport and increasing participation in sport across all ages, abilities, and backgrounds.

Budget 2014 also allocates \$9 million to the department to advance the Active Alberta policy in collaboration with our many partners.

In 2014-15 the department will focus on developing strategies to provide more recreational opportunities to youth during the after school period and on encouraging people to be more physically active during the workday.

In 2019 Alberta will proudly host the Canada Winter Games and welcome over 3,600 athletes, coaches, and their enthusiastic families and friends. Through Budget 2014 my ministry will support these games by providing a capital grant and the first of two operating grants to the host community. These contributions will help ensure that these games continue the proud tradition of excellence in hosting events that Alberta is known for.

Now, for both visitors and residents Alberta's provincial parks provide opportunities to connect with nature, to be active, to spend time with friends and family, and to simply have fun. If you ever wondered whether Albertans care about their provincial parks, just ask one of our passionate volunteers. Each year more than 2,500 Albertans and 75 nonprofit organizations contribute some 100,000 volunteer hours to provincial parks.

The Chair: You have two minutes.

Dr. Starke: Thank you.

Our vibrant parks span almost 28,000 square kilometres and receive more than 8.5 million visits per year. Those visits are made more memorable through innovative initiatives such as the First Nations internship program at Writing-on-Stone provincial park. This program trains aboriginal youth to provide interpretive programming that connects visitors with an authentic Blackfoot cultural experience. It was developed in partnership with the Alberta government, First Nations, and the Canadian Badlands. I'm proud to say that this program recently won the gold medal at

the Canadian Institute of Public Administration public-sector leadership awards. It exemplifies our vision of working together to provide our parks visitors with experiences they can't get anywhere else and will never forget.

The 2014 voted operating budget dedicates \$53.2 million to our provincial parks system. One-third of the cost of operating our provincial parks is offset by the revenue they generate. We're allocating \$24.1 million in operating and capital to maintain and enhance parks infrastructure throughout the province. In addition, over the next three years we will restore the provincial parks in southern Alberta damaged by the June 2013 flood.

Tourism, Parks and Recreation's estimates include \$9.2 million in capital for flood mitigation. The world changed for Albertans last June. Communities were changed, and so were our natural landscapes. My ministry is doing its part to ensure that our province emerges stronger than ever before. By taking steps to repair the damage to our provincial parks, we will be able to offer Albertans and visitors from around the world the chance to experience our incredible landscapes. Through Budget 2014 Tourism, Parks and Recreation will strengthen our economy, conserve our natural heritage, and enhance our quality of life.

I look forward to answering your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much. You're right on time, Mr. Minister.

My understanding is that speaking on behalf of the Wildrose caucus is Mr. Strankman. Mr. Strankman, you have one full hour, and we will divide it into three 20-minute blocks. Would you like to share your time back and forth with the minister?

Mr. Strankman: Yes. In those segments.

The Chair: I will alert you at the two-minute mark.

Mr. Strankman: Ten and 10.

The Chair: Oh. You want to go for a full 10, and then the minister will answer?

Mr. Strankman: Yes, 10 and 10.

The Chair: This is agreeable?

Dr. Starke: I thought we would go back and forth, but it's your preference, your call.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Go ahead.

Mr. Strankman: Thanks, Mr. Chair, and thanks to the minister for being here to answer questions for the Ministry of Tourism, Parks and Recreation. I've said it before, and many of your people know that I hold no malice toward anyone – I want to get that on the record – who serves the public such as yourself and your officials here today. All of you should be congratulated for your public service. However, as I said in the Public Accounts Committee, I do hold strong malice to the abuse of Albertans' taxpayer dollars. I have a job to do here today defending those taxpayer dollars, and I will be asking a lot of tough questions.

Your government continues to dig Alberta into debt, and no grossly paid spin doctor can fool Albertans anymore. I have no doubt that the vast majority of officials at Tourism, Parks and Rec are dedicated, transparent, and careful managers of taxpayer dollars. Unfortunately, their ministers have contributed to a government that continues its slide into debt despite record

revenues. This particular minister has allowed a bloated government to grow out of control while basic front-line services around the province continue to be cut. I intend to question you, Mr. Minister, on the irresponsible growth of your department.

3:50

Although the worst Finance minister in Alberta history is the one responsible for giving you and your department an outrageous 10 per cent increase, well above population growth and inflation, I might add, I hope to be putting your feet to the fire for this outrage and questioning the line-by-line items for Tourism, Parks and Recreation in this dangerously bad budget.

My first question is simple. On page 200 of the estimates it says that your ministry has received an increase of about \$16 million, or 10 per cent, to its budget from last year. Can you explain why the budget increase is above and beyond that of population growth?

It would seem that if the government is going to dig itself into a deeper and deeper financial hole for Albertans, they should stop digging and, instead, hold the line on spending. Wouldn't this be a novel idea, to decrease nonessential spending? I realize that this minister supports the debt-is-hope mantra of this tired government, but I wonder if he is rethinking his position now that Alison Redford is no longer the Premier.

Let's move on to the first part of the estimates for Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Strankman. Can we refrain from mentioning names of any past ministers or past Premiers, please?

Mr. Strankman: Well taken, Mr. Chair. It's well appreciated. I apologize if it's required.

The Chair: Thank you. That's fine.

Mr. Strankman: In 2012 the minister's office needed \$500,000, yet now you need \$588,000 despite this government's deep slide into deficit. My question is: why do you need the extra money? Why can't you provide the leadership required and give this money back to Treasury? It's a small amount, but it's the principle. Once again, it is money that could be put aside against the debt or used to hire another nurse instead of hiring another staffer.

On page 200, line 1.2, the deputy minister's office, to their credit, only got \$4,000 more since 2012-13, and I would like to compliment the deputy minister on his careful management. The numbers do you credit, sir.

Back to the minister. When you move down again to line 1.4, still on page 200, what are the communications costs for you, Minister? They have gone up by \$70,000 since 2012-2013. Now, I understand that this government is terrible at communications and that they would want to stop the bleeding of support, but why do you need to waste more money on comms when once again you're forcing all Albertans to go deeper into debt? Will you give that \$70,000 back to the treasury if this terrible budget is passed? Why do you need another staffer when you're going into debt?

On page 200, line 1.4, in 2012-2013 you needed \$375,000, so I'm asking: why in this budget year do you need \$435,000? You see, when regular Albertans go into debt, they don't go out and spend more money. They try and save money where they can to pay off that debt. Mr. Minister, you seem to be doing the opposite.

Let's move to line 2.4, still on page 200, the tourism industry. I'd like to turn specifically to tourism, where your department projects to spend, as you've mentioned, \$10.3 billion in Alberta by 2020, providing sustainable economic benefits to all regions of the

province. Tourism received an increase of 12 per cent for research, destination management, and assistance to Travel Alberta. This represents the single biggest increase in the ministry's budget from the last year, \$5.7 million to Travel Alberta, over 10 per cent from last year. My question is: can you explain this projected increase? I would like to know more specifics about the transfers to Travel Alberta. Last year the ministry changed the sharing agreement of the tourism levy from 80-20 to 70-30, with Travel Alberta receiving the larger share. What will the ratio be this year?

Changing now to page 210, we have the operational statement for Travel Alberta. The vast majority of spending is directed to global marketing, over \$42 million this coming year. Can you break down line by line how that money is spent? Again, with the Travel Alberta corporation, on page 210 of the operational statement there is \$10.6 million for industry development/co-operative. Could you please break down this item both in cost and explain how industry co-operatives have been formed? How much of the cost is development with industry?

The Chair: Gentlemen, you have two minutes in this segment.

Mr. Strankman: I see that the corporate operations for the Travel Alberta corporation have held the line in spending. I'm sure it could be reduced by eliminating major expenses, and I've addressed that in the House. That is a mess that you need to fix in the coming days and weeks, and we'll be anxiously awaiting your public response to inappropriate expenses.

Last year you discussed Travel Alberta's sustainability fund. You said that the fund will be decreased by \$2.6 million in 2013-14. Will Travel Alberta take money out of the fund again? What is the plan to replenish the sustainability fund?

The next-largest increase in the budget is on page 200, line 4.4, hosting major athletic events. Can you describe how this money will be spent?

Mr. Minister, I'd like to ask a few questions plugging my riding of Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Chairman, if you'd bear with me, this is going to take a moment. My statements will bear on the questions that are going to follow.

Specifically regarding sport tourism, I hope that you as a minister will seriously consider an event that would be taking place for at least the next four years in Drumheller called Tough Mudder. This event, September 6 and 7, 2014, is a global phenomenon and was recently featured on the *Today* show. Tough Mudder is a teamwork sport-tourism race event that was designed by British Special Forces, where teams must finish a tough obstacle course, including crawling through mud pits and climbing slick, greased half-pipes. I know that this sounds like the PC Party Alberta leadership race, but I imagine the minister will be supportive of any activities.

The Chair: Will you refrain from mentioning the names of political parties, please? This is Budget 2014-15, please.

Mr. Strankman: Well received, Mr. Chairman, with your latitude.

In short, this event accomplishes both Tourism, Parks and Recreation's and Culture's vision of increased tourism traffic and product development. Specifically, I'm referring to sport tourism, growing the industry in Alberta. Tough Mudder is the fastest growing sport-tourism event in the world, and it's considered to be a valued partner by the municipalities it is currently involved in this event with. Can you tell me: has the minister already designated funds for this event through a marketing grant with Travel Alberta? Tough Mudder is expected to attract 8,000 to

10,000 people. Therefore, does Travel Alberta have a marketing plan for this event?

One final statement on Tough Mudder. I take great pride that Bob Cromwell, the economic development officer for Drumheller, solicited this world-class event single-handedly. Bob Cromwell, myself, and all constituents in Drumheller-Stettler would appreciate some foresight and support for this multiyear, world-class event.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Strankman.
Mr. Minister.

Dr. Starke: Thank you very much. I'll move through these as quickly as I can.

With regard to the question on the ministerial office, the increase in the ministerial office over the last two years, from \$500,000 to \$588,000, was primarily last year as a result of an increase in having a ministerial press secretary. That decision was discussed last year, and I discussed the importance and the value of having that person in my office. I can tell you that that person provides an absolutely essential service to me, especially given the absolute requirement for Tourism, Parks and Recreation as a public service oriented ministry to be able to communicate with the many, many different stakeholders that communicate with us at all times. The remaining \$11,000 is the result of merit increases and adjustments along the salary grid.

With regard to communications, you know, really, the answer is similar, but I would like to just make a comment with regard to, specifically, communications. The communications staff in Tourism, Parks and Recreation as well as in other parts of the government provide truly important services to Albertans. They're serving Albertans. They're providing information that is wanted, needed, and demanded by Albertans.

In the case of my communications staff they provide information on camping and other programs and services in provincial parks; on grant programs that are available to tourism operators and tourism destinations; on special events such as Open Farm Days; on public consultations on a variety of things, including the Alberta sport plan and the tourism framework; and on providing safety announcements and safety information around, you know, various things; for example, wildlife information in some of our popular tourism spots. I absolutely defend the hard work that these individuals do. They are an essential part of my department. It is the expectation of Albertans that they receive information on a timely, accurate, and correct basis.

4:00

Let's move on now to the criticism of the increase in tourism. You know, I'll be very straightforward as to why the budget of tourism has increased at the level it has. It's because tourism industry has been highly successful. We have a highly successful industry, and as I said in my opening comments, all of the funds spent in tourism, both the marketing funds as well as the funds in the tourism division of my department, are raised by the tourism levy, the 4 per cent accommodation levy on temporary accommodations. There is not one dime of taxpayer funding that goes into the tourism division. This is all paid for by the tourism levy. The tourism levy has indeed gone up in the past number of years, but, by the same token, it can also go down. In the past year it did go up. It was a very successful year, and we continue to see increases in the tourism levy simply because our tourism operators have demonstrated an ability to serve the public and to serve their customers.

With regard to your question of the shift from 80-20 to 70-30, that shift was done last year in the split between Travel Alberta and the department, and that shift was done in order to allow us to reprofile some funding into the department. This year the ratio was left at the same 70-30 level as we had last year, and we believe that this ratio represents a good split between what we require to market the province as well as what we have in the department.

Now, as far as Travel Alberta global operations, when we say global operations, that means its operations in all parts of the world. The operations that we have and the different marketing programs are set according to – basically, we use a proven marketing and return on investment model that was developed by Oxford Economics. It's used by Travel Alberta, and it's licensed from the Canadian Tourism Commission. That model is used annually to choose those areas to market, which is based on the highest return on investment potential. You know, I will provide you with a breakdown on those marketing activities to have a breakdown on the \$42.4 million.

With regard to industry co-operatives these are critical partnerships that are formed between Travel Alberta and that are formed between tourism and the stakeholders in the province. I mean, we don't deliver per se tourism product. That's delivered by the private sector. It's delivered by communities. It's delivered by the 19,000 businesses and 139,000 Albertans that work in the tourism industry. However, partnerships and co-operatives are truly important in order that we may see the kind of growth in the tourism industry that we have experienced in the past number of years.

With regard to co-operative marketing, you know, we have a \$7 million allocation for direct co-operative marketing, and the remaining goes into learning and development workshops, speaker series, and coaching of our industry partners.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Member, there's a Travel Alberta road show happening in Drumheller today, and the information that I received from that is that it's being extremely well attended. It truly is an opportunity for Travel Alberta to engage with the tourism operators and local officials in economic development associations and chambers of commerce that are involved in tourism promotion in communities all around Alberta. Certainly, Drumheller is no exception to that. In fact, Drumheller is one of the most active areas for tourism.

I would anticipate that if they have not already heard of it, I'm sure they will hear of the Tough Mudder event that you describe, and I certainly congratulate the community for having an innovative new event. Certainly, we will have Travel Alberta take a look at how that can be promoted in such a way that we have visitors from all around the world see that particular event. That, in fact, is what we do all over the province. In fact, we have a specific festivals and events grant through our department that allows five to eight relatively small festivals and events throughout the province to apply for funding, which allows them to increase the reach of their event through the hiring of an assistant, a consultant, that then gives them information on how to grow the event sort of, if you like, to the next level. I would suggest that the festival and events grant would be an ideal place for the folks from Tough Mudder to take a look at.

With regard to sport tourism, you are absolutely right. There are a number of events that Travel Alberta assists with, and these events have shown to really be major events on the calendar. I'll give you a couple of examples. I mentioned the FIFA Women's World Cup. That's the largest women's sporting event in the world, with a world-wide audience. Edmonton next summer will be hosting nine games of the FIFA Women's World Cup,

including the opening ceremonies at Commonwealth Stadium. That is a major achievement for Alberta and will get us a world-wide audience. Another event that got us a world-wide audience was the Tour of Alberta bicycle race which had a stage which finished in Drumheller. [interjection] Thank you very much. That is the kind of sport tourism. Last week along with Councillor Sohi I was able to announce that next March Edmonton will play host to the Red Bull Crashed Ice event, and this event has attracted a great deal of interest and certainly a great deal of enthusiasm, more for spectators but also for participants.

I will tell you that as an overall thing, we work in this department very hard to promote tourism events large and small in all parts of the province, and that designation is done by the skilled people within my department and by the people in Travel Alberta. They do outstanding work. That work has certainly been recognized over the past five years. As an organization that has been in existence for five years and one week, I'm very proud of the work that they do. I think that probably wraps up my 10-minute segment.

The Chair: Well, thank you very much.

We have about 57 seconds left. I would like to ask the members who have joined us just a few minutes ago to introduce themselves. Mr. Dorward?

Mr. Dorward: Yes. Thank you, Chair. David Dorward, MLA for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Ms Pastoor: Bridget Pastoor, MLA, Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Donovan: Ian Donovan, Little Bow, with laryngitis. A politician with no voice, so you can appreciate the fact of how good this will be.

Mr. McDonald: Everett McDonald, Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Rogers: George Rogers, Leduc-Beaumont.

The Chair: Great. Thank you very much.

Now we will go back to Mr. Strankman for the next 10 minutes.

Mr. Strankman: Well, thanks, Mr. Minister, for your definitive explanations there. That's helped me to some extent. I just wanted to follow up with my last statement there regarding the Tough Mudder organization. I think it's important to get on the record for the organization at hand that the Tough Mudder was secured without initial government support, and they are also, as you mentioned, Mr. Minister, looking for the festival and events grants, and they will be approaching your department going forward. So I just wanted to say that that leans toward my view of self-initiative and the Albertan view and my way of innovative ways of bringing things forward, and I think it's well recognized, at least in my court.

I'd like to go back to the general hosting for major sports events, on page 200. Is this going to be a permanent situation? How will you measure whether it's a worthwhile investment? You had made some mention using funding earlier in your dissertation, but I don't know if that applies to major sporting events. I'd like to ask: what were the major athletic events in the previous years that were supported by this government other than the Alberta Inter-Provincial Games and, for example, the FIFA World Cup? If there were major sporting events in previous years, can you tell me what line item they fell under?

On page 93 of the government business plans a mention is made of the results-based budgeting process. What is the status of the

results-based budgeting process? Have there been any savings because of the results of this process?

Last year the minister said that the ministry received the development initiatives program, which gave one-time grants to amateur athletes. Can you tell me if that program is back again this year?

4:10

Last year, Mr. Minister, you said that the Podium Alberta criteria would be reviewed. Can you tell me if that review has been done, and what were the findings? Has anything changed? Could you please commit to sending that information to my office if it exists?

Still on page 93 it says that the business plan supports government themes through Alberta Tourism framework. One of the priorities of the framework is to improve direct air access to Alberta. Can you tell me what has been done on this priority? You mentioned direct flights from Korean Air. Has there been progress on that front? With thousands of Korean-Canadians in Alberta and thousands of Canadians teaching and working in Korea every year, this is an increasingly popular idea that we hope has not fallen by the wayside with this government. What else is planned over the next few years in regard to direct access?

Another priority of the framework is marketing in high-potential markets. Can you tell me what those high-potential markets are? Can you tell me what promotional efforts are being taken in those markets and by whom? How do you measure those strategic areas? What is the progress made in targeting, for example, India? What is the progress, for example, in targeting Mexico? What is the progress, for example, in targeting Brazil? What's the progress, for example, in targeting the rest of South America?

Last year in estimates you said that in regard to the London Olympics, you have to establish face-to-face relationships. You have to go where the world is meeting. You also said that if there's ever a place to be to see where the world is gathering, it's at those major international world sporting events. You also mentioned you'd be doing a cost-benefit analysis of going to Sochi. In the last few moments you discussed Sochi, I believe. What was the result of your cost-benefit analysis in attending Sochi? Could you please make public your cost-benefit analysis and send me that cost-benefit analysis as soon as you can? Was there any involvement of Travel Alberta or the ministry in the Winter Olympics in Russia this year? If not, why not? Was this a lost opportunity? Can you also tell me if there will be an Alberta presence at the World Cup in Brazil this year?

If I could, I'd like to turn to page 200 on the parks. One of the great creators of the American national park system, John Muir, once said, "Keep close to Nature's heart . . . and break clear away, once in a while, and climb a mountain or spend a week in the woods. Wash your spirit clean." I certainly believe in that saying, and I hope as many Albertans as possible take advantage of our provincial parks in this great province.

Mr. Minister, I'd like to turn to item 3 on page 200, under parks. We are now at the halfway point of the 10-year plan for parks put forward by your government. This plan is quoted a couple of times in the budget document. Last year you wrote about the lower Athabasca regional plan, which would provide for the creation of 14 new and expanded wildlife provincial parks and recreational areas, increasing our provincial parks system by 11,600 square kilometres. Could you please update us on that work? How much of this budget is related to the lower Athabasca regional plan?

The business plan also mentions the south Saskatchewan plan, which is under review. Can you provide more information on these two land-use framework plans and the costs associated with them? Could you also give us a timeline on these plans' public release?

In your annual report of last year you wrote that the ministry and the tourism industry supported an innovative collaborative tourism model piloted by the Canadian Badlands, and you've just discussed that. Has this pilot project been completed, and has it been expanded? You made brief mention of that, and we briefly chatted at the badlands tourism conference, so I'd like to get your feelings again on that subject. If so, where is it in this budget? How much has been allocated to that project? As the representative for Drumheller-Stettler I think you can understand why I might be completely keen on that subject.

In the plan for parks it was stated that the ministry will also work with the Land Use Secretariat to ensure regional reporting is included with the land-use framework monitoring and reporting process. It was claimed that through these reporting mechanisms, Albertans will learn about the progress made in achieving three points . . .

The Chair: Two minutes, Mr. Strankman.

Mr. Strankman: . . . the first being the outcome in the plan for parks, the province-wide priority actions in the plan for parks, and the strategies yet to be developed through regional planning. With the input of stakeholders specific milestones and deliverables aligned with the plan for parks will be developed. How much in this budget have you allocated to the province-wide capital planning?

I'll stop at that point, rather than break in the middle of a question.

The Chair: Okay. Mr. Minister.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm going to try to rattle those off as quickly as I can. The \$3.2 million allocated to hosting major athletic events is a one-time capital allocation to the hosting costs involved with the Canada Winter Games in 2019. The hosting of the Canada Winter Games is a one-third/one-third/one-third formula between the provincial government, the federal government, and the host community. Major benefits accrue, not just to the host communities. We previously hosted this event, in Grande Prairie in 1995 as well as in, I believe, Medicine Hat in the '70s, and this has been a very successful partnership. That's what the \$3.2 million is.

With regard specifically to Podium Alberta just last week I was able to congratulate and meet with our returning athletes from Sochi, both for the Olympics team and the Paralympics team. Albertans made up 25 per cent of the total number of athletes of our team. I was extremely proud of that number. It's the second-highest number behind Ontario, and they acquitted themselves very well, and they made us very, very proud. I'd like to point out a couple of athletes in particular: Kaillie Humphries, the first woman to defend the gold medal in bobsleigh; Brian McKeever, who became a record-winning Paralympics athlete in cross-country skiing; and my own personal favourite, Gilmore Junio, who captured Canadians' hearts and attention by giving up his spot in the 1,000 metres so that Denny Morrison could skate, and Denny then won the silver medal.

I'm very proud to say that Gilmore Junio came up through the Alberta Sport system. I've known this young man for the last 12 years, approximately, a great young man. He attributes a lot of his achievement through the development that he was afforded,

including the support that he received from Podium Alberta. I will tell you that the athletes that were in attendance last Thursday universally thanked me for the Podium Alberta program and for the additional assistance that it provides. These people don't do it for the money. They do it for the love of sport and the love of their country. They're proud ambassadors, and I think we should be very proud of them as well.

With regard specifically to the decision to not go to Sochi I'll be very brief on this. There was no business case to go to Sochi. There was no reason for me to go to Sochi, nor was there any reason for anyone from the Alberta government or Travel Alberta to attend Sochi. We consulted with a number of different people, and that consultation was done by me and by others in my department to determine, you know, whether there was a business case to attend this event. There simply was not. We could not see a reason to go for the cost that was involved, and I can assure you that the information that we received ahead of time was that it would be extremely costly. It was a very costly destination to go to.

With regard to the World Cup in Rio we will take a look at that. I mean, quite frankly, we make our decisions as far as travel based on where we're most likely to have an impact and be successful. So instead of going to Sochi, I attended the international tourism conference in Berlin last month. This was a far better use of taxpayer money, and I will tell you that over the seven days that I was in Frankfurt and Berlin, we made many, many, many contacts. Looking forward, I'm sure you'll have a chance to look at not only the report from that mission but also the expense disclosure, which I'm sure you'll peruse very carefully.

With regard to key markets that were mentioned within the tourism framework our key markets, the high-potential markets, in order, are basically: Alberta, the rest of Canada, the U.S.A., the U.K., Germany, Australia, and Japan. Those are our key markets. Those are the markets where we have received the highest return on investment. There are indeed other emerging markets that are certainly intriguing, China being one of them. Certainly, we are seeing a growth in visitors from China, and we are working with our partners at Travel Alberta to continue that.

4:20

However, some of the other ones you mentioned – India, Mexico, and Brazil – are much more challenging, and the return on investment for those markets is considerably lower and considerably more difficult just simply because of a lack of direct air access from those locations. In the case of Mexico the requirement for a visa to visit Canada has seen a precipitous drop in Mexican tourism to all parts of Canada, including Alberta. This is an area that is creating a tremendous number of problems for tourism ministers all across our country.

With regard to air access this is a file that I'm very active on, specifically because air access is critical to us obtaining, you know, an increase not just in tourists but business traffic and investor traffic. I'm very pleased to say that in the past year – and I'll say that we had a direct hand in some of these arrangements – we were able along with various airport authorities to announce a new direct flight from Edmonton to Newark to access the eastern seaboard of the U.S., that some 100 million population.

We were very involved in the discussions that brought the Icelandair flights from Edmonton via Reykjavik to 22 different European cities. We were also involved with the Dallas-Fort Worth discussions, which provides a direct link from Edmonton to Dallas-Fort Worth, a critical southern U.S. hub that also provides access to the South American market. These are the sorts of things.

With regard to your question on Korean Air that is an initiative that is primarily being driven by the Calgary Airport Authority, and we continue to work with them and support them in trying to establish that. Certainly, you know, we work very hard. One of the things that we do – and we raised this with my provincial counterparts. Air access was one of the absolutely critical topics at the federal-provincial ministers' meeting in Whitehorse this past September. In fact, we led the discussion on that, and we're seeking to find ways to drop the barriers that make it more difficult for travelers to come to Canada, including sponsoring a study that demonstrated that Canada, unfortunately, out of 140 countries that do international air travel, in terms of international competitiveness for the cost of our airports to travelers ranks 136 out of 140. We don't do very well on that file.

As a result, that is one of the things I heard repeatedly when we were meeting with key stakeholders in Berlin, saying that if there are impediments to people travelling to Canada, one of the major ones is airfare, and one of the key components of airfare, or at least contributors in Canada that make us less competitive, is the fact that a big chunk of the airfare is additional fees and charges that are largely mandated by the federal government.

In terms of a few other questions the development initiative grants that you asked about, that were removed last year, again, as a result of the results-based budgeting: no, those grants are not back. You know, our assessment of the grant for last year, on the removal of it, was that we did not receive significant feedback that it was creating a lot of hardship. These, remember, were one-time grants, so it wasn't like people were expecting them or were relying on them. I mean, certainly, they were used very effectively by organizations around the province, yet in a time of restraint and, again, through the results-based budgeting process they were removed.

Let's talk a little bit about regional plans. Yes, we have acted on the lower Athabasca regional plan and have allocated \$1 million in Budget 2014 for the lower Athabasca regional plan, you know, basically for doing the planning and the transition work that it's going to take for those 14 identified wildland provincial parks and provincial recreation areas within the lower Athabasca regional plan area.

In addition, for the South Saskatchewan regional plan, as you know, the consultation is still ongoing, and certainly we are involved.

The Chair: You have two minutes.

Dr. Starke: Thank you very much.

Certainly, we continue to be involved in the discussions with regard to the South Saskatchewan regional plan. You know, that plan is an important part of the overall planning process, and we have identified specific, let's say, priorities within the plan and things that we want to move forward with.

The \$1 million in LARP funding will specifically allow for our staff to do delineation and the very preliminary work that has to be done with regard to identification and clearly laying out where these parks are going to be.

Let me just see if in the last little bit I can wrap up anything else that you had asked about. Oh, you had asked about return on investment. You know, one of the things we do in the department is that we do research to make sure that the activities we have are supported by best practices and to measure our results. We did a study on four major winter events that were supported by my department through the legacy event program. These events were speed skating, a cross-country ski race, a snowboard competition, as well as a downhill ski race. In each of those the return on

investment to the taxpayer was positive, and it gave us some important information as to how we can better partner with the organizing committees.

You mentioned also about the Canadian Badlands. Last summer I met with the committee, and I instructed them to develop a clear plan going forward and then identified 16 clear deliverables, which they reported on during the course of their annual general meeting. All 16 deliverables were delivered upon, were successfully met. Certainly Badlands, I think, is a model for future municipal co-operation.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Thank you.

Mr. Strankman, 10 minutes.

Mr. Strankman: Well, thank you, again, Mr. Minister and Mr. Chairman, for allowing me another kick at the can, if you will, so to speak. I just want to follow up, Mr. Minister, and I may have been going a little quickly, so I'm going to try and pace that a little bit. I am following up with the plan for parks, and my next question is: could you tell me how many strategies you have developed for the plan for parks initiative based on the land-use framework that you discussed, and what are your projected costs for these strategies?

On page 201, line 3.4, the ministry estimates to spend \$16.7 million on capital for parks infrastructure management. Could you explain that capital expenditure, please?

If I could just regale for a moment, it seems to be clear that you're not serious about the plan for parks. Since Bill 29, the Alberta Parks Act, died on the Order Paper in November of 2010, you and your government have not reintroduced this piece of legislation. You keep referring to a plan for parks document in budgets like this one, but you don't actually implement the legislation. I was wondering if you could tell me if you intend to bring forward legislation like Bill 29. If so, how will those measures be implemented? How much might they cost? For example, a plan for parks calls for a parks conservation foundation and a parks advisory council. So can you tell me: do you intend on appointing a council and a conservation foundation? If so, how much have you budgeted in this budget for those initiatives?

I can't find any evidence online that you have done anything regarding an advisory council. Could you tell me: is it the intention of your government to implement your own recommendations, or have you changed your mind? Could you update us simply on the status of the legislation?

I want to ask you if you've ever started broad-scoped consultations with stakeholders on proposed trails act legislation. I know of one group, the Alberta Off-Highway Vehicle Association, that I have met with, and I know that they have been in contact with you and your office. Are they part of the stakeholder outreach for your promised trails act?

Recently there have been security incidents in parks where drunken visitors fought with peaceful tourists. Bill 29 would have created park conservation officers and park administrative officers, which would have increased security in provincial parks since these officers would be designated as police officers with police powers as well as conservation enforcement. Is your government planning on carrying through with this commitment it made years ago, and how much of this commitment is in the current budget? I'm hoping that you could break down those costs.

4:30

You also made reference, Mr. Minister, to flood recovery. I'd like to move to page 94 of the business plan. There you write about the June 2013 flood recovery. I see here that approximately

170 kilometres of pathways and recreational trails in provincial parks were destroyed. You write, Minister, that “more than 60 day-use areas were damaged as well as more than 50 campgrounds.” You also write about “initial repairs . . . already begun to prevent further damage and restore critical infrastructure [and that] major restoration . . . has started.” Could you let us know exactly what has been done and what specific projects your department is doing on flood recovery?

In your response you mentioned that it was a three-year program, and I was wondering if you could confirm that and explain to me what critical infrastructure has had to be replaced or restored. How much more is needed, and for how long will those provincial parks need special attention from the government in the flood area? Again, I reiterate that you had commented about three years. I'd like to confirm that.

I'd like to now go back again to Travel Alberta, page 210 of the budget, the Travel Alberta corporation operational statement. What was the breakdown for the 2013-2014 \$768,000 expense for Alberta flooding? Could you provide me with a line-by-line breakdown of that expense? I want to know: was there an advertising buy-in from Travel Alberta to help boost flood recovery within the budget for the upcoming tourist season? Was there one last year immediately after the flood?

I'd like to move to a different subject. It's aboriginal community tourism. Another element of the plans for parks is to engage aboriginal communities. Can you tell me what has been done on this promise? Specifically, the plan called on your department to build relationships with aboriginal communities to identify inventory and protect significant cultural and traditional use sites within the parks and to collaborate on park initiatives of mutual interest. Can you tell me what is the status of this initiative? Is developing aboriginal tourism still on the radar for your government?

Mr. Minister, I don't think any one of our estimates would be complete without the following statement. Mr. Chairman, I beg your indulgence. Mr. Minister, you'll appreciate my comments going forward here because they relate to a gentleman that we both know. I'd like to talk about the subject of developing new subjects under initiatives that you and I have discussed during our personal relationship with a larger-than-life chuckwagon driver. His name was Herman Flad, from Bodo, Alberta. We've also discussed a potential aboriginal heritage site at Bodo. I brought this subject up with the previous minister. My input was heard, and Ms Cusanelli responded to me by the development of a Travel Alberta promotional video. That was greatly appreciated, Mr. Minister. Unfortunately, I was looking for a long-term sustainable development.

I've been in touch with the Bodo Archaeological Society. To date Bodo has received only teasing amounts of development support. A University of Alberta academic, Terry Gibson, has stated that this site and its potential development could have more significance than Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump, a world-recognized UNESCO world heritage site. Can you tell me: in this budget do you have any long-term plans for these types of site development? You have made some reference in that regard to Writing-on-Stone, but I would like to know if there are further. Economic development in concert with preserving aboriginal heritage should be an important aspect of the Alberta tourism development.

The Chair: Mr. Strankman, two minutes.

Mr. Strankman: I'd like to leave it there, and I'll allow the minister to reply.

The Chair: Minister.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you very much. Let me go through a few things. We discussed a little bit about parks. I'm certainly glad that you acknowledged the award-winning work at Writing-on-Stone, but it is not the only park in which we engage aboriginal interns and aboriginal guides. In fact, we have involved them in other locations in the province, including Dinosaur provincial park and elsewhere. Aboriginal tourism continues to be absolutely one of the priorities that I have because, as you said, it has tremendous potential.

In addition to working in the parks department, we also worked with Aboriginal Relations to provide assistance to the Treaty 7 Management Corporation with regard to the Sharing Our Culture powwow that happened this past September at Heritage Park in Calgary. We worked with the Blackfoot Canadian Cultural Society to enhance the Lethbridge international powwow, that takes place annually in February in Lethbridge. In addition, we worked with the Making Treaty 7 Cultural Society to assist them to complete a business plan and then additional assistance for a subsequent action plan to enhance the development of new events by the Making Treaty 7. We know that travellers to Alberta, especially travellers from Europe and Asia, are fascinated by aboriginal culture. They are very interested in having an experience while they are travelling in Alberta, and they want that experience to be authentic and genuine.

Let me talk a little bit about some of the implementation of the Parks Act. You asked about Bill 29. There is no plan at this point to introduce parks legislation. Quite frankly, we are focused on other key priorities. I will tell you that, as far as the plan for parks, a number of initiatives have gone forward. We are in the preliminary stages of work under way with regard to the advisory council.

With regard to the strategies I will give you an example. One of the strategies was to develop an inclusion plan. We have an inclusion plan that, in fact, was presented at the federal-provincial-territorial parks ministers conference, which I co-chaired in February in Toronto. One of our parks officials outlined a program that has allowed for the participation of nontraditional parks users, including new Albertans and new Canadians, who might not otherwise use the provincial parks because of barriers, some cultural and some economic. We are moving forward, certainly, with that.

With regard to your question on trails, as recently as two weeks ago we had a meeting involving the Alberta Off Highway Vehicle Association as well as other stakeholders that use trails in our province. We are working towards developing the overall trail system because it is my belief that it holds tremendous potential as a rural tourism initiative within our province. That being said, it also requires the co-ordination of the various user groups and the co-operation of the user groups working together. Sometimes that can be somewhat challenging because when you're dealing with both motorized and nonmotorized users, they sometimes have different concerns and different interests. We continue to work alongside the officials in Environment and Sustainable Resource Development because, in fact, most of the trails exist on public lands and are under the control of ESRD.

With regard to Travel Alberta expenditures on flood recovery, in the days following the June 2013 flood one of the articles that really stuck out to me was an article that appeared in the *Calgary Herald*, I believe, that said that the industry that would be the most adversely affected by the flood in the province of Alberta would be the tourism industry. That really, really struck me. I knew, and I was worried about that. So I had communications

with Travel Alberta along with their partners in southern Alberta in the flood-affected areas, and I said: what are the strategies that we have to employ to let people know that we're open for business, that although the floods have happened, the vast majority of our infrastructure is unaffected and we are ready, willing, and able to host the world? We worked together with Tourism Calgary to make sure the word got out that, in fact, the Calgary Stampede would go ahead. I was there with Mayor Nenshi when he announced that, yes, in fact, come hell or high water, Stampede 101 would go ahead. I think we can be very proud of the effort that the Calgary Stampede association did in getting Stampede up and running in a period of less than two weeks.

One of the things that we did, as an example, is the Remember to Breathe initiative. Our branding is actually pretty adaptable. During last summer at the height of the flood damage and to encourage Albertans to support the neighbours that they have in the tourism industry, we rebranded that from Remember to Breathe to Remember Your Neighbours. That was a very successful branding program. In fact, in the month of September the tourism levy reached its highest single monthly total that it had ever had. It broke a new record, in fact, collecting over \$10 million in one month.

4:40

I think that while we did certainly see a decrease in tourism as a result of the flooding in the latter part of June, overall the activity that we had was, you know, really outstanding, and I certainly commend the people involved in places like Calgary, southern Alberta, the work done by Tourism Canmore Kananaskis. You know, given that a lot of the footage that was sent out was of a washed-out highway 1 and people knew that Canmore was on the other side of that, they immediately went to various forms of media to let people know that within four days Canmore was open for business. That's a remarkable achievement given the scale and the scope of the damage that was created, and I certainly commend them for what they've done.

Let's talk a little bit about the \$16.7 million in parks infrastructure. You know, this is critical infrastructure in our department. In terms of a complete breakdown I'm quite happy to give that to you, but I'll give you some examples of where the money is being spent. We have to keep up with the competition, and we're in a competitive marketplace with regard to, for example, campgrounds.

We're replacing the drinking water system and doing waterline upgrades at Dinosaur provincial park, Kananaskis Country, Winagami Lake provincial park, and Bow V lake provincial park. We're doing upgrades to the toilet and sewer system at Miquelon Lake provincial park, Lesser Slave provincial park, Aspen Beach provincial park, Chain Lakes provincial park, and Moose Lake provincial park. We are doing cabin replacement at the William Watson Lodge in Kananaskis Country. That, ladies and gentlemen, is a facility that all Albertans should be absolutely proud of because it is totally unique in terms of being specifically designed and set aside for people with disabilities so that they can enjoy a mountain camping experience. It's totally unique in Canada, and it was part of the vision of Jeanne and Peter Loughheed.

You know, we are also doing refurbishments at the Sikomi Lake aquatic facility at Fish Creek provincial park, one of the largest urban provincial parks anywhere in Canada, and Sikomi Lake gets visitors in the thousands every summer.

So our construction projects, I will tell you, occur all over the province. They are not confined to one specific area.

You know, I'm very excited about tourism as it moves forward. You made some mention about the tourism framework. We talk about 139,000 people employed and provincial tax revenue to government of \$1.15 million. Our projections indicate that the provincial revenue to government will rise to over \$1.5 million and that our numbers employed in the tourism industry will rise to over 170,000 by 2020 with the expansion in our tourism industry. Tourism is big business in Alberta. We know that, and we know that the business is supported by the activities of my department. I will tell you that we get tremendous buy-in and co-operation from all of our tourism stakeholders. I will tell you that there is tremendous excitement within the tourism sector right now, and I feel very proud and very privileged to be the minister involved with such a vibrant and important industry to the future of Alberta.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Strankman, you have three minutes left.

Mr. Strankman: Well, I was disappointed that the minister wouldn't make any mention of Herman Flad.

Dr. Starke: God rest his soul.

Mr. Strankman: Last year, Mr. Minister, you said that 23 per cent of the cost of running our parks is offset by revenue that the parks generated but that you hoped to increase this percentage. Could you tell me what the cost recovery was this year? Was it 23 per cent, or has it increased? Can you tell me if this has had an effect on this year's budget? Apparently, it hasn't since more money is being allocated to the budget.

I'd like to move on now to destination management on page 200. Mr. Minister, one of the substantial increases in the budget of your department is for destination management, line 2.2 on page 200 of the budget document. Could you explain that large increase, 15 per cent? It would seem that a 15 per cent increase is excessive, especially in this time of government-created debt. So could you please provide a breakdown of the \$21 million spent on destination management projected for 2014-2015?

One of the goals of the destination management branch is to proactively work with Alberta International and Intergovernmental Relations' international offices in Beijing, Toronto, Hong Kong, Munich, Mexico, Taipei, Seoul, and London to distribute more information on tourism investment opportunities in Alberta, with the goal of attracting foreign investment. Could you tell me what performance indicators this initiative has, and can your department show monetary investments as a result of this destination management initiative?

The Chair: You have one minute and 10 seconds left.

Mr. Strankman: Do you have any definitive examples that you can share with Albertans?

For one minute and 10 seconds I would like to turn to pages 93 to 96 of the business plan, Mr. Chair. I would like to turn to recreation, which may be the most important part of the minister's department. My first overall question is as follows. Page 93 mentions the Active Alberta policy. One purpose of the department is to support the government's wellness initiatives. How has the government supported government wellness initiatives, and which initiatives have been supported financially? Could you please break them down? Is the Active Alberta policy on page 93 of the business plan under the Associate Minister of Wellness, despite being under your department's budgetary numbers?

At that point I'd yield because my next question is of considerable length.

The Chair: You only have about three seconds left. Time is up. Thank you very much.

Now speaking on behalf of the Liberal caucus, Ms Blakeman.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you.

The Chair: Ms Blakeman would you like to go back and forth with the minister?

Ms Blakeman: No. I would like to go back and forth, but unfortunately with only 10 minutes, I'm going to have to do 10 and have him respond in 10. But thank you for reminding me about that.

I just want to start, actually, at the request of my father and his wife, with compliments to the department for the Remember to Breathe campaign. He was most insistent that I pass that on to everybody, and I will say that I think it's been the most effective tourism campaign since Stamp around Alberta, as a memorable campaign that was produced to get people to both come to Alberta but also stay in Alberta and visit. So compliments there.

Now, I'd like to talk about the flood assistance. On page 94, where it's talking about the strategic context, population growth and demographics – no. I'm in two different places at the same time. Sorry. Under 2013 flood recovery, what is the plan for that flood recovery on the 60 day-use areas and the 50 campgrounds? You must be spacing that out over a period of time. If you could table that, I'd appreciate seeing it. So both the breakdown by money or projected money, and also in what order they are going to be done.

The second piece on page 94 is under – it actually starts on 93, strategic context, population and demographic changes, but at the top of 94 it talks about how our demographics are changing, and it notes that this will require different sport, recreation, and tourism opportunities than are currently available. It doesn't detail what the province or what the department is planning on doing to satisfy that change. I'd be interested in hearing what that was exactly.

4:50

I'm going to move into the tourism areas on page 95. I have to say that I'm both surprised and disappointed that the department is still using satisfaction polls as a performance measurement. I never find those a very valuable management tool. I'm wondering why you're still using those. I mean, it isn't a very effective management tool. It doesn't tell you what you've done right or where you could improve or what you've done wrong, just whether people think they were satisfied or not. Having actually been here when we started with performance measurements, I find that a lot of departments never quite grabbed them and ran with them as a management tool. I guess, this is one of the departments.

I also notice on page 95 that it gives us a note that there is a historical break in the data series and that data for Alberta may not be compared with previous years. This is a bit frustrating. That makes it difficult for me to hold you to account, but I'm sure for you to be able to plan and manage. What is the coping mechanism that you've developed to work with that?

Under tourism priorities, 1.1 is to encourage entrepreneurial investment in traveller-focused development of innovative tourism experiences, destination renewal, and new destination areas. How exactly are you going to be doing that? Maybe you could share that with us and also how you're planning on achieving priority initiative 1.2, improving access to Alberta and its tourism regions. If you could supply us with some actual programs on how you're going to achieve that, that would be great.

I'm going to move now into the parks section, under 2.5, land use. Yeah. This one I'm really puzzled by. The land-use framework, as far as I remember, allows active oil and gas drilling and exploration and production in the parks, which as an Albertan I find difficult to, well, put that together with the concept of parks and natural areas. So maybe you could expand on how the ministry copes with those two opposing things at the same time. I'm also wondering how that priority initiative goes with your priority initiative 1.2 that I already mentioned, which is about improving access to Alberta and its tourism regions. I'll leave that one with you, then.

I'm going to move on to the recreation section. You have briefly talked about priority initiative 3.5, a user-funded provincial trails system. Now, this has been going on since I was the executive director of the Alberta Snowmobile Association, and that was in the mid-90s. The issue for me with this is: how are you making that mesh with the fact that these trails are on Crown land? When you're talking about an entrepreneurial approach to this, what exactly is the province going to be providing, then?

I'm also wondering if there's been any agreement to provide the off-road vehicle users – they've always asked for a piece of the gas tax. Has the government agreed to that, or is there any funding for them other than the small amount of operational funding that they get for the organizations themselves? If these, indeed, are going to become pay-to-use trail systems, how do you make that one work with goal 1.2 and access to trail systems if we have new Canadians who wouldn't usually be using motorized access who now would have to pay to use a trail. So how exactly are you making that work out?

On page 94 of the business plan, where you talk about flood recovery, I'm wondering if you could table – oh, I asked you that; sorry – the specific breakdown for the restoration of the parks, over what period and in what order.

Could you tell me where it shows the tourism levy? I'm not used to this budget, so maybe I've missed it in the estimates book, but I did look in the business plan, and I also looked in the fiscal plan. I'm just wondering: where is it? In the fiscal plan it talks about money from the federal government, and then there are fees and levies and premiums and things . . .

The Chair: Ms Blakeman, two minutes.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much.

. . . but I actually can't find the line in here that says that this money is coming in from the tourism levy. I do make mistakes, not often, but I honestly can't locate this, so I'd appreciate the assistance. I'm very honest. I'll admit it.

My last question. And I'm sorry if this is making you repeat something, but I really am puzzled by this government's need for communications assistance. The ministry always had the support and staff availability from the Public Affairs Bureau. I still am unclear about why there was a need for additional political communications staff, the press secretaries, which various sources acknowledged was political in that they were directed not for the good of the department, necessarily, but for the good of the minister and the appearance of the minister and the party, I'm assuming. Did you lose your access to Public Affairs Bureau staff? I mean, I'm not questioning the need for assistance in getting the word out, but I am really quite puzzled by why the government seems to need so many communications staff and so many more than they had in the past.

Those are the questions that I have at this time. I mean, your budget increases are pretty minimal: \$10,000 here, \$3 million, \$6

million. I don't see that there's anything really wild and crazy happening there.

The Chair: Thank you.
Minister.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you very much. And pass on my acknowledgement. I've received that same assessment of the Remember to Breathe program from many, many, many people that I've talked to. I always feel a little embarrassed because I'm just the minister. I wasn't the creative genius behind it. But it has been a very successful program. Most recently it was actually used by the Minister of Education while he was travelling in New Zealand to help land an international conference of educators who are going to have their international meeting in Banff next year because he showed the Remember to Breathe video while he was there. So it's an ongoing marketing tool.

Let's talk a little bit about flood recovery. The \$81 million that was announced last October for flood recovery is stretched out over a four-year plan, and I can certainly table for you the breakdown of it according to timing as well as location of the various projects. We've had, you know, I believe some 400 projects that have been identified.

To give you an idea of the scope of it, in Kananaskis Country we're talking about restoring 51 day-use areas, 41 campgrounds, and six trailheads; restoring the Peter Lougheed visitor information centre, which was compromised by flood waters; and rebuilding over 160 kilometres of multi-use trails, including more than 65 trail bridges. So it gives you an idea of the magnitude of the damage we're dealing with. In Fish Creek provincial park there are approximately \$16 million in flood recovery projects, including restoring the pathway system, some 15 bridges, five day-use areas, restoring the community access points along Fish Creek, and removal of a lot of debris piles. That work actually started already last fall in the more accessible, higher traffic areas, and it's going to continue. It's clearly not the kind of thing that we will be able to do in one year, and that's why we have a four-year plan for doing that.

Okay. With regard to the changing demographic in sport. Boy, I actually love that question because, you know, I saw it as a coach over the time that I coached both the sport of soccer and then later speed skating. You're absolutely right. I mean, our population is changing. We have a lot of new Albertans. They bring with them sometimes new sports from home that we're maybe not familiar with. They like to participate in sports in different ways, and some of our winter sports, quite frankly, they find somewhat baffling. But I will tell you that they are enthusiastic participants, and we are looking for all ways to get them engaged in sport in the province.

5:00

That really is what the Alberta sport plan is all about. The Alberta sport plan is specifically being engaged so that we understand the changing demographics within our population and also just the way sport has changed. You know, in the last 10 years there's been the development of the long-term athlete development plan, which has been developed by kinesiologists, many of them working here in Alberta, to better understand youth as they go through different stages of development and growth: what level of sporting activity, what level of specialization within sport is appropriate to them, whether they should be doing one sport only or whether they should be participating in multiple sports – when is the best time to start, for example, strength training? – whether it's appropriate for boys and girls to be

competing on the same playing field at the same time at all ages or whether there is a point at which in some sport it is appropriate to have separated sports. Those are all the kinds of questions that have really been raised in the last 10 to 15 years. The Alberta sport plan is really to address that.

Let's talk in the same way about the population changes in our parks. You're quite right. You know, it's important that our parks be inclusive and that they reach out to Canadians in many ways. Our parks staff, as I said earlier, have an inclusion initiative, that was highlighted at the recent parks conference. We have programs for new Canadians, where we partner with the Mennonite centre, for example. One of the challenges is that for some new Canadians part of their experience before coming to Canada may have included spending some time in a refugee camp. Getting these folks back into a tent is a bit of a challenge. You know, they really, quite frankly, have a hard time understanding why Canadians think of that as being recreation, but we try to embrace that and bring them along and those sorts of things.

We have a focus on youth in our park system. Our park conservation officers have extensive programming that involves schoolchildren and tries to involve them gaining a greater appreciation of our natural history.

The other thing that we have to also of course recognize and acknowledge and that we're doing as far as accessibility is dealing with people with mobility challenges. As our population ages, as more and more people, you know, have mobility issues, not necessarily due to age, we need to be able to provide ramps and even minor accessibility things within our washroom facilities; for example, putting on grab bars and making the doors a little wider and stuff like that. Those are all the kinds of things that we're doing about that.

With regard to your disappointment with satisfaction polls as a measurement for tourism, you know, I get that. But I will tell you, quite frankly, that when we measure performance, customer satisfaction in a customer-oriented department like we have, especially in the tourism business, is valid. We do things in addition to that. For example, parks has gone to an online e-mail survey. Last year we received some 14,000 responses to that, and it was a voluntary survey, so people didn't have to answer. What it does is that it allows us to be responsive to some of the needs and the trends and what people are thinking sort of in a real-time way.

As far as satisfaction levels, though, we are very happy that we achieved things like: satisfaction with our provincial visitor information centres is at 99 per cent. You know, as minister – if I'm operating a business, if I'm a bank, I want tellers doing a good job. If I'm operating a veterinary clinic, I want my receptionist to be doing a fantastic job. In order to do that – that's the front line. It doesn't matter how good everything is behind your front line if you don't have great staff, so I'm pleased when I hear those kinds of things. I think they are valid and worth looking at.

Let's talk a little bit about the statement you made with regard to drilling activities in our parks. That is a very good question and certainly one that I get addressed to me from time to time. You know, we are continuing to work with the energy industry to honour existing agreements, our existing oil and gas commitments. Over time these are phased out and removed from the system. The highest ecological areas, like wilderness areas and ecological preserves, have specific protections placed on them. This is some of the balance that we're trying to achieve in our park system. But I can understand, like I say, what you're specifically saying there.

Let's talk a little bit about the user-funded trail system. You know, you're right. It's been around for a long time. We continue to work with the stakeholder groups. As far as the funding for this,

I mean, the eventual model that we're hoping to move towards is something similar to what they have in, for example, the province of Quebec, where there is an additional fee over and above the registration fee on the motorized vehicle, and that would then accumulate in a fund that is administered by an arm's-length organization that would have representation from user groups. That's something that we continue to work on. I will tell you, you know, that having clear co-operation between stakeholder groups in order for that organization to work effectively is going to be very, very important before we move ahead.

The Chair: You have two minutes.

Dr. Starke: Thank you very much.

We're also working very hard in partnership with the folks in ESRD because, as you said, this is mostly on public lands. Clearly, we have to have their involvement as well. I will tell you that, you know, again, as recently as earlier this week we had a meeting of a working committee that is presently working on moving that initiative forward. It certainly is something that is still very much on our radar screen and very much being worked on.

As far as the tourism levy, that's reported at the government of Alberta level, but the overall amount is, I believe, \$82 million. The full amount of the tourism division: if you add up Travel Alberta as well as the tourism division, that total amount is the tourism levy, okay?

Finally, I do want to make a few comments about comms staff. If it was my press secretary's job to make me look good, I would consider him to be a complete failure. You can't make me look good. It's just not possible. I will tell you that whether it's the press secretary working in my office, who provides me with absolutely critical assistance in dealing with a wide variety of stakeholders – I mean, that person is extremely important. Really, I think that when you say, "Why more communication?" well, it's quite simply because there's more communication out there. We have phone, we have e-mail, and now we have the advent of social media, whether it's Facebook or Twitter or other methods. You know, really, people expect a relatively quick response on all those things. I'm sure you experience it in your day to day. I tell you that I certainly experience it.

Ms Blakeman: Indeed, but I don't get funded for it.

Dr. Starke: Well, let me tell you, though, that in my position I'm responsible not just to my constituents, I'm responsible not just to Albertans, but I'm responsible to travellers from around the world. You know, that's a pretty big audience, and it's really an audience that we want make sure that we reach out to.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Thank you very much. At this time I'd like to call for a seven-minute break. We will be back here at 5:15 sharp, please.

[The committee adjourned from 5:08 p.m. to 5:15 p.m.]

The Chair: Welcome back.

Continuing on with the estimates of the Ministry of Tourism, Parks and Recreation, speaking on behalf of the NDP caucus, Mr. Eggen, you have 20 minutes. Would you like to combine that time between you and the minister?

Mr. Eggen: I think, if you don't mind, we can go 10 and 10.

The Chair: Go back and forth?

Mr. Eggen: I just have a lot of questions. I know it's a little harder, but my questions are pretty straightforward anyway, so thank you.

The Chair: So you're going 10 and 10?

Mr. Eggen: I think so, yes.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to both the minister and the staff for being here today. My questions are around all aspects of the budget, so I just wanted to start off by talking about the Castle special place, wildland park, that we've been trying to work with, and again we saw over these last 12 months the decision to only have protection on part of the area. I guess this is part of the theme of my questions. We're trying to both promote internal tourism and external tourism, and perhaps the most important asset that we have as a province to attract tourists is the wilderness that we have available to us.

So I was concerned about the choice to not protect the Castle fully as a wildland provincial park. I was just hoping that in this budget this year there is still some plan for consideration, perhaps, to move ahead and not just protect the very highest elevations and to in fact invoke the full wildland provincial park status, which I think the vast majority of people in southern Alberta and Lethbridge would like to see. I mean, these are similar issues that we did see around the Athabasca recreational park planning as well. I was wondering why we couldn't have learned from that process.

The second question I have is in regard to using flights to conduct interviews for a senior-level Travel Alberta position. I'm just looking at this 2014-15 budget to see if there are specific parts that talk about how you choose the level of flights that you use for senior Travel Alberta staff, whether people are meant to be using first-class flights. Or should they be going for more economical choices? I just want to know as well if there is a protocol in this coming year for face-to-face interviews by which people make choices to make those interviews and then whether you're flying first class or not.

I have a question as well in regard to the total percentage of wilderness that we protect in Alberta. If you take away our considerable national park acreage that we have, Alberta is actually quite low in regard to how much protected land we have. For the 2014-15 budget, again, are there specific concessions here to protect more total square kilometres of Alberta's wilderness areas, especially for protected areas specific to certain ecosystems like grassland and wetlands as well, and is there a priority system in place for this year's budget? Where are we targeting for more wildland, protected land here in the province of Alberta?

Another question related to that in a similar way is in regard to the recommendation by ecologists and scientists to have a certain size for parks. Generally, the recommendation is that a park should be at least 4,000 square – or that you have continuous, linked protected land. Only two out of the 504 sites among Alberta's parks sort of meet the standard requirement, and then most of them are quite fractured and small, small parks. Again, further to this idea of protecting more wildland park and having it interconnected, is there provision for that in this year's budget, to work with that idea?

I notice that this ministry has a tendency to spend more on strategic corporate services than many other areas. I'm just wondering what services this department provides that requires such an extra expenditure. How is the necessity of this justified when the whole operational budget line, say for example, for

recreation and physical activity is only \$4.4 million? I'm just wondering why there's such a large focus on that, that particular item of strategic corporate services.

Everyone certainly has a lot of positive feedback on the Remember to Breathe campaign, and I heard my colleague from Edmonton-Centre talking about ways by which we can measure sort of the response to that or the value for money in that area. What sort of metrics are we using to measure major television advertising campaigns? I guess one of the things that always strikes me is that, really, in terms of our parks, let's say for example, by far the vast majority of people using those parks are Albertans, right? While we do want to expand our international tourism, it's really important that we are focusing back on providing those services for Albertans for their recreation. Most people don't travel internationally or even outside of the province. In this province we just go camping in provincial parks. You know, I think that's a very important area for investment.

Further to that, I just wanted to have an idea – I know that this ministry generates income from park fees, camping fees. I'm just wondering for this year's budget coming up if there's any provision for a change in those fees. For some people a combination of the fuel and so forth – for people with modest means, to go camping is their only kind of holiday, right? If we do have room in this budget for a change in camping fees to perhaps round it off to a lower number.

I have a question as well about a specific park, the Lakeland provincial park. Again, back to my original comments about the biggest asset that we really have in this province, which is wilderness, those wilderness park experiences are becoming fewer and farther between. The Lakeland provincial park, say for example – I'm sure you're familiar with it – is an interconnected sort of canoe-camping type of provincial park, with portage carts available and so forth. I've been getting complaints over the last couple of years where people are building their own roads into the provincial park and then bringing motorboats in, using ATVs to pull the motorboats into Lakeland provincial park. The integrity of the wilderness experience there is being compromised. It's very important. Once you lose that, you're not likely to get it back. I think that's . . .

The Chair: Mr. Eggen, you have a minute and 15 seconds.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you very much.

I just wanted to point that out, that an investment in the wilderness park experience in this year's budget is, I think, an important thing to consider.

Yeah. Those are my questions, Mr. Chair. I'd be happy to have a reply, anything that you might. Thank you.

5:25

The Chair: Minister.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you very much. Let's start with the Castle. Castle certainly is a special place, and I visited there last August along with some of the conservation officers that work in that area. There has been no decision made on the Castle at this point. That's still part of the overall SSRP consultation. The plan, in fact, proposes a wildland provincial park in the Castle. So the designation that you and others are looking for, in fact, is part of the proposal within the SSRP.

But the SSRP goes further. You ask about increasing areas. In fact, the SSRP calls for 32 new or expanded conservation areas within the South Saskatchewan regional plan area. There will be, you know, specific limits for air and surface water quality as well

as in the biodiversity management framework that we've discussed before.

Let's talk about LARP. You say that we don't have enough park space. Well, 8.3 per cent of our land areas is national parks in this province, 4.3 per cent is provincial parks, so we have 27,000 square kilometres. But under LARP 12,000 square kilometres of additional space, an increase of some 43 per cent, will be added to our parks inventory, wildland provincial parks as well as provincial recreation areas. This is a significant increase, and it's also why we've allocated a million dollars in this year's budget towards, you know, the initial planning of an area of land that is that large.

I think the other thing I'm proud of in this system is that we administer some 475 pieces of the most interesting property in the province, ranging from a park that's 591,000 hectares, adjacent to Wood Buffalo national park, to a park that's half the size of a city block, and it's a special ecological preserve. While you can make generalizations about what ecologists say about the right size of a park and that sort of thing – and I understand that – I will tell you that in each case the park is appropriate to the size of the land and what you're trying to preserve within that park. Each of our provincial parks, our recreation areas have something special within them: a special land form, a historical designation, or whatever. I mean, these are treasures.

You're quite right when you say that the vast majority of visitors are Albertans. The one thing that I certainly acknowledged in my visits to over 20 parks last year and camping in about 15 of them was that there is a sense of ownership and pride amongst the people who live nearby these parks. They love these places. We suffered some damage up north at Notikewin provincial park, which is up north of Manning. There was some damage up there. I worked with some of the local folks in the Hawk Hills community in order to make sure that the access road into that park, which was badly damaged last year in June, was rebuilt and repaired. It's a remote park. It doesn't get huge visitation, but it's sure important to the folks up there.

Let's talk about access. We had no increase in parks fees this year. We are in this year's budget – and this gets back to Ms Blakeman's question – actually achieving a higher level of cost recovery. In fact, we will achieve revenues of approximately \$17 million from parks activity, but there is no fee increase, unlike what neighbouring provinces have done or what has been done federally in the national parks. The other thing that's important to know is that we do not charge day-use fees in our provincial parks. Most other provinces do. We do not; we never have.

The other thing that's interesting is that just this week we've introduced a new initiative for our parks users, the three-for-two program. I said: can't we give some of our, you know, faithful users, folks that use our parks, especially folks that use our parks during mid-week, a bit of a break? I mean, occupancy levels are lower. Hotels are often a little cheaper at times when they're trying to fill rooms. Why don't we try to fill campsites? So we in selected campgrounds are going to offer a three-for-two program. You stay for three nights, but you pay for two. These are the kinds of things we're looking at to make sure that the accessibility issues that you talk about certainly are dealt with. I mean, I acknowledge that.

I spent a lot of time last summer talking to campers. I spent a lot of time talking to our parks volunteers, and I mentioned them in my opening comments. We have folks that volunteer to work in our parks and spend the entire summer as volunteer park hosts. That's a fantastic program, and they do a lot of things and provide a lot of value for that.

Specifically with regard to Lakeland provincial park, you know, I'm going to actually take a little bit of issue with your statement that wilderness experiences are fewer and farther between. Quite frankly, with the expansion of our parks system and the dedication of additional funding under LARP this year we're going to have more opportunities for Albertans and for people from other parts of the country to access the wilderness. But I will agree with you, for sure, that the wilderness is critical to us. When we speak with people, especially from other countries, especially from countries that have high levels of crowding like Europe or Asia, they tell us that the thing about Alberta that makes it special is nature. They use the term "nature" again and again and again, and I understand that. So we're certainly working to preserve that and work very, very hard on it.

I'm sorry that I'm jumping around a little bit and am not exactly chronological with how you asked your questions. Let's talk about flights for Travel Alberta. There's no specific budget item within here, you know, as far as flights, but I do want to say a couple of things with regard to the expenses. Back in March I instructed Travel Alberta to conduct an independent, third-party review of expenses, and that review is complete. The report was completed on time, and I had that information passed on to me by the chair of the Travel Alberta board. It's currently being reviewed by the Travel Alberta board. Specifically, the guideline for Travel Alberta is that for flights of a duration of over eight hours business class was a permitted and acceptable expense, okay? The flight in question that I think you're asking about was a 17-hour flight. In fact, the eight-hour guideline of Travel Alberta is twice as stringent as the Treasury Board and Finance guideline, which is four hours.

You know, I think that face-to-face interviews with people who are potentially going to become critical parts of a very important organization are essential. Certainly, in business I would feel very hesitant to hire someone without doing a face-to-face interview, especially for a senior position.

Let's talk about metrics for the TV campaign. You know, it's hard sometimes to get a real, accurate measurement of metrics on what's our return on investment, but we do measure our performance. Travel Alberta conducted a winter campaign – and these are funds spent within the province of Alberta – where \$1.3 million was spent on that Travel Alberta 2012-2013 winter campaign. The incremental expenditures that were attributed to that campaign were some \$49.8 million, or an ROI of 37 to 1. A little later in the summer Travel Alberta did a summer campaign with expenditures of \$1.7 million. The incremental expenditures attributed to that campaign were some \$71.6 million, or a total ROI of 42 to 1.

You know, marketing is sometimes described as an inexact science, but we know and we know from the experience of other jurisdictions – and I believe you were there last year when we talked a little bit about the Colorado experience – that if you take away marketing dollars, you will see a precipitous drop in your tourism revenues. That's been shown by the state of Colorado. They learned it the hard way. They saved \$12 million in marketing expense, and it cost their tourism industry \$1.4 billion in economic activity.

Sadly, unfortunately, nationally we are seeing a significant decrease. The Canadian Tourism Commission, which markets Canada world-wide, has decreased its budget by some 43 per cent over the last number of years, and what we're seeing is that Canada nationally as a destination has dropped from second to seventh. Now as a nation we're 18th in the world as a tourism destination. You know, at least some of that, quite frankly, based on what I have seen on our marketing competitiveness – tourism is

competitive. You've got to be in there, and if you're not in there and you're not actively marketing your location, you won't stand still; you'll lose ground. That's exactly, unfortunately, what has happened to our nation.

Hopefully, we'll be able to reverse that trend in the coming years. Alberta continues to grow, but Canada as a nation is not experiencing some of that same growth. We're actually fortunate that we have the partnership in this province between Travel Alberta and Tourism, Parks and Recreation to support our tourism industry and to see the growth that we are seeing year over year and hope to continue to see, you know, guided by our tourism framework.

Are we close?

The Chair: There are 35 seconds.

Dr. Starke: Oh, sorry. Strategic corporate services. There's a fairly long list of what that includes: finance, HR, policy, business planning, performance measurement, legislative services. You know, all of those except finance are in fact shared with the Department of Culture, okay? This is an example of where ministries work together to try to achieve administrative efficiencies. It is an efficient way to provide service. Our corporate services has a client base of up to 1,000 people being delivered by a relatively small section of our department, so that may be the . . .

5:35

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Eggen, you have 42 seconds. Would you like to put something on the record in 42 seconds?

Mr. Eggen: Well, I find it interesting that you're sharing some of your resources with the Ministry of Culture. I mean, I think that's an appropriate synergy there. I think it's important that we invest in summer festivals over this next fiscal year to ensure – like you say, if you're standing still, you're losing on tourism, right? So for everything from the Calgary Stampede to the Edmonton Folk Festival you need that extra investment, really, to ensure that people will come here next year and five years from now, too.

Thanks.

Dr. Starke: Great.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Eggen. Thank you, Minister.

Now we will move to Mr. Quadri speaking on behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus. Twenty minutes. Would you like to share your time with the minister back and forth?

Mr. Quadri: Yeah, we'll go back and forth, and any other of my caucus members can ask something.

The Chair: Okay. Is the minister in agreement with that?

Dr. Starke: Yeah. Absolutely.

The Chair: Great. Go ahead.

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Minister, for your agreement. Okay. Budget 2014 provides \$1 million to Tourism, Parks and Recreation for the implementation of TPR's responsibility associated with the lower Athabasca regional plan. The LARP was approved in August 2012 and indicated that 1.5 million hectares of land will be designated as conservation areas and provincial recreation areas. What is the status of these designations?

Dr. Starke: Thank you. Well, as you know, under LARP we identified 14 new and expanded wildland provincial parks and recreation areas, and you gave the land area that's concerned.

There is quite a process that is involved in sort of bringing those identified lands into the overall parks system. First of all, there's a transition that has to occur with regard to the designation because they are public lands, so currently they are under the purview of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development. We also have to work together with Energy because in some cases, you know, we're talking about lands that have mineral rights and interests on them. We are working with those other government ministries, and we've actually developed quite a streamlined process to ensure the efficient transition of those lands into the wildland provincial parks and PRAs.

We've done the necessary work in terms of the staffing complement that we will require, the additional staff that we require in order to bring these lands into our part of it. With regard to the allocation we will be, as I said, hiring new staff to manage and enforce the new land base, and we have to do some initial sort of what's called ground truthing and boundary demarcation. There's some education and communication that needs to be done, obviously, with existing users. We will be engaging First Nations and neighbouring communities in consultation and, obviously, engaging industry that have had and continue to have interests honoured in that area.

Those are the sorts of things that all have to be done. There will be some additional conservation officers as well as seasonal parks services rangers. It's a process that does take some time. It does take some money. That's the reason for the \$1 million allocation.

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Minister.

Another thing, you know, is that there will be a short-term plan and a long-term plan, but what will the financial implications of these wildland and provincial recreation area designations be?

Dr. Starke: You know, as we discussed with the last set of questions, we have a growing population, and we know that there are demands for people to access wilderness opportunities, if you want to call it that. In the lower Athabasca regional plan we have considerable wilderness opportunities, but it takes time. One conservation area – for example, the Birch River conservation area is 330,000 hectares in size. These are big areas, and it does take some time.

The anticipated cost to our department – you asked about long-term costs to the department for all the deliverables under the lower Athabasca regional plan, including the development and operating of the new areas – includes \$26.3 million for capital over the next three years and \$4.3 million for operation once they're up and fully operational. So it's a significant investment.

Mr. Quadri: Good.

On page 202 of the estimates it indicates that the revenues associated with parks operations and parks infrastructure management will increase by almost \$2.3 million, from \$14.7 million in 2013-14 to \$17 million in 2014-15. Are camping fees being increased?

Dr. Starke: No. All of that is without a camping fee increase. You know, we monitor the fees that are charged, and we try to make sure that we strike a balance. We know that within Alberta, amongst our thousands of campgrounds and campsites, we have competition from the private sector, and we don't want to be, certainly, out of line with that.

Part of the increase, though, is that there are some specific fees that we are looking at introducing for new services. As the units get more sophisticated, there are sometimes – you know, once you arrive at a site with, for example, a large RV, perhaps you don't want to actually move to go to the sewage dumping station. So

we're looking at, for example, having a mobile service. That's done in other provinces. It's done in some of the private campgrounds. It's certainly appreciated by the users. There's a fee charged for that. We're looking at a number of things. There are some small adjustments that are made, but the camping fee range per party per night right now ranges from a low of \$5 to \$23, and then additional charges can be for things like power hookups or water hookups or sewage hookups, use of the sewage dumping station, that sort of thing.

Part of the increase in our revenue is primarily a result of a couple of things, I should point out. One of them is due to just increased activity. Another one is that in a couple of the parks the campground operations have gone from being managed under a facility operating agreement with a private contractor to being operated, actually, by the parks department. In those situations the revenues flow directly into the department. You know, that's been a good move for us. I stayed at one of the parks where that transition was made at Cypress Hills. They're beautiful facilities, a gorgeous part of the province, you know, a real opportunity to see some of Alberta at its best.

Mr. Quadri: That's good.

The description of the operations funded by, you know, credit or recovery, page 202 of the estimates, indicates that parks collect various fees and other revenues that are used to partially offset the costs of providing services and that the revenue is also used to manage infrastructure within the provincial parks. What portion of the parks costs are covered by this revenue, and what is your plan to increase the revenue to support parks operations?

Dr. Starke: Well, the \$17 million that's forecasted to be collected in 2014-15 represents about 32 per cent, or one-third, of the parks overall \$53.2 million operating budget. In terms of growth in revenue, you know, we're continuing to do upgrades on our campgrounds and our parks facilities, and as we do that, we'll have more sites that have power, for example, more sites that have the facility for water. As you upgrade your services, you're able to charge for those sites over and above.

The other thing that we're doing – I'd be remiss if I didn't talk about this when we talk about accessibility – is comfort camping. Comfort camping is a relatively new concept, but since it's been introduced, it's been wildly successful, I would call it. What it does is that it allows people visiting our provincial parks the opportunity to stay in a unique camping environment without going sort of whole hog to a camping experience.

5:45

Let me give you an example. At Dinosaur provincial park we have tents that are patterned after archaeologists' tents, so you can take your family and say: we're going to go on a dig this weekend. You can stay in a comfort camping site. There's a bed, there's a beautiful duvet, there's a cooler next to the bed, and it's really pretty comfortable. That's why we call it comfort camping. You sleep under canvas, but the canvas has got a roof over the top of it. In Pigeon Lake provincial park we have yurts. These are patterned after the ancient Mongols. Here again, if you want to take your kids out for an interesting experience and pretend that you're pillaging most of Asia, you can go to Pigeon Lake and stay in a yurt.

By expanding those sorts of services, that's why we're able to do some of the things and see some of the increase in revenue that we have.

Mr. Quadri: I like the sound of comfort camping.

Dr. Starke: You're not alone.

Mr. Quadri: Then I can bring my own pillows.

Dr. Starke: Actually, you don't even have to do that.

Mr. Quadri: Oh, really?

Dr. Starke: No. Bedding is supplied.

Mr. Quadri: That's good.

On page 96 under Tourism, Parks and Recreation the 2014-17 business plans indicate that 32.1 per cent of adult Albertans said that they had visited our provincial parks and provincial recreation areas. In the past 12 months has anything been done to increase that number?

Dr. Starke: Absolutely. We promote our parks in a variety of different ways. One of them has been to have a real prominent presence at places where we see our target audience. For example, the Edmonton RV show, which is held in February, gets tens of thousands of visitors. Alberta Parks was there and, basically, had hundreds of brochures and maps and information on the park system that they handed out, and they said that the response was fantastic. Alberta Parks was also at all of the stops of the Tour of Alberta bicycle race last year. The Alberta Parks trailer does a lot of travelling around.

The other thing that we do – and I participated in this along with the Associate Minister of Wellness last year in July at Bow Valley provincial park – is Parks Day in July. We had over 5,000 people in attendance at Parks Day demonstrations that talked about camping, gave demonstrations on bear safety, how to use bear spray even.

One of the things that I found really intriguing was the number of people I talked to that called themselves new Canadians. These were folks that had been in Canada for less than five years. You know, when you talk about promotion, the thing we did was that we did promotions on the Family Day weekend. On the Family Day weekend I went snowshoeing at Miquelon Lake provincial park. Two of the families I snowshoed with were Jamaican. They were bundled up a lot warmer than most of the others. I will tell you that after an hour they've snowshoed more than 95 per cent of the Canadian population. That's how we engage people.

We talk about some of the challenges involved with it, but our parks system and our parks staff are always looking for new and innovative ways to reach out to Albertans and visitors from elsewhere. You know, it really is our system, and we're very proud of it. I'll tell you that if you want to find a passionate group of individuals, talk to our parks staff or our parks volunteers. When we needed to clean up Kananaskis Country, in addition to our hired staff we had 600 volunteers show up to help clean up trails and parking lots and day-use areas. I mean, Albertans love their parks, and there's absolutely no question about that.

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Minister. I think I'm done.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Dorward.

Mr. Dorward: Thanks, Chair.

The Chair: Seven minutes and 50 seconds.

Mr. Dorward: Holy crow. Wow. Well, I've got eight items, so that tells you, Mr. Minister, how much the answer is. The question is 30 seconds; the answer is 30 seconds. We've got eight to hit.

When I hear the words “no park fees this year” – I think, personally, that user-pay is a good thing – I'm concerned that that kind of can be the way it is for several years in a row, and then all of a sudden you're behind the eight ball, and you've got to do it in a way that jumps it up. Can you make a comment as to what the more long-term strategy is with respect to parks fees, not just this year?

Dr. Starke: Absolutely.

Mr. Dorward: Minister, I apologize if I cut you off, but I really need to get through these.

Dr. Starke: No. That's absolutely reasonable.

We want to avoid any situation where you have a sudden jump in fees because, as you know, having worked in a fee-for-service business – and I've done the same – that makes people unhappy. A more sustainable plan is to have small incremental changes as your costs increase. We review that every year. It was felt that this year there would be no increase, but I'm not making any assurances that that will necessarily be the case going forward. We take that on a year-by-year basis.

Mr. Dorward: All right. How much money is in your budget for the Trans Canada Trail work?

Dr. Starke: You know what? I'll have to get that specific dollar figure back to you.

Mr. Dorward: If you could, Minister, I'd appreciate that.

Dr. Starke: I will.

Mr. Dorward: Also, at the same time, how many staff resources are allocated to the development of that trail going forward in trying to meet Alberta's commitments in that regard? I can wait, Mr. Minister, if you want to give me that later, too.

Dr. Starke: Yeah. Again, we'll get you the information both on the allocation and the staff.

Mr. Dorward: That would be great.

When I come across the border – and I travel a lot – north, south, east, or west, how long will it be before I see a great big, huge green sign with a big old Alberta label on it saying, “Download your app here for Alberta,” then a sign two miles down the road saying, “Make sure you turn on location services,” and a sign two miles from there saying, “Now turn on the app”? I just think we're missing a huge opportunity. I mean, you could have that app talk to people and say: “Turn left. You're going to go to Drumheller now, where you will see the following.” It could be interactive with all the other websites that we have out there. How long till we have that, Minister?

Dr. Starke: I can't give you a specific answer on the time frame, but I can tell you that innovative delivery methodology, whether it be through apps or the Alberta travel information service, which is the ATIS site, which gives specific information for tourism, is an integral part of Travel Alberta's overall website. You know, all of those discussions with regard to app development and location services are things that we are working on. We recognize that that's sort of the way of the future, and, like you say, they're great ideas because they're a way to have things move forward.

Mr. Dorward: All right. You may be aware that I was involved in a project where the government of Alberta put in \$10 million, a

quarter of the money that was needed, in order to build a building called the Saville Community Sports Centre. That building now is a sustainable, proven model after two and a half years of being open: money in the bank, with people flocking there and 90 per cent occupancy. We need another building of the same size. It's the largest building of its type in North America.

Are you willing to work with your colleagues in cabinet to support capital funding like that, which I got at that time, in a format whereby community groups can provide capital funds for projects like that – it doesn't have to be a building like that; it could be a ski facility; it could be anything – so that we can get those larger, \$10 million range types of grants? Would you be willing to advocate for that with your cabinet colleagues?

Dr. Starke: As far as facility development goes, I guess one thing I'll say from the outset is that within the purview of my ministry I do not have capital dollars, and that is something that I, unfortunately, have to patiently explain to a lot of people.

Mr. Dorward: I understand. That's why I worded it that way.

Dr. Starke: I know.

That being said, on a regular basis we certainly have, you know, different groups, stakeholders, and partners within the recreation system and elsewhere come to us with new ideas for specific recreational facilities around the province. Where those clearly meet a defined need and have a clear business plan going forward, I certainly encourage my colleagues that have specific funding mechanisms in place for them. I encourage that, but again in the budget of TPR there are not capital dollars available for that sort of addition.

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, and I understand that. There isn't that plan. That program does not exist anymore and needs to be brought back, in my opinion.

Alberta athletes: my understanding is that if they're nationally carded, they get approximately \$6,000. Correct me if I'm wrong.

Dr. Starke: That's the Podium Alberta program.

Mr. Dorward: Okay. By the way, where I'm going with this is that I don't think that's enough money for carded athletes, personally. I have worked with lots of them because I've coached for so many years, and I've been involved in that world. That is a minor part of the sacrifice that they go through not only in their expenditures but the lost opportunity cost of them working, which they do for the good of the sport and that they do so that they can be role models to others. Is there a way – just an idea I'm throwing at you, Minister – that we could perhaps say, "Well, when you come back, we would like you to do seven appearances for us as Albertans, and we will fund you to the extent of the appearances?" It would be way cheaper than other appearances.

Dr. Starke: You know what? The beauty is that they do that anyway.

Mr. Dorward: Do they?

Dr. Starke: They do that anyway. The athletes that I met with last week at our Olympic and Paralympic salute are young people that do that anyway. They pay it forward. They understand that there is a continuum between high-performance sport and high-performance athletes and all the other stages of the sporting system. That's what the renewal of the sport plan is to deal with: how we co-ordinate all the different parts of the sport system most

effectively so that the investment that we make in the sport system has its greatest return.

5:55

As far as the \$6,000 goes, I want to stress that that is not the sole source of funding. Most of the funding, actually, for the carded athletes comes from the federal program or from Own the Podium or other programs like that. We are one of few provinces that does actually provide provincial additional, you know, incremental support. I mean, it's not a ton of money, but I'll tell you that the athletes, that have a lot of expenses for training and travel, certainly appreciate it. These athletes, I will tell you, in terms of their citizenship and what they provide back to the sport that developed them, like in the field of speed skating, go back to their clubs, work with the kids, coach, mentor, and provide role models. They do all that stuff.

Mr. Dorward: Thanks, Minister.

The Chair: One minute left, Mr. Dorward.

Mr. Dorward: Okay. I'm probably one of the few people in the room that have caught trout in Scarpe Lake. If anybody knows where that is, that's in the Castle region. There is a huge opportunity to have a corridor from the northern part of Waterton Lakes all the way to Pincher Creek, so this factors into what you said there. Maybe I'm just advocating. I mean, that area, to me, is the perfect model of having co-operation between the federal park and then coming up past Scarpe and Ruby lakes and up north to the Pincher Creek area. Can you comment on that at all?

Dr. Starke: You know, based on the success of the Legacy Trail between Banff and Canmore – and, you know, there are sometimes up to several thousand users per day on that trail – I would suggest that those sorts of partnerships would be something that we will continue to investigate.

Mr. Dorward: I think there's an opportunity for people not to be bragging about the West Coast Trail or the Chilkooot Trail, but let's brag about that trail and find a name for it.

Finally, my last one, Minister, real fast, is: will I ever golf in Kananaskis again?

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Well, now the first round is done. For the remaining time we'll follow the same rotation to the extent possible. However, the speaking times are reduced to five minutes, which is 10 minutes combined with the minister.

Mr. Strankman.

Mr. Strankman: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Would you like to do it the same way, five and five?

Mr. Strankman: Yes, if I could, please.

Minister, you talked about the Alberta sport plan, and somewhat to that end on page 96 of the business plan your department has been tracking performance indicators for adults who participated in recreational activities in sport. Your department is also tracking performance indicators for teenagers, age 12 to 19, who are active or moderately active in their leisure time. These are important indicators, and the targets are important to strive for. My question is in relation to your tracking. Why is there not a tracking mechanism or target for children under the age of 12? Childhood obesity is a serious problem in this country. Ensuring our future adults learn from a young age to be physically active would seem

to me to be as important if not more important than for teenagers and adults. Could you answer on why that is not tracked, or is there another department responsible for early childhood physical activity after school?

The reason I ask is that childhood obesity has become an epidemic in Canada. The House of Commons Standing Committee on Health published a report in 2007, that was supported by all parties except the separatists, where they heard from many experts who predict that today's children will be the first generation for some time to have poorer health outcomes and a shorter life expectancy than their parents. I'm sure there is no need for stating the obvious, but the health implications for children who are obese is that in adulthood they will inevitably become more susceptible to health problems from preventable diseases like diabetes, increased risk of heart attacks, strokes, joint problems, and even mental health issues.

So while the ministry business plan seems to have some good information and good performance measures, I would be more interested in the statistics for children under 12 years of age who are active or moderately active in their leisure time. Again, do you have those statistics? I realize that measuring those would be hard due to the fact that you would have to rely on parents and their answers regarding their children's health for those statistics.

Furthermore, since your department is measuring performance measures and is measuring performance indicators, as you mention on page 96 of the business plan, does your department build research capacity? In other words, is there directed research, be it with your department or in conjunction with other departments such as Health, where the government tries to determine the best practices and best ways to encourage healthy weights for teenagers, adults, and children? Is your department interested in the physical activity aspect only? If so, does your department work with another department on the equally important notion of encouraging healthy food choices?

I appreciate that your department's goal 3 on page 96 is for Albertans to enjoy a high quality of life, improved health and wellness, strong communities, and personal excellence and fulfillment through recreation, active living, and sport. I hope, Mr. Minister, that part of the way that your department hopes to reach that goal is to have research capacity and to have links to healthy food choices. Is that the case? Minister, is there an advertising campaign plan that helps promote goal 3 built within this budget? If your goal is to reduce sedentary lifestyles – and too many Albertans are spending too much time watching TV, playing videogames, and surfing the Internet – is there a plan to reach any of those Albertans with advertising on TV and the Internet? If so, when will it be rolled out, and how much will it cost?

What specifically is your department's commitment to increasing physical activity beyond the stated goals of the business plan? Is there a federal allocation for goals on increasing physical activity that is part of your budget?

In a 2007 House of Commons report they wrote about the fact that the sport and community activity infrastructure programs fall to the bottom of the municipal lists, below sewer and bridge repairs, for example. Correct me if I'm wrong, but the Active Alberta policy would seem to try and address these problems. Am I correct?

You released an update last year where you mentioned that you attended a federal-provincial meeting on physical activity and recreation which supported a multisectoral framework for action on the after school time period. Is this related to those budget initiatives in the Alberta sport plan? If not, what is your govern-

ment's progress on these agreed-upon initiatives? If it is, how much is the federal government's share expected to be?

With that, Mr. Chair, I'll yield the rest of my time.

The Chair: Thank you. You only had nine seconds left.

Mr. Minister.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you. Let's talk a little bit about, specifically, some of the aspects of the Alberta sport plan and the recreation area. I mean, nobody would ever argue with you about the importance of physical activity for children under 12. I mean, that's very clear, and in fact perhaps, if anything, it became the dominant topic of discussion at the parks ministers conference in February. We talked a lot about encouraging Canadians to get out and get active.

Specifically your question with regard to the survey results: you kind of answered your own question. Part of the difficulty in getting specific numbers for the under-12 bracket is that we would have to rely on the data being given by parents, and that is more difficult to specifically track. It doesn't mean that it's less important – trust me – but it is more difficult to specifically track. We are very committed, though, to specific initiatives to get Albertans connected with nature.

Let's talk a little bit, though, about physical literacy within the Active Alberta plan. The Active Alberta plan talks about physical literacy starting, basically, with even preschool children. We have, for example, around the province seven Alberta sport development centres that work with stakeholders throughout the community to deliver programming to encourage programs like moms and tots and other programming for the very young and working their way all the way up through their development process.

With regard specifically to research capacity and research work we work with researchers at a number of educational institutions within the province, and we have a tripartite agreement between the federal government and the province that also involves the University of Alberta, and that agreement is in terms of finding best practices and working towards, you know, addressing some of the issues and challenges that you mentioned.

You know, I will say that with regard specifically to the after school program right within the department right now we are developing a policy to connect with, for example, the social innovation, the social framework, and we're also trying to take a holistic approach that is based on best practices. There is a wide variety of people and organizations delivering after school programming. The question here is that before you embark on something that you fund, make sure that what you've got is well planned and well executed and has specific measurables and deliverables before you go out and fund it. So we still remain committed to that. Like I say, we're working with a number of departments. We're working with the Department of Human Services to develop specific standards with respect to physical literacy in youth. You know, these are small steps initially, and it's too early to measure specific things.

6:05

I want to talk a little bit about some of the areas where there certainly is overlap with the department of Wellness. I work together with Associate Minister Rodney quite extensively, and things like food choices and that sort of thing are clearly within the purview of the ministry of Wellness. We concentrate on physical activity. You know, there are a lot of other partners that deal with things like food choices, and of course they are part of the overall strategy. Our focus is specifically on the physical activity side of things.

With regard to how we promote that, we promote that with a large number of different things. We don't do a specific advertising program. You know, our funding primarily goes to partners like our provincial sport organizations, over 120 of them, that provide programming and organize the individual sports that we're involved in. You'd actually be surprised at just how many sports are participated in here in Alberta. We have participation levels that are very high, but of course we always want to see if we can drive those higher. That is something we continue to work for, and that's really the reason for the Alberta sport plan.

Again, that's a critical document, and it's one that will provide us, really, with a blueprint, a road map for how we go ahead over the next 10 years to tackle some of the issues and the challenges that you've outlined. I mean, these are big problems. They're not unique to Alberta. We certainly share them with all of our other provincial and territorial partners. When I talk to my counterparts in the other provinces, they really, you know, tell me that they're seeing exactly the same kinds of problems.

You know, we share best practices back and forth. Part of the reason that you attend federal-provincial conferences is so that you can do that sort of thing. Yes, there's some cost involved in doing that, but I think it's money very, very well spent because you have the chance to exchange. Not just ministers but key support staff and deputy ministers have that interchange as well, and I think that's very valuable.

The Chair: Wow. Timing, Minister.

Mr. Rogers, you have five minutes.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Mr. Minister.

The Chair: Would you like to go back and forth?

Mr. Rogers: I'd love to go back and forth with the minister.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Rogers: Mr. Minister, I want to thank you and your staff for your forthright answers today.

Mr. Minister, we all know that Alberta has a deep connection with our natural heritage, and we're privileged to live in one of the most diverse and most beautiful places anywhere in the world. As our province grows, so do the opportunities to experience all that Alberta has to offer. Our network of provincial parks has been built over our province's history, but the need for parks and the important role they play remains the same. They're excellent classrooms for our young to learn about their environment and provide opportunities to have fun with family and friends.

With that in mind, Mr. Minister – and I know you mentioned earlier that you don't have capital per se in your budget – I'm wondering if you can tell us in what way and how much is being invested in 2014 for infrastructure in Alberta's parks, and I'll piggyback on the question from Mr. Dorward just to wonder if any work might be done in Kananaskis after the floods last year that might see that jewel returned for the use of Albertans and certainly to attract the visitors that we've attracted over the years from all parts of the world.

I'll give you a chance to answer that, and I'll have a couple of supplementals. Thank you.

Dr. Starke: Well, I don't want to give the impression that I have no capital funding for anything. I do have capital funding for parks.

Mr. Rogers: Okay. Well, that's good to know. I'm glad you clarified that, sir.

Dr. Starke: I do not have capital funding for specific recreational facilities, and you can probably understand why with the kinds of demands that would come from across the province.

Within our parks system we've allocated for the 2014-15 budget year \$16.7 million in capital expenditures for parks for a variety of parks projects. The bulk of that, some \$14.7 million, is on park construction projects, and I've got a two-page list here ranging from, you know, Gregoire Lake to Chain Lakes, the Oldman dam to Dinosaur to Kinbrook to Tillebrook to Kananaskis park to Vermilion to Young's Point to Crow Lake, all over the province. These projects are going to improve things, you know, in a variety of our parks all over the province. You know, the capital funding efforts include provisions of upgraded parks facilities, facilities that are more accessible, facilities that are modernized to reflect environmental stewardship, to reflect increased accessibility.

You know, all the things you said about our parks are absolutely true. They are jewels. As far as Kananaskis goes, we have a number of very specific objectives. We have some that were sort of part of our regular maintenance plan in Kananaskis Country, an investment of – I'll do the math here real quick – approximately \$1.8 million. But over and above that, of the \$81 million that was allocated for parks reconstruction that I announced last September, \$60 million is for Kananaskis Country. You know, you're right; there was a tremendous amount of damage.

In the last 10 years in this department we have invested some \$300 million in capital in our parks. That's a lot of money. You're right; our parks are very important to Albertans. They care about them, and they want to be able to be proud of the facilities. We continue to work and do the very best job that we can to keep up those facilities across a parks system that I'm very proud of.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Maybe just to follow up, I get a lot of calls in my office, for example, about campsites and access. Some people believe that we've closed too many sites, that we haven't opened enough new ones, that there's just not enough access for my constituents and many others to camping opportunities across our system. With that in mind, I'm just wondering: certainly, keeping in mind what you're doing in the upcoming budget, could you share with us how you prioritize some of the infrastructure that you upgrade and some of the improvements you're making throughout the year?

Thank you.

Dr. Starke: A couple of clarifications, I guess. First of all, you can let your constituents know that we have not closed any parks facilities, and we've not reduced the number of campsites. In fact, we've increased the number. We have some 14,000 available in our provincial parks, but in addition to that, in the national parks and in private campgrounds I think the total inventory of campsites in the province is something around 30,000. There's lots of demand. You just have to drive down the road past an RV dealer to know that Albertans love to camp. You know, in terms of increasing capacity, we continue to do that.

With regard to how we prioritize parks infrastructure and how it'll be upgraded, our staff identified the need for repair and upgrading of infrastructure based on their inspections, based on how the infrastructure is holding up, the condition of the asset. One of the factors, certainly, is visitation, but it's not the only factor. You know, we made an investment at Notikewin park. That's not a hugely visited park, but I will tell you that it's one of the few parks in the northwestern part of Alberta, you know,

servicing the area north of Peace River, and it's one of the few parks that provides access to the Peace River. That's the kind of decision you make based on the priorities that you have.

You know, we have other criteria to consider: health and safety concerns, accessibility, current use/visitation, as I said, some of the demands for outdoor recreational opportunities. Those are all things that factor into it. Certainly, let your constituents know that we're expanding upon and upgrading your area. Pigeon Lake provincial park just went through a major upgrade of its campground facility and those sorts of upgrades. Again, it's a long list of upgrades that are occurring throughout our parks system.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you for that, Mr. Minister.

With that, I'll yield the rest of my time to another member of the PC caucus.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Dorward, together with the minister you have three minutes.

Mr. Dorward: Thanks very much, and I appreciate my colleague's indulgence in allowing me to keep going.

Minister, firstly, a quick comment about Alberta Summer/Winter Games. Good on you and your ministry for supporting those wonderful platforms to be able to allow youth, particularly, to go and experience those kinds of things, surely part of the fabric of building them as citizens and people who experience the kinds of experiences that they would have there. So maybe a comment on that.

Also, I just need you to explain to me a little bit – I heard a reference to it, and I don't quite understand it – how the Associate Minister of Wellness works with you or not with you.

I was at a YMCA announcement regarding a program that's going to be run through the primary care networks, and your side of things on the recreation and physical activity piece wasn't there, but they were. This has got to do with where doctors fill out prescriptions and give them to people who, like myself, need more physical activity. Can you comment on recreation and physical activity? I'll let you take the rest of the time, Minister.

6:15

Dr. Starke: Okay. Well, thank you for that, and thank you for your comments on the Alberta Summer Games and Winter Games. I mean, the Winter Games this past February in Banff and Canmore were hugely successful. I'm anticipating similar success in Airdrie this summer with the Alberta Summer Games. But it's not just for our youth. We also have the Alberta 55 Plus Games, summer and winter.

Mr. Dorward: Yeah. Are you suggesting something there?

Dr. Starke: So there's a chance for you.

Those were held last year in Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock and Calgary, and they're coming to Strathmore in 2015. I mean, it's extremely exciting. These games, you know, have different functions, and they provide different opportunities for young people, but they are integral to the development of young people. You'd be surprised how many of the Alberta Olympians that were at the salute last Thursday competed in Alberta Winter Games, that I was at, in the last 10 years.

Mr. Dorward: Wow.

Dr. Starke: It's pretty cool to see some of these kids that, you know, got their start at Alberta Summer Games and Winter Games.

With regard to your other question on the physical activity and recreation plan, you know, there is certainly, like I say, some common purpose between what we do and what Wellness does. Depending on the ministry that is involved with a specific announcement or a specific deliverable, they will deal sometimes with one department as opposed to the other. Specifically, the prescription to get active was an initiative that was started in Leduc by recreation directors, and this is an area that the Associate Minister of Wellness is specifically involved with. We work collaboratively with them in initiatives like the let's go outdoors initiatives. We're helping them with that because a lot of those are happening in recreational facilities like our provincial parks.

Mr. Dorward: Thanks, Minister.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Now we'll go back to the Wildrose caucus. Mr. Fox, you have 10 minutes with the minister. Five and five?

Mr. Fox: Perfect. I'd be willing to share that time with the minister if he's agreeable.

Dr. Starke: Sure. Absolutely.

The Chair: Back and forth.

Mr. Fox: Wonderful. Thank you for coming here this afternoon, Minister. I actually only have two questions for you, so I think we'll probably run through these pretty quick. At the summer village of Gull Lake there's a provincial recreational area there that has a particular type of vegetation growing in it. It's called the Russian olive tree, and it's growing quite quickly in that area. It's actually growing out into the county land, the summer village land, and particularly into the land of private property owners. They've been looking for help in dealing with this piece of vegetation. It's become quite a nuisance in the area. I'm wondering what kind of supports there are in this budget to help those residents in the area deal with the issue of this particular piece of vegetation. It's something that's in the park, so they don't feel that they have the ability to go into the parkland and deal with it themselves.

Dr. Starke: Okay. I have to confess that botany is not my area of expertise. I'm more on the animal side, the fauna side rather than the flora side. I'm very familiar, certainly, with Gull Lake because my wife is from Lacombe, and I've camped there myself. The Russian olive tree, as I understand it, is an alien, invasive species, and it's causing quite a bit of difficulty. I will tell you that from our involvement with the Pacific NorthWest Economic Region, we discuss a number of alien, invasive species. This is an area of particular concern from a lot of different standpoints.

Specifically to your question, we are currently working with our counterparts in Environment and Sustainable Resource Development to document exactly what is going on with the spread of this vegetation and to work on measures to control it. I would encourage the folks in the area, your constituents, to be in touch with our parks people, and we'll work together on coming up with a solution that answers their concerns and at the same time is, I'm going to say, sensitive to the needs of the environment.

I mean, Gull Lake, as you well know, is one of those big central lakes that provides tremendous recreational opportunities to our growing population and, being in the Edmonton-Calgary corridor and very close to highway 2, is a very, very popular site.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Minister.

The last question that I have for you deals with something that's happening in southern Alberta. Near the U.S. border there is a significant area that's slated for federal allocation of use under the Species at Risk Act. Are you aware of any implications of this act in relation to provincial parks, and do you have something in the budget to help you figure out this act and deal with it accordingly?

Dr. Starke: Are you talking about the sage grouse preservation?

Mr. Fox: Yes, the sage grouse issue in southern Alberta.

Dr. Starke: Okay. Yeah. I'm certainly familiar with – you know, now we're dealing with an animal, so that helps me out right away. Specifically with regard to sage grouse, I've had conversations with some of the constituents of the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat's on this issue. The programs that are in place, which are a co-operation between the federal-provincial departments as well as the Calgary Zoo, are co-operative programs that are working to increase the sage grouse population. I know that there is some disagreement and some controversy as far as how that is being administered and monitored. My department is not specifically involved with that initiative. As far as the questions you have with regard to that, I would say that they are probably best directed to the Minister of ESRD.

I guess those specifically in the area that you speak of, you know, the Cypress Hills area as well as in the area of the far south – the Writing-on-Stone provincial park is in that area as well. It's an area where there needs to be some co-operation and management of things like what you're talking about. Obviously, these birds don't respect provincial or national borders, so there's also some work that can probably be done in co-operation with U.S. officials. But, again, I'm not directly involved with the program or with that other than to know that they're a very unique and interesting bird.

The protected areas that we do manage, you know, help provide habitat for specific species at risk, and that's part of the reason why we set aside specific protected areas within the parks program. But at this point, to my knowledge, we have not been approached by either federal or provincial officials with regard to specifically designating parks areas or provincial parklands for the specific initiative that you're talking about.

Mr. Fox: Thank you very much, Minister, and thank you to all of your staff who have come out here with you today to help answer these questions.

Dr. Starke: You know, I'll say something. It was Eisenhower that said that when something goes wrong, take the blame, and when

something goes right, give others credit. I give a tremendous amount of credit to this team. They are fantastic.

The Chair: Are there any other members wishing to ask a question? Seeing none, then pursuant to Standing Order . . .

Ms Pastoor: I'm sorry. Yes. If I might, Minister.

The Chair: You only have three minutes and 54 seconds.

Ms Pastoor: Oh, it will be quick.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms Pastoor: I'd like to speak about Ya Ha Tinda because I have not heard that mentioned in any of the other parks that you've mentioned. It really did sustain a tremendous amount of damage during the flood. There are probably four or five units in that whole area that have been knocked out by the flood. It's an area that specifically caters to horses and walking. You're familiar with the area?

Dr. Starke: I am.

Ms Pastoor: I just didn't hear it mentioned. I want to make sure that it's on somebody's list because it does require some work this summer before I go there.

Dr. Starke: Mr. Chair, I will undertake to look into the specifics of what the hon. member is asking about. Oh. Look at that. Here it is. The Ya Ha Tinda specifically, though, is Parks Canada property; it's not provincial. I mean, as much as I hate it when guys say, "It's not our problem; it's the other guys'," it's not our problem; it's the other guys'.

Ms Pastoor: Okay. I didn't know that. Thank you.

6:25

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak? We have two minutes left.

Seeing none, pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(8) the estimates of the Ministry of Tourism, Parks and Recreation are deemed to have been considered for the time allotted in the schedule.

I would like to thank the minister and his staff, all the members who attended this afternoon.

I would remind committee members that we are scheduled to meet next on Monday, April 14, at 7 p.m. in committee room A to consider the estimates of the Ministry of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour.

Thank you all very much for being here this evening.

[The committee adjourned at 6:26 p.m.]

