



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Standing Committee
on
Alberta's Economic Future

Ministry of Tourism and Sport
Consideration of Main Estimates

Monday, March 11, 2024
7 p.m.

Transcript No. 31-1-2

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First Session**

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP), Deputy Chair

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Also in Attendance

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Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Participants

Ministry of Tourism and Sport

Hon. Joseph R. Schow, Minister

David Goldstein, Deputy Minister

Paul Lamoureux, Assistant Deputy Minister, Sport, Tourism and Recreation

7 p.m.

Monday, March 11, 2024

[Mr. Getson in the chair]

**Ministry of Tourism and Sport
Consideration of Main Estimates**

The Chair: Excellent. Well, I'd like to call the meeting to order. I'd like to welcome everyone that's here in attendance today and those that may be dialing in online. The committee has under consideration the estimates of the Ministry of Tourism and Sport for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

I'd like to ask that we go around the table and have the members introduce themselves for the record. Minister, please introduce your officials who will be joining you at the table as well. Just to get things started, I'll start off. My name is MLA Shane Getson, and I'm from Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland. We'll start the introductions, starting to my right.

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Chair. My name is Justin Wright. I'm the MLA for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Cyr: Scott Cyr, MLA for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

Mr. Yao: Tany Yao, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Wiebe: Ron Wiebe, MLA for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Stephan: Jason Stephan, Red Deer-South.

Mr. Schow: Joseph Schow, MLA for Cardston-Siksika, Minister of Tourism and Sport. To my left is senior financial officer Carmen Vidaurri. To my immediate right is Deputy Minister David Goldstein, and to his right is my assistant deputy minister, Paul Lamoureux.

Dr. Elmeligi: Sarah Elmeligi, MLA for Banff-Kananaskis and critic for Tourism and Sport.

Ms Hayter: Julia Hayter, MLA for Calgary-Edgemont.

Member Loyola: Rod Loyola, MLA for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

The Chair: Do we have anyone remotely? I'll look to the clerk. I'm not seeing anyone online. Going once, twice, sold.

A few notes of interest here. We do have a substitution. We have Mr. Wiebe in for Ms de Jonge.

A few housekeeping items to address before we start the business at hand. *Hansard* is here to help us out, so you don't have to touch those microphones or anything else. They'll be running that. Committee proceedings are live streamed on the Internet and broadcast on Assembly TV for your interested audience members and participants out there. Members participating remotely: we have none. If you were, you'd have to turn your camera on and turn your microphones off when you're not speaking. Remote participants, the speakers list: we'll just cut all that. Cellphones: please set them to something that won't disturb us. That would be awfully handy.

Speaking rotation and time limits: I get to read a little bit into the record here. I do have an agenda, no more than five minutes, and for those of you political aficionados out there: very difficult, but we'll see what we can do.

Hon. members, the main estimates of the Ministry of Tourism and Sport shall be considered for three hours. Standing Order 59.01 sets out the process for consideration of the main estimates in the legislative committee. Suborder 59.01(6) sets out the speaking rotations for this meeting. The speaking rotation chart is available

for all the committees on the internal website, and hard copies have been provided for the ministry officials at the table. For each segment of the meeting blocks of speaking time will be combined only if both the minister and the member speaking agree to it. Here we go. If debate is exhausted prior to three hours, the ministry's estimates are deemed to have been considered for the time allotted in the main estimates schedule, and the committee meeting will adjourn. Should members have any questions regarding speaking times or the rotation, please e-mail or message the committee clerk, the gentleman to my left.

With the concurrence of the committee I will call a five-minute break near the midpoint of the meeting; however, the three-hour clock will continue to run during the break. Does anyone have an issue with calling a break at the midway point for a biobreak or otherwise? Seeing no objections, we'll do that. The clerk will note that.

Ministry officials who are present may, at the discretion of the minister, address the committee. Ministry officials seated in the gallery, if called upon, have access to the microphone in the gallery and are asked to please introduce themselves for the record for the committee.

Pages are available to deliver notes or any other materials to the gallery, and attendees in the gallery may not approach the table. Space permitting, opposition caucus staff may sit at the table to assist their members. However, members have priority to be sitting at the table at all times.

Points of order will be dealt with as they arise, and individual speaking times will be paused. However, the block speaking time and the overall three-hour meeting clock will continue to run.

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

Finally, the committee should have the opportunity to hear both questions and answers without interruption during the estimates debate; in other words, please, no heckling. Debate flows through the chair at all times, including the instance when speaking time is shared between the member and the minister.

I would like to now invite the Minister of Tourism and Sport to begin. Actually, before that, Minister, just one other item. For the chair's benefit and those following along at home, when you are asking questions, please refer to these nice documents. We have here the strategic plan, we have the ministry business plans, we have the fiscal plan, and we have the Legislative Assembly Office estimates and the government estimates, all at your disposal to reference. It makes it way easier. It might mitigate the number of points of order that could be called and allows, honestly, for your answers to be responded to by the ministry in a more expeditious manner.

With that, Minister, I'll turn it over to you, and you have 10 minutes to start, sir.

Member Loyola: Chairman Getson, if you don't mind, I believe Member Arcand-Paul still needs to introduce himself.

The Chair: Oh. Jeez. I apologize. You slipped in there, Member, and I missed you. Please introduce yourself for the record.

Member Arcand-Paul: Member Arcand-Paul, MLA for Edmonton-West Henday.

The Chair: Perfect. Thank you, Deputy Chair.

Without further ado, over to you, Minister.

Mr. Schow: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's a great day when we get to talk about tourism and sport, and I'm pleased to be

here to discuss the budget for the Ministry of Tourism and Sport. I've already introduced my executive team here at the table, but I'm also joined, behind me, by members of the ministry executive team in the gallery. We have a great squad, and I appreciate all their help and support. I want to take this opportunity to thank them for all the work they do. I would not be able to make it happen here today without them.

The Ministry of Tourism and Sport was established by this government nine months ago, on June 9, 2023. In those nine months our ministry has seen our tourism economy recover to prepandemic levels two years ahead of schedule. I repeat: two years. We have encouraged Albertans to be active by increasing access to sport and recreation activities across the province, and we have focused on building our reputation as an attractive destination to host world-class sporting events. With an operating budget of \$135.7 million, we will continue to work with communities and businesses to showcase the beauty of Alberta, create lasting memories, and propel our tourism and sports sectors to new heights.

Last month I was pleased to be joined by the Premier, Danielle Smith, in Jasper to introduce our new long-term tourism strategy. Alberta's government understands that growing our tourism sector is an important part of diversifying our province's economy, because tourism means jobs. In fact, the tourism sector supports more than 80,000 full-time jobs in the province. Alberta's tourism strategy will take a whole-of-government approach to growing the visitor economy. It provides crucial direction in key areas of our tourism sector, including sustainable and responsible development such as all-season resorts in order to attract more visitors year-round; ensuring that the needs of rural, urban, and Indigenous communities are reflected and met; increasing visitor access to and within the province; and easing tourism sector labour shortages.

Achievement of these ambitious goals and outcomes set out in the tourism strategy will require close collaboration with Travel Alberta, the province's destination management organization. As part of Alberta's new tourism strategy, Travel Alberta's budget was increased in 2024 from \$71.9 million to \$79.5 million for '24-25. Since expanding Travel Alberta's mandate several years ago from being purely a destination marketing organization to being a full-fledged destination management organization responsible for destination development and investment attraction, Travel Alberta has helped drive recovery of the industry two full years ahead of schedule. They have relaunched efforts in key international markets like the U.S., the U.K., Germany, and Japan. They partnered with airlines to generate over 500,000 new incremental air seats in the province from key and emerging international markets, driving and delivering target demand in our province.

They've invested over \$40 million across the province into over 500 new tourism products, 70 per cent of which have been developed in rural Alberta. They have stimulated \$118 million of private capital investment into the province, with a return of \$8 for every \$1 spent, and they produce tourism development plans for 10 zones of the province previously underrepresented in the tourism economy. By investing in our emerging destinations, visitors to our province will have even more authentic Alberta experiences that inspire them to stay longer and spend more and will give Albertans more opportunities to explore their own backyard.

In January we announced an investment of more than \$20 million to support tourism growth across the province this year. As part of Travel Alberta's tourism investment program, this funding has already supported a number of exciting projects across our province, from Ro5ie the robot coaster at Calgary's Telus Spark Science Centre to Métis Crossing, Alberta's first Métis cultural interpretive destination, in Smoky Lake. I would say that with

Ro5ie, if you're over six foot nine or six foot eight, you can't ride the ride – that's a fact – but it's a great thing to see.

7:10

In collaboration with Travel Alberta we have proven that we can successfully grow and diversify Alberta's tourism industry, and I cannot wait to see what new heights we will achieve with our tourism strategy, that is now launched. In fact, one of the pillars of our tourism strategy is investing in the province's growing Indigenous tourism industry, who, through the tourism experiences they offer, are sharing their cultures, languages, and traditions and changing perspectives. Our government has directed the largest ever provincial commitment to Indigenous tourism in Canada, \$8.85 million over five years to Indigenous Tourism Alberta. On top of this, we have invested \$3.2 million in 40-plus Indigenous tourism and hospitality providers through Travel Alberta's tourism investment program. This investment by Alberta's government will help Indigenous peoples share their stories, cultures, and traditions while drawing visitors from around the world. Indigenous tourism alone is projected to contribute \$126 million in GDP to the provincial economy in 2024.

On the sports side of things, to start, I was given the exciting mandate to develop a new funding program that will contribute to the continuing success of our tourism, sport, physical activity, and recreation sectors. We know that recreation and parks are the heartbeat of our communities. We plan to invest at least \$30 million over three years through the new community recreation centre infrastructure program, supporting recreation facilities across the province, and that funding is just the beginning. This will be Alberta's first grant program that is solely dedicated to funding sport and recreation infrastructure. The details of this program are still under development, but I'm excited to share more details about it soon.

Our commitment to recreational facilities is not just about building more gyms, parks, and sports facilities; it's about creating accessible spaces to support everyone regardless of age, ability, or background. It's also about ensuring that physical activity and recreation opportunities are affordable and accessible for all. When we come together through sports and recreation, we build social bonds, break down barriers, and create a sense of belonging.

To ensure more Alberta children have the opportunity to enjoy the benefits of physical activity, Alberta's government provided \$8 million in stable funding for our every kid can play program. This program provides direct support for parents to help off-set sports and recreation fees as well as funding for provincial and community organizations to help them create more programming, making sports and recreation accessible to more of Alberta's kids. The every kid can play program is anticipated to provide financial support to more than 8,500 children and youth and support over 50 child- and youth-focused community-level programs throughout Alberta.

Later this spring we will deliver on our mandate letter commitment to establish a major international sports bidding policy. Alberta has an excellent track record of hosting major national and international events and multisport games across the province. The major international sport event bidding policy will ensure we only pursue major sports events that offer the highest benefit for Albertans while safeguarding taxpayers. In recent weeks Alberta has hosted a number of international sporting events at our many world-class facilities. These events were partially made possible through the major sporting events grant, formerly the major cultural and sport event grant. This support is about building a legacy of sport infrastructure, providing opportunities for local athletes, and driving economic growth and tourism. With the eyes

of the world on Alberta, hosting these events has an economic impact in the millions per event and builds upon the province's reputation as a premier host for major events and an attractive travel destination for visitors from around the world.

In addition to our major sporting event grant commitments, SPAR includes funding for other significant events that will contribute to our province's major sport legacy, putting the eyes of the world on Alberta and filling hotel rooms and restaurants, events like the 2027 IIHF World Junior Championship, two Hlinka Gretzky world cups, two Canada versus U.S. National Women's Rivalry Series games, the 2024 World Para Ice Hockey Championships, and four years of Hockey Canada summer camps. These investments ensure that Alberta will get to watch the best play the game they love and get to learn the game they love from the best.

The budget line also includes supports for events like the Canadian Finals Rodeo in Edmonton, ensuring this provincial tradition continues to thrive. Attracting major international events like these highlights not only the quality of our facilities but our ability to host and deliver world-class competitions.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

That concludes the first 10 minutes of the portion here. We'll now begin with questions and answers for the meeting. The first 60 minutes goes to the members of the Official Opposition, and the minister may speak, of course, back and forth between the two. Hon. members, you will see the timer that's in the committee room here. That'll let you know how much time is left on the shot clock.

With that, I turn to members of the Official Opposition. Is there anyone who would like to go first? Okay. Recognizing – I'm going to look and make sure I get your name correct – Elmeligi.

Dr. Elmeligi: Yup.

The Chair: Okay. Whew. I've got a bad reputation for names, so I appreciate that. You do have some options here. Are you looking to go back and forth and split the time with the minister?

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to split the time with the minister, through you to the minister, if you'd be so willing.

The Chair: Okay. As in the opening remarks, it's up to the minister how they want to do that.

Minister, your option.

Mr. Schow: I think we're going to go block time.

The Chair: Okay. With that, I'll turn it back to you, Member, and enjoy your time.

Dr. Elmeligi: Okay. Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. I'll just start by saying that it is an incredible honour to be the critic for Tourism and Sport. I do think that this ministry is a very good-news ministry for Albertans. There is a lot of potential to grow the tourism sector in Alberta across the province in rural and urban communities. It is a pleasure to be here this evening.

In the business plan, on page 139, there is a description of the ministry, and I'll just read a quote from that.

The ministry works with Albertans, other governments, Indigenous communities, non-profit organizations, and the private sector to grow Alberta's visitor economy. Tourism is an economic driver with linkages to many related industries such as transportation, accommodations, food and beverage, recreation retail; and has a broad and diversifying effect on Alberta's economy. There are opportunities for Alberta's tourism industry

to further contribute to economic growth and diversification while raising awareness and a positive image of Alberta in the global marketplace. Growth of the tourism industry also enhances quality of life and rural economic development across the province. Travel Alberta contributes by supporting the growth of the tourism industry through marketing and helping businesses and communities develop must-see tourism products such as unique accommodation, experiences and destinations, as well as ensuring visitors can easily access them. Alberta's tourism economy attracts millions of visitors each year.

In line of that, I have a series of questions. First, how do you measure the success of Alberta's tourism industry in contributing to economic growth and diversification beyond just visitor numbers and overall tourism spending? How is overall tourism spending measured when the sector encompasses so many different industries? Can you provide examples of how the tourism industry has directly benefited other sectors such as transportation, accommodations, and food and beverage? What strategies does the ministry employ to ensure that the growth of Alberta's tourism industry positively impacts rural economic development across the province? How does Travel Alberta prioritize and select which tourism products to support and promote, and what criteria are used to determine their potential success?

In what ways does the ministry collaborate with Indigenous communities to ensure their inclusion and benefit from Alberta's tourism initiatives? In what ways does the ministry collaborate with the First Nations and Indigenous Relations ministry to ensure their meaningful engagement in tourism development? I'm asking that specifically thinking about tourism development opportunities that are not Indigenous led but are occurring on Indigenous traditional lands.

How does the ministry support the development of amateur athletes at the provincial, national, and international levels, and what measurable outcomes have been achieved in this regard?

Given the emphasis on economic growth and diversification what specific initiatives or incentives does the government provide to encourage private-sector investment in Alberta's tourism and sport industries? Can you provide examples of how the ministry balances economic growth objectives with environmental sustainability and cultural preservation in its tourism and sport initiatives?

7:20

The provincial tourism strategy is receiving support from stakeholders, and there are beneficial pieces to it. Given that this document provides the direction for the tourism sector in the coming years, there are budget implications that need to be discussed. First, where is the funding for the implementation of the strategy reflected in the budget specifically? How does the government plan to incorporate feedback and recommendation from stakeholders to revise and strengthen the provincial tourism strategy, particularly in addressing its lack of comprehensive policy measures, which I will get to in a moment?

The first pillar of the strategy identifies – does that mean I only have 56 seconds left in this block of 10 minutes?

The Chair: No. You're at 5:58 currently, so you've still got five minutes, Member.

Dr. Elmeligi: Okay. Sorry. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yeah. No worries.

Dr. Elmeligi: The first pillar of the tourism strategy identifies the need to work with other ministries to achieve the 2035 goal of doubling tourism spending. Tourism is a system, and working with other ministries will be key. So how will this be done? Which

ministries will be a focus, and how are these relationships reflected in the budget? When we assess the budget, there is funding allocated for parks, municipal infrastructure, jobs and trade, tourism, et cetera. How can we assess if and how much of those funds will be allocated towards tourism-related businesses?

The expenses for Tourism and Sport in the government estimates, page 223, show a dramatic increase from a forecasted \$35.2 million to \$52 million. Why? Where is this additional \$16 million going?

The new tourism immigration stream provides opportunity for people who have been working for six months to apply for permanent residence more quickly. This is helpful for the tourism industry, and I have heard positive reaction from stakeholders to this, but I am wondering how it will be applied in this regard. Forty-seven per cent of adults in Alberta do not have sufficient literacy to work the majority of available jobs. This is particularly relevant in the tourism sector, where people are often recruited from outside of Alberta. The adult learning centres across Alberta submitted their three-year funding applications to the government in November and were not aware of the tourism strategy or the new immigration stream at that time. This group provides much-needed ESL – that's English as a second language – programming for new Albertans, and their capacity will be significantly impacted by this new immigration stream. Will their funding also increase in turn, and will funding for CALPs be prioritized to tourism development zones or distributed equally across Alberta?

Also in the government estimates, page 219, under operating expense, section 3, can you please explain the difference between 3.1, 3.2, and 3.4 since they all contain the same or similar words? Is the \$10 million increase for sport, physical activity, and recreation associated with the new community recreation grant program?

On the same page the forecast for the minister's office for 2023-24 is \$150,000, and then for 2024-25 it goes up to \$775,000. Why?

What kind of funding will be provided to communities to create tourism plans of their own in the tourism development zones? Will rural communities be provided with any infrastructure support or capital supports? How will the tourism development zones be prioritized for rural economic development in the tourism sector? Farm to table is a growing movement in the agritourism sector, and Tourism Lethbridge was developing an app where people could identify agritourism opportunities and then spend a great afternoon picking berries in the Alberta grasslands, for example. How will initiatives like this be supported, prioritized, and encouraged to fit strategically within a municipality's tourism strategy? What about farmers' markets and Open Farm Days? How will those fit in?

Tourism development zones will require support from the province to be successful to develop tourism strategies and plans, to attract capital investment, to engage their communities effectively, to monitor the impacts of tourism on their communities. Will there be provincial support to do this work? Legacy destinations will also still require support to ensure their return on investment. Where will these funds come from, and how will they be prioritized?

The Crowsnest Pass is located in one of these tourism development zones. It is also the area where the Grassy Mountain coal mine exploration proposal is currently being moved through a public hearing by the AER. We know that this coal mine has already been through a public hearing and rejected, but for the purpose of our conversation tonight let's discuss how this proposal fits in line with tourism. It's a great example that will be facing other rural communities who want to develop tourism. How can one area be the focus of tourism development and coal mining? These activities do not fit together. Tourism can provide longer term economic and environmental sustainability than a coal mine. How is the minister

working with the minister of energy to champion tourism opportunities over coal mining opportunities? Has the minister been working with the local community to develop a tourism product that would provide jobs to these communities?

The town of Grande Cache also had a coal mine, and when it closed in 2015, 650 jobs were instantly lost. Their town population dropped from 5,000 to 3,500 and continues to decline. They also lost two out of five doctors. What assurances does the minister have for the communities of the Crowsnest Pass that this will not happen to them and that tourism potential will be achieved through this new tourism strategy and increased funding?

The tourism strategy doesn't list climate change as something important to plan for or react to, yet it is. People are displaced from wildfires, tourists and residents. Drought may alter the functionality of various tourism operations. Smoke can cause people to cancel their trips. How are these things being accounted for in the budget? Is there a contingency plan for hotels who may have to unexpectedly host people who are displaced? Is there funding for communication in different languages if it's required? How are tourism stakeholders being engaged in disaster planning and supported in their efforts to do so? Regarding the absence of sustainable and regenerative tourism as defined pillars in the strategy, what specific actions will the government take to integrate these concepts, particularly in light of climate change?

Sorry, I just finished the sentence. My apologies.

The Chair: No problem, Member.

Just for quick edification, yeah, we have the block time, being the chunk that you have, whether it's for the opposition or the government side, the total meeting time, and then your speaking time. They're broken up into 10-minute blocks.

Minister, back to you. You have 10 minutes to respond, sir.

Mr. Schow: Well, through you, Mr. Chair, to the member, thank you very much for those questions. Certainly, there's a lot there, and I will endeavour to get to as much of it as possible.

I would like to start by congratulating her on being the critic for Tourism and Sport. I know she also carries some other critic portfolios, and there's a lot of work to do there, but it is a great critic file to have. You know, Tourism and Sport is a file that I think has a greater potential, a huge opportunity in this province. I think that as I've spent the last nine months as the minister touring around Alberta, getting to better acquaint myself with the tourism sector and with even more sporting organizations than I already knew before, I can say that there is great upside in this province with tourism and with sport. Like the member, I'm also honoured to be the Minister of Tourism and Sport as it affords me the opportunity to talk about what this province has to offer in that file.

I will begin with the Travel Alberta mandate. This was addressed early on in the questions from the member. It's really important to note that in 2021 Travel Alberta's mandate did change from a tourism marketing organization, a destination marketing organization, to a destination management organization. What that means: it's a very important distinction in that prior to 2021 much of what Travel Alberta did was market the beautiful landscapes that are the province to other areas around the country, around Alberta, of course – if you go to any airport or lots of other destinations, you'll see Canada's Alberta advertisements; you'll see them on TV – but also market them overseas.

Since 2021 that mandate has changed into a management organization. What that means is that Travel Alberta does more than just marketing now. They actually work with businesses around the province, and in doing that, they consult with them on best business practices. They also explore international markets and better

understand what those markets are looking for from Alberta as a destination so when they come back here, they can explore those opportunities, invest in those products, and help build more products that those international visitors want to see.

We talked a little bit in my opening remarks about the fact that we are two years ahead of schedule in recovering to prepandemic-level spending. That's also a really important statistic because, you know, we expected it to get back there kind of around the '25-26 mark, but we are there now as a result of the new mandate that Travel Alberta has taken on.

7:30

The largest segment of the traveller in spending in Alberta's economy is the local traveller, the traveller here within the province of Alberta. Second, then, of course, it will be followed by Canadian travellers, then U.S. travellers and international travellers.

The last segment, that I just mentioned, the international traveller, the high-spending traveller, as we call them, is a segment that we're working very hard to bring back to Alberta. I'm sure I'll touch on this later, but a part of that is with, you know, the airline strategy and having more direct routes coming into the province. When we better understand what that segment needs in coming into Alberta, it helps us better develop those kinds of products.

With regard to Travel Alberta's mandate as a destination management organization, it is a multifaceted approach to better understand what we as a province have to offer, what are the untapped resources, and what it is that the consumer wants. You know, if you use an abstract example, if you want to start a store somewhere, you have to do your market research to better understand what kind of products the local consumers want to buy. Like I say, you wouldn't want to sell – I won't get into deeper abstract examples; I'll just get off topic.

But all that is to say that Travel Alberta has done an incredible job. I do want to credit the team over there. I know my deputy minister was also CEO of Travel Alberta, and they have done fantastic work. A lot of the travel that I have done over the last nine months, acquainting myself with the industry, has been planned and spearheaded a lot by Travel Alberta, so I'm grateful for their work. To all the members of the Travel Alberta team and squad: thank you very much. I want to give you a big shout-out.

Well, with regard to what they do, also a question that came up in the member's opening remarks was with regard to rural Alberta. What I love a lot about the expanded mandate of Travel Alberta and where we're going with the long-term tourism strategy is that it's not just focused in the major urban centres. There's lots to offer in places like Edmonton and Calgary, wonderful cities that have fantastic events – we just announced one not long ago, and I mentioned it in my opening remarks with the IIHF world juniors and other events and, of course, the Calgary Stampede – but a lot of the development that we're working on through Travel Alberta is going into rural Alberta.

The reason we do this and the reason Travel Alberta is doing this is that we understand that Alberta as a vast landscape has so much to offer and an incredible story to tell. This story allows us to explore not just one segment of the Rocky Mountains but also the badlands out near the Drumheller area or going further up north into Fort McMurray. Not long ago I was up in Grande Prairie and got a chance to explore that area as well. These are areas where, we believe strongly, travellers can come to from around Alberta, from around Canada, and from outside of the country and international destinations and stay for several days, spending time in hotel rooms, restaurants, shopping at local stores, and supporting the local economy. This goes to a point that's been made before – but it's worth reiterating – which is that tourism results in the largest export

dollars in all of Alberta. We have a huge opportunity here to expand that, and I don't see why we wouldn't do that, why we would leave those dollars on the table.

Rural Alberta has a story to tell, and what I think is also unique, as I talk to my colleagues on both sides of the aisle, is that every constituency has an opportunity to expand tourism, and that goes for rural Alberta in particular. I think the statistic I used here was that 70 per cent of Travel Alberta's investment has been in rural Alberta products, understanding that visiting a small town doesn't mean you get a small-town experience. You can go there, stay in some very unique boutique hotels, shop at farmers' markets. The member had talked about things like farm to table and ag tourism, which I'm certain I'll be able to expand upon shortly.

This idea is that rural Alberta is here for the world to explore, and I've had the chance over the last nine months to explore it. I'll tell you that prior to getting this ministry, I always thought: I want to go explore more of Canada and the rest of the world. I've got to tell you: there's a lot to see right here in our own backyard. For anybody watching at home, I encourage you to check out the Travel Alberta website. You'll see a whole world of opportunities for your family to explore and enjoy, and you can see why Alberta is a prime destination for world travellers.

The next several years of the long-term tourism strategy is about attracting international travellers, because, of course, we want people to hear about that, go back to where they're coming from, tell their friends, tell their families, come back and visit again and again and again. You know, we have 10 tourism destination zones, and those don't even include places like Banff, Jasper, Lake Louise, Calgary, Edmonton.

I think I'm making the point pretty clear that when it comes to rural Alberta and the economic development opportunities, the sky is the limit, and I'll tell you a little bit about one of them. Not long ago we had the opportunity to go out into the Livingstone-Macleod constituency. I was joined by MLA Petrovic. She does a wonderful job there. I want to make sure that she gets the credit where it's due. She works very hard for her constituency. We explored a grain silo hotel, where a family with a tract of land, cattle ranchers for multiple generations, which is part of the fabric of Alberta, had a large piece of land just off the highway. I actually drove past it, missed it because I was looking for something else, turned around, found it, and it was four steel grain silos that they've turned into boutique accommodation, where the top floor is kind of the bedroom setting and downstairs a shower, a little kitchenette, a table, and all those kinds of things. There's not a huge disturbance to the local area, but it definitely gives you a chance to stay here, get a luxurious experience in an overnight hotel or multiple nights in the hotel. The view is picturesque. I mean, you're right at the foothills of the Rocky Mountains; you can't beat it.

Someone had an idea. They thought: "You know what? Let's share this story with visitors who want to come and check out what our lifestyle is like." I'm certain that I'll have more chance to talk about these experiences and others, but it really hammers home the point that everyone has an opportunity to share tourism, and rural Alberta is absolutely no exception.

The Chair: Right to the wire. Well done, Minister.

Over to the opposition.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Through you to the minister, I appreciate that answer. I am looking for a few more details, however, so I really would like to zoom in a little bit on a couple of things. First, I think that there is an importance to address climate change within the tourism strategy, and there needs to be funding to support the tourism industry to host evacuees from wildfires,

whether they be coming from parts of Alberta or other provinces. There is a cost, potentially, to hotels to do that. There are also potential impacts from climate change on the tourism industry like having smoky air and people not wanting to come here because of that, so how is climate change going to be addressed either in this budget or in the tourism strategy?

I also think there is a potential conflict between the development of tourism and resource extraction practices for rural communities. When it comes time to make the hard decisions between coal mining and tourism development, which will win out? Tourism development does have more sustainable economic potential for rural communities than some resource extraction practices like coal mining. How will we see those hard decisions reflected in this budget here?

The other thing. You know, I agree with the minister, Mr. Chair, that rural Alberta has a lot to offer for the tourism sector. It is really amazing how many unique experiences, such as the one the minister just described, exist in rural Alberta, but that doesn't negate the fact that rural communities will need support to plan strategically for tourism.

I come from a community that is really – you know, Canmore and Banff, the Bow Valley: these are, like, the legacy destinations of tourism in Alberta. They are significant economic contributors. But one of the things we have learned in the Bow Valley is that if you don't strategically plan for tourism, you can make a lot of mistakes along the way, and you can end up with products that you don't want and impacts that you don't want. So how will rural communities be supported when they don't necessarily have the expertise in tourism? How will they be supported to develop strategic plans? Again, back to this all-of-government approach: which ministries will the minister be working with, and how will those collaborative relationships be reflected in the budget?

The minister brought up air investment, and I'm really happy to see that, because although overall tourism spending has recovered to pre-pandemic levels, the level of international travel and international tourism spending has not, and that continues to impact communities like Banff and Jasper, that rely on international tourism for their overall economic sustainability. I'm interested in how air access will be invested in and what criteria will be used to invest this money and how the outcomes of it will be measured.

7:40

I'm also interested in the tourism levy because, well, it's just a fascinating little levy, really. What is the status of assessing the tourism levy in being assessed for its allocation to tourism in its entirety? The tourism levy in 2023 was \$73 million, and Travel Alberta got \$62 million of that, and I'm pulling that from page 44 of the annual report. Where did the other \$11 million go, and how can it be tracked? If the tourism levy is from tourism, should it not be invested back into tourism, and wasn't that the intention of the levy in the first place? Will any of this money from the levy be available to tourism marketing destinations or communities to help them develop their tourism program?

What about inclusion? The strategy talks about Alberta being welcoming to everyone. Has the minister considered any funding specifically associated with countermarketing the message of certain policies that may position Alberta as less than welcoming for some; the trans policy, for example?

Public transportation can also be a solution to reduce tourism traffic congestion in popular locations, but most of the strategy focuses on air access. Will the ministry be investing in any development or expansion of public transportation like regional bus routes or partnerships with road transportation of some kind?

Albertans spend \$2.3 billion recreating on Crown land annually – that's from page 24 of the annual report – yet outdoor recreation is not a pillar in the tourism strategy. Spending associated with new campgrounds and outdoor recreation infrastructure is reported through the Ministry of Forestry and Parks, but what kind of tourism investment is required to monitor, market, and understand visitor expectations and satisfaction with these recreational opportunities?

The budget spending for tourism in 2022 was \$15.8 million, but in 2023 it was \$893,000, from page 31 of the annual report. What were the consequences of this, and how can we decrease funding for tourism so dramatically and try to double the industry spend by 2035? I understand that this budget proposes an increase. I'm still concerned that that increase is not sufficient to get to this doubling of tourism spend by 2035. The tourism policy and strategy were budgeted at \$1 million but came to \$116,000 underspent on page 64 of the annual report. What happened to save this money? Given that the tourism strategy doesn't address key segments of our tourism industry like climate change and environmental sustainability and emergency response, would it have been more prudent to spend up to the budgeted amount and provide a more comprehensive strategy?

The fiscal plan, on page 111, also says that there is \$23 million to upgrade and construct new trails. Then on page 118 of the fiscal plan Crown land trails has a budget of \$6 million, and Kananaskis trail upgrades is \$1 million, for a total of \$7 million. Which is it? Where is the other \$16 million going? I understand that some of this funding will go through the Minister of Forestry and Parks as well, so I just am looking for clarity about how much is coming from tourism.

I want to spend some time talking about tourism-based economies. The cost of hosting tourism is high for rural communities. The communities of Banff, Canmore, and Jasper have long struggled to provide infrastructure to host tourism and have been exploring options for decades. In 2023 former MLA Miranda Rosin introduced the Municipal Government (Tourism Community Designation) Amendment Act, 2023, designed to provide for the designation of tourism communities to support visitation to and the economic growth and sustainability of the tourism sector in those communities. The intention was for this designation to be accompanied by some kind of funding stream to support infrastructure improvements associated with the tourism population. That bill was never debated and not passed, but the intention has been discussed for many years.

Now the communities of Sylvan Lake and Drumheller have joined these communities to request additional support to host the large number of tourists they do. Just to provide some examples, the town of Canmore estimates that 25 per cent of their budget goes towards funding tourism-related expenditures, from multi-use pathways to waste-water treatment and infrastructure. The town of Sylvan Lake estimates \$1 million is spent to clean their beach annually, which is a direct impact of being one of the most beautiful and popular beaches in Alberta. Jasper and Banff and Drumheller also spend significant portions of their budget maintaining trails in town to host tourists. Tourism generates billions for the Alberta economy, yet the cost is borne by small rural communities with small tax bases.

We sometimes compare Alberta to B.C. and talk about Whistler, with an all-season resort, as being something to emulate. Whistler, B.C., is a thriving tourism destination. For the 2023-24 fiscal year the B.C. government will distribute a \$1 billion boost to be distributed amongst 188 municipalities and regional districts. Whistler, which had a 19 per cent growth of its permanent population between 2016 and 2021, will receive \$4.9 million. The resort municipality of Whistler receives funding from the B.C. government through its resort municipality initiative program, and

in 2023 RMOW expects to receive \$5.7 million in that funding. Between 2015 and 2019 Whistler received an average of \$326,000 from small-community grants that are meant to assist in basic services. This grant is generally applicable to municipalities with populations up to 19,000.

If we are going to compare our small tourism-based communities to Whistler, we should also provide comparative funding. Where is the funding for tourism-based economies in this year's budget, particularly since the government has set the objective to double tourism spending by 2035? Why are we not doing this if we want to support tourism growth, especially in rural communities whose property owners bear the tax burden?

With nearly three-quarters of businesses feeling that their previous optimism is dissipating, what specific strategies is the government considering to restore confidence and stability within the tourism industry? What is the breakdown for the funding for this? Why has the government been so slow to remedy these issues that are going to have a lasting impact on businesses? Considering that 59 per cent of businesses cite inflationary impacts as the biggest challenge during the summer season, how does the government plan to address the rising costs and maintain affordability within the tourism sector? Do they think their measures are enough? Are there any research studies being conducted on the government strategy success?

The Chair: There we go. Member, I really appreciate you referencing the documents. Just for everyone's edification even though I referenced Legislative Assembly Office's document, that's not what you're talking about tonight. Everything is germane to tourism. Thank you for doing that.

Minister, back to you.

Mr. Schow: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair, and I thank the member for those questions. I think before I jump into some of the questions that she asked in the second round, I will refer back to some of them in the first round as I didn't get to all of them as much as I can, and I suspect we'll kind of do this dance throughout the evening as I try to answer as many questions as possible.

I think the first thing to talk a little bit about is the goals of Travel Alberta and the government in setting our objective of \$25 billion by 2035. You know, this is obviously more than doubling where we're currently at right now, at \$10.7 billion. The question was asked: how do we measure success beyond the dollars? There are a number of metrics that we can go into, and I'm happy to throw it over to my deputy minister, Mr. Goldstein, in a moment, but when it comes to our goal, it is heavily based on the visitor spend.

If we bring more people into Alberta from outside of Canada or shift them around Alberta, it's great they're getting a chance to really experience all that Alberta has to offer, but the real benefit of tourism, from an economic standpoint and from looking at this file as an economic development file, is finding ways to have people stay longer and spend more. That's a lot of the research that goes into what Travel Alberta has done. While I understand that there are a number of metrics, things like hotel stays, you know, restaurant stays, and spending there, and that's all great, we really do bring it all together and we look at visitor spend, direct visitor spend, so it's really important to note that.

What I will do very briefly is just allow Mr. Goldstein to elaborate a little bit on kind of the measures that we use to gauge success in the tourism sector in Alberta.

Mr. Goldstein: Thanks, Minister, and thanks for the question. It comes under a couple of parameters. I think the first thing, just to reiterate what the minister said: unlike most tourism strategies in

other parts of Canada or the rest of North America, ours is a spend goal, not a visitation goal. We're not looking for volume; we're looking for the quality of visitation. As the minister said earlier, that is primarily driven not just by the Albertans who travel around Alberta, who are, you know, our core bread and butter, but other Canadians who come here, who spend 2 to 1 what Albertans spend, and that goes up successively.

7:50

The spend issue is an important one. I believe you asked the question: how do we come to that? There are 22 pieces, or data parts, that we pull together as part of the team, the econometrics team, at Travel Alberta. That includes airline data, hotel data. Stats Canada has – you asked, I believe, earlier how you discern between restaurants and other forms of spending. That's all done through what's called the tourism satellite account, which is established by Stats Canada. And we work in partnership with Stats Canada and Destination Canada to come up with those dollar figures. It does a percentage breakdown for food and beverage and accommodation and others.

The other crux of the answer – and I don't want to take up too much of the time on this, but I think it was a good question – was about that we then go through the actual measurement accountability pieces, which are actually in the Travel Alberta business plan and their annual report. You will see what's called a balance scorecard. We have several pieces in that balance score card which include not just spend but what our attractiveness is, particularly in the U.S. media market, what the incremental air seats are, and, to something the minister raised earlier, which is: how are our dollars driving and assisting private-sector investment? On the aviation fund it's a leverage of \$6 to \$1, so we earn \$6 of appreciable revenue to the system for every dollar we invest. On the funding mechanisms, the grant programs, that goes up to 8 to 1. So that \$1 helps stimulate a great deal of additional investment from those private-sector businesses to the tune of 8 to 1.

There's a series of those, and I don't want to get ahead of ourselves, but we also, within our own management structure, have a series of environmental and economic data points that are important to us as well.

Mr. Schow: Thank you for that, Mr. Goldstein.

I hope that answers some of your questions kind of deeper into the economics of the visitor spend.

With regard to the communities and how they'll be supported with tourism destination zones, there have been conversations around resort municipalities. If our tourism strategy is successful, which I really think it will be, you will see a number of communities asking for this because they're going to see increased visitation as we develop the tourism destination zones. These 10 zones have been identified by Travel Alberta as having a high potential for growth and expansion. What's important to understand, however, is that there are some communities that are left out of the tourism destination zones, but this is an evolving plan.

You know, Mike Tyson used to say that everybody has a plan until they get punched in the face, if I'm going to use a sports analogy, which I'm sure I'll use lots throughout the rest of this evening. But I think it'll be a great injection into our local economies which may force us to re-evaluate as we see tremendous success from these tourism destination zones and others emerge potentially. I don't want to get too far ahead of myself, but the reality is we are looking at this where we are today, which is the 10 tourism destination zones. As we see tremendous success through this plan, then we will address communities.

I don't think there are any resorts in Alberta that are at the Whistler status. We had a chance to visit Whistler not long ago and talk to them a little bit about how they've developed and how they've come to be this world-class destination. I think Alberta has tremendous opportunities within the resort sector.

This plan is trying to signal to investors that Alberta is open for business, which leads me to the next point that you had asked, which is our first pillar of the tourism strategy, which is: how are we going to collaborate with ministries? While I'm the only ministry with the name of Tourism and Sport in it, there's a number of my colleagues that are, I would say, Tourism and Sport adjacent. For example, working with Minister Schulz on the environment file; with Minister Loewen, of course, from Parks; working with Municipal Affairs and Minister McIver; working with Minister Dreeshen in Transportation.

You did ask a number of questions that are a bit out of scope, I would say, for my budget, as I don't deal specifically with some of the transportation issues, but you did address an important issue: once people get here, like, once they get to Alberta soil, how are they going to be able to get around? I apologize. I should be referring through the chair. I apologize, Mr. Chair.

It's important to note that our job as a government and my job as the Minister of Tourism and Sport is to work with my colleagues to create a seamless path. Once people arrive into Alberta and they get off the airplane in Calgary or they get off the airplane in Edmonton and they see the beautiful vistas and landscapes that they're about to explore, the first question they're probably going to ask, which, hopefully, is already answered, is: how am I going to get there? You know, are you renting a vehicle? Are you taking a bus? Are you taking a train or whatever it is? There have been conversations about different modes of transportation in the throne speech and in other press conferences.

Suffice to say that this is all part of the larger plan for the tourism strategy, which is creating an environment in which people are able to arrive here by air because it's very difficult to get here otherwise. There's not a lot of rubber traffic that comes into Alberta. We like to say, "Our pipeline has wings" in Tourism and Sport. Once they get here, how are they going to get around?

I've kind of outlined at a very high level how we intend to work with my ministerial colleagues as we, you know, sort through some of these questions. But laying out the overarching framework – that is, the tourism strategy – helping my colleagues understand that as they are tourism adjacent we'll be working with them, and as kind of a window into the tourism sector for industry I'm able to liaise back and forth and better understand what we're missing as a government, as a province for tourism to continue to thrive and for this long-term tourism strategy that we have to develop and grow over time. I often like to say that the tourism strategy is not a rotisserie chicken; it's a brisket. It takes a lot of time to cook just right.

We've gotten this far. We've recovered to prepandemic-level spending two years ahead of schedule, and what I think that's really signalling to the public, to travellers coming here, and to industry is that Alberta is open for business. We're ready to rumble. We have all the things we need. We've just got to create a more, you know, favourable investment environment to develop all those world-class products.

The Chair: Perfect. I appreciate that.

Members, I really appreciate the tone and, Minister, for self-correcting through the chair. You guys didn't lock horns, so it was okay. I would call you back otherwise. Really appreciate it.

Back to the members opposite, whomever wants to go if you catch the chair's eye. There you go. It's over to you.

Ms Hayter: Thank you. This is from the business plan as well, on page 139, Mr. Chair.

The ministry works with Albertans, other governments and non-profit organizations to grow Alberta's amateur sport system and host [sporting] events in Alberta. The ministry also delivers social benefits by promoting safe and welcoming environments for sport, physical activity and recreation, and supporting the development of Alberta's amateur athletes at the provincial, national and international levels.

The Government of Alberta is prioritizing economic growth and diversification, and a fiscally responsible approach to [ensuring] sustainable, high-quality public services are provided to those who need them, when [we] need them. Tourism and Sport's programs support that goal.

My first question is: what is being done to grow Alberta's amateur sports system? What kind of sports are the focus, and what supports are being provided for families to afford them? How are the different sports prioritized, whether it be hockey, basketball, ice-skating? Research shows that engaging in sports as youth leads to living active lifestyles as adults. What is being done to fund development of children in all kinds of sports, not only hockey? What is being done to support parents? You know, they need to find the time and the money to support the development of their children in those sports. As well, what is the status of the community recreation centre infrastructure fund? How many community sporting facilities are in the process of being planned or constructed, and how are they prioritized?

It was recently announced that the UCP government has committed \$11 million to host hockey events in communities throughout the province. I understand that hockey is a fundamental part of Alberta's culture, and it's one where you will see me cheering my own child on at the arena. However, as the critic for status of women, I'm concerned how women are often neglected in sport or face gender-based obstacles. This ranges from lack of funding and accessibility, compared to male sports and athletes, to gender-based violence and sexual assault on women in sports. I've asked this government repeatedly to invest \$10 million in women's shelters, gender-based violence training, and providing resources for women in dangerous situations, yet the money has never been available. I'm wondering if the minister could explain why this government can find \$11 million for sport but not \$10 million to protect the women of the province . . .

8:00

The Chair: Yeah. Just to interject, Member, to help bring you back in line. With that, it's a good question. However, it has to be relevant to the ministry. So the minister would be put in a – and just so you're not surprised in his response, it would be very difficult for the minister to answer to somebody else's budget.

Ms Hayter: Okay. Can I ask if it's the best use of his money?

The Chair: You can keep going, but I'm just giving you a caution, so trying to help you out here.

Ms Hayter: Okay. Additionally, considering that hockey has recently been involved in the cover-up of gender-based violence and sexual assault of up to five of its athletes who have now been arrested and charged with sexual assault in London, Ontario, what amount, if any, is going towards protecting women in sports and supporting women that experience this gender-based violence in athletics?

This government is well aware of the fact that when women are trapped in dangerous situations, whether it's an unsafe home or in a relationship, women can die as a result. Can the minister explain why funding stadiums and athletes seems to be a priority over that

of the safety of women for this government? What steps are being taken to address the culture that sport breeds in regard to violence against women?

Women's access to sport is not equal to that of a man accessing sport. What is the government doing to close the gender gap here and address the gender inequality in sports? What is the government allocating towards funding community sports beyond hockey, and how much will it specifically go to women in sports?

Lastly – you'll be happy about this, Mr. Chair – alpine world cup at Lake Louise. Is that better? Over the past couple of months there have been multiple world cup events that have been particularly financially supported by the Alberta government: the Coop FIS cross-country world cup at the Canmore Nordic Centre, the ISU World Cup Speed Skating at the Calgary Olympic Oval, and the Calgary, Canada, snowboard half-pipe world cup in Calgary. Thousands of Albertans have enjoyed these events, bringing millions to Alberta's economy as well as world recognition for the other support of amateur athletes.

Last June Alpine Canada was requesting government funding to support their long-standing hosting of the alpine world cup at Lake Louise. That event is worth over \$1 million in earned media and generates \$22 million in economic impact for the province of Alberta. They are requesting \$1.3 million annually for the next three years and additional funding to help with the snow-making. The minister of tourism denied this funding request, and the alpine world cup at Lake Louise was cancelled for this year. Given the incredible success of other world cup events, would the minister decide differently now? How is the minister working with Alpine Canada to secure the return of the alpine world cup to Lake Louise?

If I could cede my time to my colleague, I would like to do that.

The Chair: Sure. We'll let that go.

Ms Hayter: Thank you.

The Chair: Absolutely. Thank you.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, MLA Hayter.

I have a few questions sort of building on parts of our previous conversation around tourism. I do really appreciate MLA Hayter's questions on the sport portion of your ministry, and I look forward to those answers, through the chair. I was talking about tourism-based economies, and the minister said that, you know, we may re-evaluate that later; if the tourism strategy is successful, many communities will ask for additional funding, and we may be forced to evaluate that later as communities see success.

I would just like to emphasize that these five specific communities of Jasper, Canmore, Banff, Drumheller, and Sylvan Lake are already experiencing dramatic success as tourism destinations. For example, the town of Banff is 8,000 people and welcomes over 4 million people each year. The town of Canmore is a community of 14,000 people and welcomes 5 million people each year. It is not difficult to see the incredible, disproportional level of visitation to the rural tax base that actually supports waste-water infrastructure, multi-use trails, roads, sidewalks, and anything else you can imagine that rural municipal funding goes towards. So, again, what is the plan to help these legacy destinations, which are identified in the tourism strategy? We need to support legacy destinations to also offer high-quality visitor experiences, and part of that high-quality visitor experience is being able to flush your toilet. Like, it's pretty basic infrastructure needs we're talking about here. I do want to emphasize: what is the plan to support some of these legacy destinations to continue to grow their tourism offer, to continue to grow a high-quality visitor experience without putting the burden of hosting that massive amount of tourism on their rural tax base?

Going back to some tourism businesses, given that 42 per cent of businesses identify labour supply as a significant challenge, what initiatives is the government undertaking to address labour shortages – especially with pausing the AAIP, it has created a lot of uncertainty in the incoming workforce and concerns that the field they apply to could be the next one to be paused randomly – and ensure a sufficient workforce within the tourism industry? I'm interested in hearing specifically about plans to create a career path in the tourism industry, and I'm also interested in some explanation around how the minister will work with other ministries to address the affordable housing crisis.

The Alberta Is Calling campaign is drawing Albertans to the province in record numbers in tourism development zones. Whether those be in rural areas, urban areas, or legacy destinations, many of those people are coming to work in tourism. But it's not very good if they don't have a place to live, if their kids don't have a school to go to, and they can't find a doctor, so how is the minister working with these communities to make sure that overall community supports are in place so that when people do come to work in Alberta, the systems are there to support them?

With 91 per cent of businesses impacted by insurance premium growth in 2023 and many experiencing cash-flow pressures and debt-related impacts, what financial support measures is the government planning to implement to assist struggling tourism businesses? Do they think their measures are enough, and are there any research studies being conducted on the government's strategy's success? In light of the negative impact of higher interest rates and slower economic growth on the tourism industry, what fiscal policies is the government considering to stimulate growth and investment within the sector?

Can you provide details on any specific funding allocations or grants aimed at supporting tourism businesses in managing their debt repayment plans or overcoming financial challenges? This is particularly important for small businesses and entrepreneurs who were hit hard during the pandemic and are still struggling to recover.

What measures is the government taking to monitor and respond to changes in consumer behaviour and market trends within the tourism sector, particularly in light of the shifting economic landscape?

Again, I'll just mention that my questions about climate change were not answered by the minister. Thank you. Oh, or response.

The Chair: When the time is up, the time is up.

Yeah. The minister has 10 minutes to respond.

Mr. Schow: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker – or, rather, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Don't give me a promo.

Mr. Schow: You'd look good in the black robes, Mr. Chair, I'm sure.

I'll start with Member Hayter's questions with regard to sports. We have focused predominantly on tourism, and I would hate for the sporting side of my file to feel like they're getting left out, so we'll jump into that a little bit. I'll start by saying that Alberta as a province has a rich history of hosting major national and international events. It is a prime destination. If you look at the venues we have, somewhere like Rogers Place here in Edmonton, if you've ever been to any kind of a concert or a game of any kind, it's an impressive facility, but what's even more impressive is the underbelly of this facility and their ability to host these kinds of events and turn that facility over overnight, go from a hockey game to monster trucks to a concert in three separate nights, with the way it's developed.

There's a huge amount of credit that goes to the crew over there, but it's just one of the many facilities. I also saw the Member for Banff-Kananaskis at the world cup cross-country skiing event the other day. You know, the Canmore Nordic Centre is another world-class facility that hosts and hosted a fantastic event where we saw not just cross-country skiing fans from around Canada but competitors from around the world who brought their coaches, who brought their families, but what was really interesting was that you also got a chance to see the young fans. They bused in hundreds if not thousands of young cross-country skiers, outdoor enthusiasts to check this out, gave them all cowbells, and they're ringing them as they're coming down the final stretch. It was a really electrifying environment, something I've actually never experienced before. But that facility is a world-class facility. You know, the sport and tourism worlds collide when we're able to host these kinds of events and we're able to support them through the major sporting events grant.

8:10

But you have to start somewhere. I would never want anyone in this province, knowing what advantages a sport can have in someone's life, to have to make the decision: do we buy groceries, or do we put our kids into sports? So we introduced the every kid can play grant, which was a continuation of the return to play grant – that was \$4 million – immediately after COVID, getting kids back to playing sports. What this did is that we partnered with \$8 million with KidSport – sorry, not KidSport. I'm thinking jump-start is the other program. That's with Canadian Tire. But KidSport: they have been able to take registrants through this program. As a result, we've heard numerous success stories of parents saying that without the help of the registration fees being covered, they wouldn't have been able to get their kids into swimming; they wouldn't have been able to get their kids into hockey; they wouldn't have been able to get their kids into basketball.

You know, as someone who got started into sports at a very young age, going to sports camps, learning some tough lessons early on – I was a bit lanky growing up, playing sports, as you can imagine. I grew pretty quickly. I didn't put on a lot of weight. I learned very early that slow feet don't eat, so you've got to up your sports game. You've got to up your strength and conditioning. You learn those lessons very early on at these kinds of camps. You also learn if you want to be really active and aggressive with it and go competitive or you just want to do it recreationally. That's the choice of the athlete and the parents. But as a government we have a unique opportunity to step in and help support these families, and that's what the every kid can play grant does.

It also supports the ability to rent the equipment and for coaching training. This is a fantastic opportunity for kids to learn the sport properly. You know, some sports are done individually, things like track and field, but some sports are team sports, and they're a little more physical. And as you get older and develop into these sports, things like hockey or football or basketball or other events and other focuses of sport, if you don't learn them correctly, if you don't learn them from the proper teachers and those teachers don't have the proper techniques to educate the players, you can get hurt pretty quickly. As a result, this every kid can play grant also supports recreation facility rentals, equipment rentals but also training for coaches and referees and others who want to help. Sometimes, if you look at a small community, the best coach you have is the person who's never maybe played the sport before but they're interested in it and the kids want to play and there's a demand, so it ends up being a parent who gives freely of their time, and it's an opportunity for the kids to learn. I'm really excited about that.

I also want to touch a little bit on the accessibility in sport. The point was made that we're only investing in hockey. That could not be further from the truth. As a government – I have a list here of the provincial sport organizations that we fund, a number of them well over \$100,000. You look at the Alberta Amateur Baseball Council; Alberta Alpine Ski Association; Alberta Basketball Association; Alberta Badminton Association; Alberta Gymnastics Federation; Athletics Alberta, which would be track and field; Skate Canada; Alberta-Northwest Territories/Nunavut Association. You look at something like Alberta Fitness Leadership Certification Association. These are all organizations and so many more that are creating accessible opportunities for all athletes.

You know, it was mentioned earlier the money we put towards Hockey Canada. As the Minister of Tourism and Sport I would not be doing my job if I wasn't seeking out opportunities that would help us bring world-class events like hockey onto Alberta soil. It's a chance, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, for us to watch the game we love played by the best and to learn the game we love from the best. So while I understand the IIHF World Junior Championship in 2027 is kind of the final piece of the puzzle, there are other events that we're hosting there, including two Hlinka Gretzky Cups, which are the best U-18 players in the world. We're also hosting two Canada-U.S. women's Rivalry Series games in December of '25 and January of '26, and we're also hosting the Para Ice Hockey Championship in 2024.

I think the one missing piece that people aren't talking about as much – sorry; it's not a missing piece; it's there, but people aren't talking about it as much – are the four Hockey Canada camps that we're hosting around the province of Alberta. This is about teaching the game to everyone. It's not just boys who are playing hockey. There are also girls playing hockey. We're creating an environment where people can learn this game from the best players in the world, the best coaches in the world. As the Minister of Tourism and Sport, if I had passed on this opportunity, I would feel like I would not be doing a very good job. Anyone, any professional organization that is looking to bring their talents and show and demonstrate the best they have to offer to Alberta and let us host them: I'm all for it. I'm talking to the NBA, and hopefully they're listening.

So far as, you know, these events are concerned, it's not just hockey. We also have put money in towards hosting the Canadian Finals Rodeo, which Edmonton will be hosting this year in November. We have the three years. I see Member Arcand-Paul is cheering on that. It sounds like that member is a big fan of rodeo. Rodeo, Mr. Chair, is for everyone. If you talk to people who plan and execute rodeo, they'll tell you that there are a number of events, probably more events that are catered towards women.

I got a chance to experience those events this summer as I went to the Canadian Finals Rodeo in Red Deer, who put on a fantastic show. Everybody is cheering their loudest for all the athletes and all the competitors, regardless of male or female, and it's one heck of a good time.

The Chair: I appreciate that, Minister.

I believe we're over to the government side at this point, so back to whomever. MLA Yao, I see you first. What are you looking for? Back and forth or block time?

Mr. Yao: I'm wondering if the good minister would be willing to go back and forth on our questions.

The Chair: Minister, over to you.

Mr. Schow: Yeah. Let's give it a shot.

Mr. Yao: Why, thank you so much. I greatly appreciate that. I just want to say, first off, thanks to you and your team, your entire team in the ministry, for all the good, hard work that you guys are doing. You certainly don't get the recognition that, say, our ministers in Education or Health do, but certainly I think we have to recognize the importance that Tourism and Sport plays. To that effect, prior to being an elected official, I can honestly say that I did not understand truly the benefits of investing in these areas, and I greatly appreciate that.

With that, certainly, my first question is just an overall, broad question in understanding your budget. Again, Alberta's government is working to help make Alberta the place to visit, play, and live. We're working with communities and businesses to showcase the beauty of our great province that we call Alberta in order to create lasting memories and to propel our tourism and sports industries to new heights.

My question to you, sir. On page 96 of the fiscal plan, Tourism and Sport's operating expense for 2024-25 is \$126 million, which is an increase of \$14 million. I'm hoping that you would be able to explain how this funding ensures continued success in the tourism and sport sector and understanding how this money gets focused. If you could expand on that, that would be fantastic.

Mr. Schow: Absolutely. Through the chair to the member, thank you for that question. Travel Alberta will receive \$8 million of this additional funding in addition to the money they already had, and that will be primarily focused on expansion of air access and the development of all-season resorts.

Alberta's government and the Minister of Tourism and Sport are working towards what is a bold and an ambitious goal of growing Alberta's visitor economy from \$10 billion a year to \$25 billion annually by 2035. That is going to be done through the five key pillars of the tourism strategy. I've already touched on a handful of these, but they're worth repeating. It's leadership and alignment, competitive product, people and careers, expansion of access, and Indigenous tourism. Alberta's government is working towards this bold and ambitious goal of growing Alberta's visitor economy to 2035 through these five pillars. I'm happy to expand on it if you like.

I think it's important to note that this is a market-driven, industry-consulted plan. This is not something that, you know, has come up overnight. This is something that's been done through years of public consultation, industry consultation, and round-tables.

8:20

Though I am the minister who got the chance to punch this over the goal line, there are several ministers and members of the government caucus who helped us get to this point, including Minister Fir, Minister Loewen, Minister Schweitzer, and MLA Martin Long. So I do want to give them the credit that's due. They helped to get it down the field, and I was able to get into the end zone. So grateful to them.

I suspect you probably have more questions, so I'll turn the time back over to you, through the chair.

Mr. Yao: Well, thank you so much.

I suppose I am kind of curious what you mean by "air access." If you could expand more on that. But I guess, to expand on the overall question there, what tourism-related initiatives are supported under Tourism and Sport? If you can help me understand that, I'd greatly appreciate that.

Mr. Schow: Sure. I'll start with the air access piece. As I mentioned earlier, Alberta's pipeline has wings. Like, the rubber traffic: we just don't see it like you would in a place like Vancouver, that has

major cities just south of the border. Our major city south of the border, you know, is Babb. That's the major city in Montana just south of Cardston, where I live; the beautiful city, the beautiful county of Cardston, God's country, if I dare say, and I'm sure that that's a matter of debate with the chair as well.

But to your point, the air access piece is crucial. It's absolutely vital to us. If we want to increase, as my deputy minister mentioned, not just the number but more so the value of the traveller and the money that they're spending, we have to be able to bring those travellers in with as little friction as possible. And by friction I mean layovers. Anybody – and I mean anybody – who's been on an airplane, which I suspect is most people if not all people in this room, knows that when you're trying to book a plane somewhere, you're trying to travel somewhere, you're looking for that direct flight. You don't want to spend five hours laid over in O'Hare airport in Chicago or LaGuardia or somewhere else; you like to get there as fast as possible because you want to begin enjoying your travels. So making sure that we're having direct flights coming from these international destinations is crucial.

Recently we've expanded out of the Edmonton International Airport, direct flights into Nashville, San Francisco, and Atlanta. Coming out of Calgary, we have flights now going to the U.K., France, Germany, Tokyo, Korea, Italy, and always looking to expand more routes. It's one of these things where, without those direct travel routes, these high-spending travellers look elsewhere. They're looking for opportunities with as few barriers getting there as possible. The air travel piece is crucial for us, and that is a large portion of the budget. We are investing \$10 million a year in the air travel piece. That will help us to attract and retain those international travellers.

But your question, I believe – I just took some notes here. I have some notes: tourism-related initiatives, support under Tourism and Sport. With Alberta being the dynamic province that it is, with the locales and diverse cultures and welcoming experiences, the '24-27 business plan has two outcomes. The first is that tourism is a key driver of Alberta's diversified economic prosperity. Second is that Albertans and visitors enjoy sport and recreational opportunities in a safe and welcoming environment that promotes health, well-being, sport excellence, and an active lifestyle.

Today I'm looking forward to unpacking some of the successes that have led to the new business plan and where we're heading next year and the years beyond. But, you know, even to throw back to Member Hayter's question with regard to the long-term outcomes of sport and recreation, for example, I'm a strong believer that healthy kids who learn healthy habits become healthy teenagers and become healthy adults. That creates less stress on our health care system. It also creates an environment of improved mental health. We all have those times where we're low, and I know that physical activity is definitely one of those ways to get out, be active, enjoy the outdoors or the indoors, but just associate, be part of that community that is the athletic community. We want to get youth and all Albertans, for that matter, involved in those communities.

I'll end there and see what other questions the member might have.

Mr. Yao: Thank you so much for that, Minister.

I'm exceptionally hopeful for your discussions on air access with our larger airlines, because from the business travel perspective, by using Calgary for their hub and spokes model, it's impacted negatively the flights that do come into Edmonton and through the north and ultimately would affect tourism, so I'm really hopeful that you'll have some good conversations there.

In 2024-2025 almost \$80 million is being allocated to support Travel Alberta to foster tourism growth and diversification and to

attract visitors from around the world. I'm especially encouraged from this, especially when you see the advertising campaigns that you've done previously. I have to admit, if you could relate to your ministry officials, I am disappointed by the fact that they emphasize, for example, the Member for Banff-Kananaskis or the Member for West Yellowhead's ridings with those picturesque mountains whereas they don't seem to advertise too much the nation's largest national park; that is, Wood Buffalo national park in the north. I do respect the fact that we don't really have any roads that go up to that area currently, and we do have large mosquitoes which discourage people in the prime travelling times, but I certainly hope that you'll consider using some of that money to advertise right across Alberta.

I guess that is my question to you, sir. This almost \$80 million: how will that be used to grow the tourism industry in Alberta, and what work is being done through that money to specifically attract international visitors? As an example, up in the Fort McMurray region we used to actually have a lot of Japanese tourists that used to come up and see the northern lights. My own mother, who was of Japanese descent, origin: she would translate for them so that they could truly understand all the benefits of our region, community. Again, I guess my question to you, sir, is that approximately \$80 million is being allocated towards Travel Alberta to foster tourism, but if you can explain: how is it being used to grow our tourism here in Alberta, and how is it done to specifically attract international visitors?

The Chair: Actually, I'll just jump in there for one quick second, Member. There is a chair at the front of the room. At least cast me a glance once in a while if you wouldn't mind doing that.

Minister, back to you.

Mr. Schow: Sure thing. Thank you, and thank you to the member for the question. I have been up to Fort McMurray; it's a beautiful area.

Mr. Yao: God's country even, right?

Mr. Schow: That's a matter of debate, Member, through the chair.

But, you know, I look around the table; we have some members here who have some really picturesque constituencies. I'm sure we can have that conversation during the break as to who has the most beautiful one, but there are some strong cases to be made for the Member for Banff-Kananaskis, I would argue. Not that I'm conceding that point, but I am suggesting I've been there and it's pretty dang beautiful. But, to that point, certainly, we do advertising and shoot videos there. Travel Alberta is getting just under \$80 million this year. The process is that they get the money from us, they create a business plan, and then as the minister I sign off on that business plan.

What I will probably do, to get a bit of a deeper dive into how that's done, is I'll turn it over to Mr. Goldstein, and he can elaborate as he sees fit on how, you know, TDZs are chosen and how the money is spent, advertising is chosen, and what kind of work they've done.

Mr. Goldstein: Thank you, Mr. Chair, through you to the member. Let me try and do this as succinctly as I can. There's about an \$80 million budget. It's basically broken up into three areas. First of all, we have a regulator that no more than 10 per cent of our budget gets spent on overhead or back office so that 90 per cent of the revenue from our appropriation is going into programming.

The first 40 per cent is the marketing program. I'm sorry you haven't seen your region. It's not that it's not represented. It's just not aimed at you, so it would be hard to see that, but we do a lot of

work with organizations like Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo and their economic development group to make sure that there is reflection around the province. Over the last three years we've actually gone from one to three local representatives or regional representatives in the north. The north is actually a very important priority of ours. I was just in Fort Mac myself. The minister and I were just in Grande Prairie. This is an important part of our development cycle.

The second piece of the pie, if you will, is \$10 million, as the minister mentioned, to air access. That first piece, the first \$10 million, was meant to increase air access to Alberta, so U.S. and international flights, working with air carriers and airports. Next there's a million dollars of the new spending in the new budget that is meant for intraprovincial travel, so trying to stimulate those flights to those secondary markets, including your community. That's an important piece, and again we're looking at a 6 to 1 ratio of being able to invest a dollar for every \$6 that is brought in by those visitors.

8:30

The last piece is the economic development piece, which are the TDZs, which other members have mentioned, Mr. Chair. Let me start with that pre-COVID 70 per cent of the tourism revenues in this province were in five locations: Calgary, Edmonton, Banff, Lake Louise, Canmore, and Jasper. While they continue to be important, or, as we like to say, jewels of the crown, you need a crown around the jewels as well. We needed a disbursement strategy to move some of those visitor dollars to other parts of the province, both Albertans who are travelling around Alberta and for those other Canadians and international travellers.

We set up the 10 TDZs, the tourism development zones, which Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo is part of, to find opportunities to invest in specific areas that we believe will stimulate international travel, will create itineraries that will drive international travellers. I've gone as far up as Andrew Lake Lodge and Fort Chipewyan, looking at hunting and fishing product up there to look to see if we can help invest in that. For each of those regions, we have a Travel Alberta designated regional director to go in and work with those communities, work with local municipalities to develop those tourism master plans for each of those parts of the province. So the last bit, I guess, of the \$40 million, that last piece, is directed in those areas and specifically into the investment in small businesses creating those itineraries.

Within that, there is \$2 million a year that goes directly to Indigenous Tourism Alberta for them to work with their Indigenous operators, and there's another \$1.5 million roughly per year that goes directly to Indigenous entrepreneurs who are creating product in the space. Those projects are co-adjudicated with Indigenous Tourism Alberta, so those projects, effectively all of our Indigenous tourism pieces, are co-led or led by the actual Indigenous tourism communities.

I hope that answers the member's question.

Mr. Yao: Thank you so much for that.

Through the chair to the ministry, I would actually like you to expand on some of that. I guess my first question as a follow-up is: can you explain some of the previous work from Travel Alberta that you can point to in recent years that benefited our tourism sector and the number of visitors? Again, if you could relay that in a way that my constituents can understand so that they understand that these are worthwhile investments.

Then on page 96 of the fiscal plan you mentioned that Travel Alberta corporation was receiving \$8 million of the increase for the implementation of a 10-year tourism strategy. I feel like I'm asking

this because it does expand on a little bit of what you're saying there. Can you outline the main goals of the 10-year tourism strategy? And how will this \$8 million increase help with the implementation of the tourism strategy, that you discussed there briefly, please?

Mr. Schow: Sure. I'm definitely happy to talk about the successes that we've seen through Travel Alberta. I mean, the initial success is one that I've already mentioned a couple of times, which is where we currently stand as a province in our recovery from COVID-19. We are two years ahead of schedule. Prepandemic numbers had us at about \$10.1 billion. We're now at \$10.7 billion as of 2022, so two years ahead of schedule is a huge win for the province.

We would not have been able to do that without investing in product, without driving demand within Alberta through products. I'll talk to you a little bit about some of the products that we have invested in. The first one that I would say would be Métis Crossing. This is a unique Métis cultural experience and centre just out by Smoky Lake. It's also a boutique hotel with overnight viewing domes where the domes actually have a glass or plastic ceiling. If you were lucky enough to spend the night there and see the northern lights, the aurora borealis, it is really something to truly behold.

This is a perfect example of the kind of product that Travel Alberta has invested in, seeing the value both from the Indigenous tourism side but also from the boutique hotel and the cultural experience side. We spent a couple of days there and got a chance to really understand all that they do there, immerse myself, as someone who didn't understand the Métis culture as well as I do now, you know, and really appreciate all that. There's also a very unique portion of it, which is the interaction with wildlife. There is a bison ranch there that is expanding, and you get a chance to drive around and get very close to the animals and better understand the lifestyle there in their bison ranching lifestyle.

We also look at how resorts have played a huge part in our recovery for tourism, understanding that Albertans want to get outside. They want to get outside, and they want to experience the mountains. We have some fantastic resorts in the province. We were able to get up to Jasper earlier last year, and I had a chance to re-experience that community and all it has to offer. I highly recommend people get out to Evil Dave's restaurant and try the meat loaf. It's really something to behold. There are so many restaurants and hotels there. It's a picturesque area. It's easy to understand why it's one of the crowning jewels.

But, as Mr. Goldstein had alluded to – and I thought it was a great line, by the way – the crowning jewels have to have a crown. So to build that crown, we are expanding products around the province, understanding places like Fort McMurray, which I had been to and visited you, through the chair to Mr. Yao. I've been there to visit him up in that area and really experience the hospitality that Fort McMurray has to offer. It's an incredible place, and I encourage Albertans to go check it out. Once you've seen that, come on all the way down south. We'll always roll out the red carpet for you down where I live in the sunny south, as we call it. If the timing is right, come check out some basketball.

My time is expiring, as I can see.

The Chair: That concludes our block time.

As agreed to at the start of the meeting, we have five minutes, so make sure you use your time appropriately.

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

The Chair: Welcome back, members and those that are joining us online through the live broadcast. I'd ask members to take their seats, please. We're reconvening.

We'll turn it over to the opposition, and we've got up to 10 minutes for these blocks in these segments.

Member Arcand-Paul: I've got the floor.

The Chair: Member Brooks Arcand-Paul. Again you get the question, "Do you want block or combined?" and then it's up to the minister how you're going to do this.

Member Arcand-Paul: I'll ask the minister through you, Mr. Chair, if that is something that he is open to, to do it combined, or if he would prefer block.

The Chair: Okay. Over to you, Minister.

Mr. Schow: I'll probably stick with block time.

The Chair: Okay.

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have been meeting with Indigenous leadership in this province in my capacity as critic for Indigenous Relations and reconciliation, and they're very clear that this government has been failing their legal duty to consult on matters related to land and industrial development. Tourism is no different. In fact, in parts of northern Alberta Indigenous communities are seeing, which the minister has admitted exactly, this government's policy to expand tourism in rural Alberta, the development of recreational facilities, and increased recreationists accessing previously pristine traditional territories that were being used since time immemorial to exercise the Treaty 8 rights of hunting, fishing, and trapping. It is incredibly concerning that this government has even greenlit projects prior to completing their legal duty to consult, thereby causing legal uncertainty for the tourism industry and projects that could be subject to similar incidents like that at Oka in Quebec during the Kanesatake resistance or the Shaughnessy golf course on Musqueam traditional territories in the province of British Columbia.

Mr. Chair, it's also really concerning that the funds to assist nations to consult have been stagnated at \$7 million year over year when this government continues to push industries such as tourism and recreation that will impact Indigenous nations' avocations of hunting, fishing, and trapping as they will continue to be decimated in northern Alberta. My question to the minister: why is the aboriginal consultation office, understanding that it's not under his purview, not discharging its responsibility specifically in those areas of tourism and recreation, and why are First Nations left in the dark when it comes to developments on their land when this government cries foul over the federal government trampling over their so-called sovereignty when actual sovereign nations are not notified about the expansion of the tourism industry in this province?

I also would like to talk about the subject, given the widespread opposition from various stakeholders, of the proposed policy changes blocking trans athletes from competing against women and girls. How does the government plan to address the concerns raised by Albertans, human rights groups, and sports scholars regarding the exclusionary nature of these policies? Where in the budget can we find that, especially if Alberta is – as the minister put it earlier, the sky is the limit. Part of the ministry business plan . . .

The Chair: Member, I'm giving a ton of latitude. If you could . . .

Member Arcand-Paul: Yeah. I'm going to page 141.

The Chair: Awesome. There we go. Perfect. Bring it on back.

Member Arcand-Paul: Sorry. Bringing it back. I know you want the sources.

Part of the ministry business plan talks about encouraging “safe and welcoming sport in Alberta, including reduction of harassment, abuse and discrimination.” That’s on page 141. Can you say how the new policy against trans women in sport plays a role in creating a safe and welcoming sport environment in Alberta? The proposed policies: as on the table they’re harmful and critical.

What evidence-based approach is the government taking to ensure that its sports policies are grounded in facts and do not create additional barriers for marginalized groups, including athletes from the 2SLGBTQI-plus communities? How does the government plan to address the findings of the Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport, which concluded that trans women who have undergone testosterone suppression do not have clear biological advantages over cisgender women in elite sport, and ensure that policy decisions are based on evidence rather than stereotypes? Again, this is page 141 of the ministry business plan.

Considering the lack of tracking of trans athletes in Alberta and the potential impact of these policies on youth participation in sports, what steps is the government taking to gather relevant data and consult with affected communities before implementing such significant changes, including creating specific leagues for trans athletes? Can the government provide transparency regarding the timeline and process for the implementation and enforcement of these proposed sports policies, including how they will engage with sports organizations and affected communities in this process? Where in the budget is the funding for this? Will it be funded? If not, how will this proceed?

Will the government be supporting the development of a new trans sporting league? Are you suggesting there will be male, female, and trans women sports leagues or trans men sport leagues? For which sports? How many teams will be created and funded in the latter? We’ve already heard issues with funding for women in sports. We can only assume that this is going to not be funded adequately for trans folks in sports.

I want to know what measures the government is considering to promote a fun, safe, and accessible sports system in Alberta for athletes of all gender identities. What metrics are the successes of those endeavours being evaluated by? Is it done by peer-and-peer assessment? Is it done on a government-wide assessment, or are we going to be left without any kind of assessment?

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Perfect.

Over to you, Minister.

Mr. Schow: All right. Certainly, a lot of very important questions there, so I’ll try to answer as many as I can. We’ll start with Indigenous tourism. You talked a little bit about that. I would say that a number of the questions you asked probably – no; not probably – most certainly don’t fall within the Tourism and Sport file. What I can say is that I’m very proud, I’m extremely proud of the record our government has with Indigenous tourism, funding it more than any other province in the country. I need to repeat that: more than any other province in Canada. Alberta is a leader in funding Indigenous tourism.

ITA, or Indigenous Tourism Alberta: CEO Shae Bird has done a tremendous job working with Indigenous tourism operators around Alberta, helping them develop their product. I often say that I see Shae everywhere because I’m everywhere and so is he, and that’s just an indicator of how hard he’s working. I do want to give a shout-out to Shae Bird and the products he’s helping to develop.

Some of the interesting products that I’m seeing are actually teaching a lot about the Indigenous culture. I’ll talk a little bit about one in particular, if you’ll allow me to, which was the – let’s see here. It was Painted Warriors ranch, which is just outside of Sundre. Painted Warriors ranch is a very interesting experience where you get to go out and learn first-hand hunting and trapping skills from an Indigenous tourism owner-operator and his wife. They’re also both international archery champions. As you go out there, there are glamping tents, you get to try Indigenous food, and then they teach you how to shoot a bow and arrow. Then once you’ve learned that skill, they’ll take you through about a 90-acre course. It’s kind of like bow-and-arrow golf, where as you walk through the course, there are offshoots throughout the entire course and there are animals at varying distances, everything from gophers to foxes and deer. They teach you how to measure the distance just by eye and how to manage your shot appropriately.

8:50

These immersive regenerative tourism experiences are the exact kinds of products that international travellers are looking to get, Canadian travellers, and Alberta travellers. It’s also, I believe, reconciliation in action. As a province we’re funding these products because we understand that it’s an opportunity for us to partner with authentic Indigenous tourism operators, who have a great story to tell about their culture. So I’m very proud of that, and that’s just one example of the hunting and the fishing and the trapping that Member Arcand-Paul had talked about.

With regard to safe sport in Alberta, the Premier recently announced that the government will work with sporting organizations in the province to ensure that biologically born female athletes are able to compete in a biological female only division without having to compete against transgender female athletes. We’re going to take a balanced approach that considers fairness, safety, and inclusion. I want to repeat that: fairness, safety, and inclusion. All of them are crucial and central to this plan, recognizing, as someone who spent his entire life playing sports and understanding the benefits, that under no circumstances should anyone be excluded from playing the sport that they love, full stop.

With that said, we also must make sure that anyone playing sports is doing so in a safe and a fair manner – and I addressed this earlier on in my remarks – when it comes to things like coaching and coaching training and creating an inclusive environment but also creating one that is safe for the athletes and that is fair for the athletes.

There are organizations in Alberta. We have, you know, just under 100 provincial sport organizations. About a third of them already have policies in place for transgender athletes. There are other organizations much higher up like the IOC, the International Olympic Committee, the NCAA. Also, our relationship with each provincial sport organization is different, so the process that we’re looking towards now is consulting with provincial sport organizations towards the implementation of this policy that balances the three criteria that I already mentioned, which is fairness, safety, and inclusion in sport. I believe we will come to that understanding and come to that policy in a way that supports athletes in Alberta.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Over to the government caucus. MLA Wright.

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Chair and through you to the minister.

The Chair: Just to ask: are you wanting to share time or block time?

Mr. Wright: Oh. Yeah. If we go back and forth, that would be splendid.

Mr. Schow: Sure. That would be splendid.

Mr. Wright: Perfect. Thank you for that, Chair and through you to the minister. I think everybody on this committee could really agree that southeast Alberta truly is the powerhouse of rodeos for the province. Now, when I take a look at some of the histories on rodeo, the Calgary Exhibition had their first exhibition in 1886, and I have to say that Medicine Hat: we were one year short, in 1887. So there's a long-standing history of agricultural sport going on here in the southeast.

We deliver one of the best rodeos in western Canada, with tourists and contestants from all over the U.S., Australia as well as South Africa. This event draws visitors from all over North America to come watch, whether it be the chuckwagons or the rodeo. When they're there, they're seeing rodeo spirit really alive in Alberta. In fact, if we were to go out during those time periods and ask them to use one word to describe the culture or rodeo in this event, chances are it's going to be a yee-haw or western or something along those lines as a word to describe the events that are going on when they think of Alberta. It shows a deep culture and roots within not just sport and tourism but also into our many other different industries like agriculture.

Unfortunately, these days the Justin Trudeau bandwagon with all of his buddies never leaves too much Ottawa, so they tend to forget that rodeo is intrinsically twined to Alberta and Canada's culture. One thing they've never forgotten to do, though, is that they never forget an opportunity to dress up and play a different culture, as we see with the Calgary Stampede every year.

I know previously you shared that the government is investing \$4.5 million to support the delivery of the Canadian Finals Rodeo, which will return to Edmonton this October. Can you please highlight what elements this support is bundled into on page 219 of the government estimates documents?

Mr. Schow: Well, thank you, Member, for that question. I would definitely agree that the Prime Minister never misses an opportunity to dress up and play, whether it's being at a rodeo or dressing up in blackface, but there's certainly never a missed opportunity there. But what I would say is that when it comes to rodeo in Alberta, we have a rich history, and if you want to do the tour through all the rodeos in Alberta, you're going to have one heck of a time. And you're right: there'll be a yee-haw or yahoo, and you get a chance to throw on a cowboy hat and really experience something that is deeply rooted in Alberta's culture, in the fabric of the province.

That's why we saw the need to support an Alberta bid for the 2024, 2025, and 2026 Canadian Finals Rodeo, and we're grateful that that rodeo is staying here in Alberta. That's why we committed \$4.5 million to support this. Funding the Canadian Finals Rodeo: you can see that under 3.4. This is support for sport, physical activity, and recreation. There's \$1.5 million included in the 2024-2025 fiscal year.

But every town – I shouldn't say every town, but most towns dotted through rural Alberta have a rodeo, and if you get a chance to go out there, you'll see some unique events that might be specific to those areas. One in particular, if I can share a small anecdote, was last year and the year before, the businessman cow ride. They have business leaders from the community get a chance to jump on a cow and try to raise money for the local agriculture society through scholarships. This is a great way that we've seen rodeos generate support for the local community while putting on a really good time.

So I'm grateful for the question about rodeo and also grateful that we've had a chance to support the CFR staying here in Alberta. And I can't wait to come out to the Medicine Hat rodeo.

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Minister, through the chair.

Something that I've really been blessed with over the last five years is that I've been able to coach nine different hockey teams. It's been really remarkable, even since being elected, to spend the time on the ice developing, mentoring, and growing the next generation of leaders. I appreciate that this ministry has invested in the every kid can play program, but I do have some questions specifically pertaining to how this will really impact and get the mileage needed. How many children and youth are expected to receive direct funding support through the every kid can play program?

Mr. Schow: Thank you to the member through the chair. The every kid can play program is anticipated to provide financial support to more than 8,500 children and youth to subsidize sport and recreation program registration costs, support for over 50 child- and youth-focused community-level programs throughout Alberta. What that's saying is that there are 8,500 or more children in this province whose parents are not being forced to make the tough decision between whether or not they get to play sports or they get to put food on the table.

There are cost pressures across this entire province, and I understand that. I'm also grateful to live in the province that is the lowest tax jurisdiction, with no PST, and is welcoming new Albertans every year by the thousands and thousands. But when they come here, there is more to Alberta than just, you know, the opportunity to work. We need a place where our kids can play, making sure that when people arrive here, whether they're new Canadians or just new Albertans, we're helping them overcome some of the barriers for recreation and sport. The every kid can play grant does exactly that.

9:00

I've heard so many success stories of kids who are telling me and telling our government that as a result of this grant they're being given a chance to actually get out and be active. It's not just being active. Think of the communities that are built through sport. I can't tell you how many teams I've played on and contacts and friends that I have still to this day. One of the people that I played basketball with professionally, I stay in contact with to this day. I went to his wedding. I consider him, you know, one of my closest friends if not a brother. These are the kinds of relationships that you can foster. They start at a young age, and you get to share stories. I'm getting a bit personal here, but I feel so strongly about this every kid can play grant. It is changing lives.

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Minister. You know, I've been fortunate enough to host you down in Medicine Hat. It was great to go for breakfast there. We were able to talk about some of the great initiatives and avenues for tourism and sports in the southeast.

Now, obviously, there are factors such as infrastructure, travel accessibility that really make Edmonton and Calgary the primary centres for large sporting events. Additionally, these large events tend to bring an economic impact of tourism specifically in those areas. So, I guess, my question would be: given, you know, great initiatives such as our regional fairs and festivals in rural Alberta, if a more modest-sized arena or venue is capable of hosting international events – for example, maybe the Servus Arena in Red Deer or I'm going to shamelessly plug Co-op Place in Medicine Hat – will municipalities outside of Calgary and Edmonton be given the

same consideration for these types of events such as the large centres would be?

Mr. Schow: Yeah, absolutely. I think it's important. In fact, it's imperative that we spread the wealth around. If I go back to the hockey grant that we just gave to Hockey Canada, those events are going to be scattered throughout the entire province.

I've got to give a huge shout-out, if I may through the chair, to Tourism Medicine Hat, who do a fantastic job of drawing these, you know, multisport events. Tourism Medicine Hat, the principal funder for them is Travel Alberta. They do a great job with the resources that they're allocated, and they also do a great job once hosting these events. It's that kind of hosting that draws people back.

When I find out about someone who's looking at hosting a Scotties Tournament of Hearts or, you know, a hockey event or a basketball event, I can say that I have more venues than just Calgary and Edmonton. I can say that I have Lethbridge, I have Medicine Hat, I have Red Deer, I have Fort McMurray, I have Grande Prairie. I mean, we were just at the Alberta Winter Games kickoff in Grande Prairie not long ago, where I think we had 2,500 athletes shoulder to shoulder on the ice rink and another 2,500 fans in the stands, parents, coaches, and the environment was electric. You know, Alberta does it great province-wide.

The Chair: We're back to the opposition side, 10-minute block times. I should have mentioned earlier, too, no more than five minutes per speaker.

Again, I would put it back to whichever member wants to go and then the question back to the minister if you want block or shared.

Dr. Elmeligi: I'm not going to ask. I would rather stick with block time, actually.

The Chair: Okay.

Dr. Elmeligi: Okay. I want to revisit some of the key themes of my line of questioning which I still feel have not been fully answered. To back up a little bit, I think we all probably recognize in this room that a big portion of the tourism and sport industry and sector in Alberta is generated based on outdoor recreation, outdoor sport. We've talked a lot tonight about skiing, like the skiing world cup, but also outdoor recreation is a big part of what we do. We have a beautiful province with amazing landscapes that all kinds of people like to enjoy. Because we are so reliant on outdoor spaces in this sector, a healthy environment means that we have a healthy tourism and recreation economic sector. We have not yet talked about why climate change or environmental sustainability is not reflected in the Alberta tourism strategy. I would really appreciate some responses in that regard.

Last year 25,900 people were evacuated from the Northwest Territories. A lot of them landed in Alberta due to a wildfire up there or a series of wildfires. Also last year 38,000 Albertans were evacuated from 48 different Alberta communities because of wildfire. While a lot of these people may have the opportunity to stay with friends or family or end up in a shelter, a lot of them don't, and those who don't end up staying in hotels. That stay is an example of a pressure, an unexpected pressure that is placed on the hospitality sector associated directly with climate change impacts and wildfires. There is no plan in the strategy to support the hospitality sector in dealing with some of these large-scale weather events that impact tourism.

There's also no mention in the strategy of the tourism sector being involved in emergency planning or emergency response around some of these extreme weather events. It would seem to me that tourism stakeholders should be party to that conversation given

the dramatic impact that they may experience with this. And I'm not only talking about wildfire; it could be associated with floods or drought or, I don't know, pick your extreme weather event. We seem to be having a lot of them, and it directly impacts the tourism sector. Will the tourism sector be supported? Will they be part of the conversation around emergency planning with municipalities, and will they be supported to unexpectedly have to host millions or thousands of people at least who have been displaced from their homes?

I also want to take a moment to revisit some of what my colleague MLA Arcand-Paul – I forgot your riding. My apologies. My colleague MLA Arcand-Paul was specifically speaking about Indigenous consultation, not Indigenous tourism. The tourism strategy does have a really great pillar around growing Indigenous tourism, Mr. Chair, but, through you to the minister, we're specifically interested in how Indigenous nations are involved in consultation on tourism developments on their land, on their traditional territories.

The minister has mentioned several times development of all-season resorts. How will First Nations be involved in understanding the potential impacts of all-season resort development on their traditional lands? How will they be consulted? Where is the money for site visits, for gathering the wisdom of elders, and where is the direction to ensure that the wisdom of elders and traditional knowledge is woven with western science to make sure that the development of all-season resorts does not compromise ecological integrity of some of our most beautiful landscapes and also the cultural integrity and the intergenerational connection that our First Nations people have with the land?

The minister has spoken tonight several times about different experiences that he's had around the province, and I think that this is one thing on which we can 1,000 per cent agree. Every square inch of Alberta is incredible and has a lot to offer. I will tell you right now that one of the most magical experiences of my life is sitting in a teepee with elders talking about their connection to the land and learning from them. When you have that conversation with elders in a teepee, you understand the importance of Indigenous consultation in a completely new light. It is not about the footprint of the development; it is about how that development might impact a connection to a landscape that has been going on since time immemorial. I'd appreciate some answers to those questions as well. Climate change and Indigenous consultation, please.

The Chair: To the wire.

Over to you, Minister.

Mr. Schow: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair, through you to the member for the questions. Yeah. I have shared a lot of stories tonight about my experiences as I've travelled the province and exploring the tourism sector in this province because that's what the minister of tourism is supposed to do: they're supposed to get out and better understand the products that we have here in Alberta and better understand how to develop them. That includes working with First Nations and Indigenous Tourism Alberta.

You know, I can understand the member's comments on that, but I think it's important that as we go through these estimates this evening people understand how important it is to actually get out and consult stakeholders. It's my job. I would argue that probably for every day that I've spent at home these last nine months, I've spent four days on the road. I once heard from a constituent: we haven't seen you in a little bit, Schow. I said: my wife said the same thing. I'm not going to apologize for being out there and also for explaining the experiences that we've had.

9:10

I also do want to give a huge thank you to the first responders and the hotels and everyone who jumped into action during forest fire season last year. It was certainly a very difficult time and a devastating time for so many Albertans, and Albertans opened up their arms to residents across the province and the people from outside of the province. I remember being in Calgary and seeing residents from the Northwest Territories who were displaced, and it was heartbreaking. It was absolutely heartbreaking to see. But I was also heartened to know that as a province we're prepared to welcome those people from other provinces and other jurisdictions around the province.

That's why as a ministry we are engaged in multi-department conversations about emergency preparedness as we prepare to go into spring here. We have not seen a lot of snow this year. There is no debating that. I'm hoping we have a very wet spring, but, you know, if in the event that that's not the case, I recognize that we need to be prepared for that, and we are working on that.

As far as a healthy tourism sector is concerned, I have heard from a number of stakeholders who have talked about tourism our way, and I think that it's an important point to make, tourism our way, and that it's done differently through different parts of the province, embracing different parts of tourism, embracing different ways of doing it, but recognizing that it's about sharing stories.

Alberta's government is committed to protecting people, nature, and fish and wildlife while growing the province's visitor economy, and tourism is an important part of Alberta's diversified economy. It is economic diversification, and we are committed to its growth and protecting the environment. In 2022 visitors contributed, as I've said, \$10.7 billion to Alberta's economy and the industry supported 80,000 full-time equivalent jobs. In short, sustainability and economic development are not mutually exclusive, Mr. Chair.

Alberta's government, led by the Ministry of Forestry and Parks, is investing more than \$211.3 million over three years in campgrounds and trails to support high-quality, low-cost recreation opportunities while also doing it in an environmentally responsible way.

A number of the questions that I was asked, you know, certainly fall outside of the Ministry of Tourism and Sport, but what I can say is that we are engaged in conversations with other ministers and their departments as we prepare to go into what will be forest fire season.

Lastly, what I will say with regard to Indigenous consultation, as the MLA for Cardston-Siksika I represent the two largest land mass reserves in the country, so I don't think it's necessarily fair to lecture me on Indigenous consultation and understanding the people that I represent. Now, there are traditional lands across this province where we are looking at developing tourism products, and it's important that we do the proper consultation and also do it responsibly and in an environmental way while also telling the private sector and investment that Alberta is open for business.

We cannot under any circumstances reach our goal of \$25 billion visitor spending by 2035 without the resort development piece. It is crucial to us, making sure that we do the proper consultation and do the proper development but expanding our resort offering so high-spending travellers outside of Alberta, outside of Canada, want to come here multiple times to bring their families, stay longer, spend more, and enjoy more of Alberta.

The Chair: We're back to the government side for block. MLA Stephan. Again, your choice of back and forth with the minister, no more than five, and no ceding time.

Mr. Stephan: Yeah. It would be super duper, Chair, if we're able to go back and forth.

Mr. Schow: Sure.

Mr. Stephan: Thank you.

The Chair: "Super duper" is the word of the night. Thank you for that.

Mr. Stephan: It is. We're in the third period here, so that is very good.

Minister, I really appreciate you talking about the wonderful tourism opportunities throughout Alberta. As you were talking, I know last summer we had the opportunity to host the Premier in Red Deer, and when we talk about developing our competitive advantages, one of the neat things, actually, that isn't that well known about Red Deer is that just outside Red Deer there's a ski hill. It's called Canyon ski hill. It's actually the largest nonalpine ski hill in western Canada.

Recently Canyon has expanded. Not only is it the largest nonalpine ski hill, but they have added a summer coaster. The Premier had the opportunity to go down that coaster, and it's pretty fast. It's always a challenge to try and go down that coaster without pulling the brake because it gets going pretty good there. They also have a summer tube ride, and they are looking at putting in a zip line.

I was talking to the owners, actually, just last week. It's interesting because, of course, they've been a ski hill traditionally for decades, and out of COVID they were looking at: how do we diversify our income? During the summer, of course, there's no snow, not normally, anyways. They put that in, and it has exceeded their expectations. I know that that's a wonderful thing that I think our government supports, you know, the development of these competitive advantages throughout the province in terms of tourism opportunities.

One of the things I want to talk about, though, getting back to the business plan specifically, is that, as you mentioned, Minister, I mean, you can hike into Alberta, you can bike into Alberta, you can run into Alberta. If you're at Waterton Lake in the U.S., Glacier national park, you can swim into Alberta. Now, that'd be very cold, Minister. It'd be very cold. If you've ever been in Waterton Lake, it's a very cold lake. I know you've been there, Minister. It is very cold. I've been in Waterton Lake, too, and I can attest it is very cold.

Probably one of the things you are focusing on is air access into Alberta. We have WestJet. We're so blessed to have WestJet, which is really based in western Canada and in Alberta. We have talked about the outcome in the business plan, outcome 1, actually, on page 140, to grow the tourism industry in Alberta, and I'm just wondering: how does Budget 2024 support air access expansion?

Mr. Schow: Well, thank you very much. I would definitely agree. Waterton Lake is cold. It is very cold. I have been in there. I've swam in Waterton Lake, and it's something. I'll tell you what, that's for sure.

I have to say that Red Deer really is a poster child for this four-season resort development that we've talked about. You touched on a couple of things: the summer coaster, possibly a zip line, and some other potential products. These are the kinds of wins that Alberta is getting through the community of Red Deer. They also have the Alberta Sports Hall of Fame, that I had the opportunity to visit there recently and announce some funding. Alberta is getting wins, Alberta is getting Ws, and it's because of communities like that and these kinds of advancements in tourism product. You know, like, we get dubs. We definitely get dubs when it comes to tourism when communities think like Red Deer is thinking like. When you're

really giving it a hundred and ten per cent like Red Deer is, I think the whole province benefits.

When it comes to the air access piece, if you want to try those products that we talked about, if you want to get out to Red Deer and check out their coaster or check out the tubing or whatever it may be, you've got to likely fly in here. There are lots of ways to get to Alberta – there's no question – but the most seamless way and the most popular way is to fly in. So it really builds on the funding we've given – you know, we've worked with the air sector for the last couple of years – the \$10 million, plus another million dollars that we're investing in developing more access once you arrive here through air access to regional airports, places like Red Deer, Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray. It's essential. I mean, if I was to sum it up in one word, air access is essential. I'm grateful for our partners like Alberta's flagship carrier, WestJet, and how they've worked so hard to develop and thicken roots into the province so that more travellers can get in here.

Budget 2024 proves that, you know, the \$79.5 million to Travel Alberta, including the additional \$7.6 million to help implement the new tourism strategy – it includes this air access expansion. Growing the visitor economy will strengthen the tourism industry and support the Alberta government economic development and diversification goals.

So grateful for that question – I thought it was an awesome one – and grateful for communities like Red Deer and all their hard work.

9:20

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Minister.

Alberta, I think we can all agree in this room, is a home run destination. When we are trying to attract people to Alberta through air access, what are the identified key markets that we are looking to draw people to come to Alberta through air service?

Mr. Schow: Well, I think we've identified a number of markets already that you're seeing direct flights to. You look at a place like flying into Paris; London; Seoul, Korea; Japan; and Rome. But in terms of identifying them and researching the market and the understanding that goes into that, I will turn it over to Mr. Goldstein to talk a little bit more about the details there.

Mr. Goldstein: Thanks, Mr. Chair. To try and do this quickly, Travel Alberta has one of the most robust analysis units in the country right now next to Destination Canada. We do an evaluation which includes data, as I said earlier, from over a dozen sources, but, most importantly, through Oxford Economics, to look at the mix of which kinds of travellers are coming or are most susceptible to coming to Canada and to Alberta. We rank them internationally, and then we work with our air partners to make sure that we are marketing and working on the air access piece in those same markets.

In list of priority the U.S. is number one. If we took all of the international arrivals together, it would still not be greater than the U.S. In the U.S. particularly California, Texas, and New York are the three sort of major markets within that market. Then you go to U.K., Germany.

France is a new market for us, and we're the only province, outside of Quebec, that's actually in that market, and that's largely due to the direct flight between Charles de Gaulle and Calgary. The interesting thing – and I know I'm running out of time – is that that's a really good example of how the system is working together. Our work on the marketing front in France with Destination Canada, with WestJet has moved that WestJet flight from a seasonal flight to a year-round flight, so now we have year-round access to that

market, which has been great for the ski business and all kinds of other winter products.

So that's how we go through a very systematic way of evaluating the markets and figuring out how we make sure that that air access aligns with those markets. I hope, Mr. Chair, that answers the question.

Mr. Stephan: Yeah. Thank you very much.

When we kind of think about – of course, there's kind of the obvious winter destinations. We talked about our beautiful Banff ski resorts in the national parks. We also have great traditional activities we can do. I know I was in the west country, actually, with my family this weekend, Chair, and we went snowmobiling. There are many great activities that perhaps are not as readily available in some of those other markets that you mentioned. I don't think they do too much snowmobiling in Paris. You know, when I went there, there didn't seem to be too many snowmobiles around there.

I know you went on a trade mission to Europe with Travel Alberta and WestJet, and I'm just wondering what tourism experiences you highlighted that were offered by Alberta.

Mr. Schow: Well, with the limited time I will say that our German travellers love snowmobiling. They absolutely love it. You know, tourism is very interesting because people want what they don't have, so they come here, and they're willing to spend good money to experience it. I'm sure I'll get a chance to elaborate more after. [A timer sounded]

The Chair: Put it to snooze.

Over to the opposition.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you. Okay. I heard the minister say, Mr. Chair, that, you know, Alberta is open for business – and when it comes to tourism, I think that's great – and that we need proper consultation on all-season resorts. I couldn't agree more, and I'm just going to assume that that will include a budget for meaningful Indigenous consultation, including site visits and connections with elders about potential impacts to the land. I'll just assume that that is the case.

I want to move a little bit towards monitoring and, like, defining success in this regard. Tourism is a particularly challenging sector to do this in because it is a system of multiple industries working together. What measures is the government taking to monitor and respond to changes in consumer behaviour and market trends within the tourism sector, particularly in light of the shifting economic landscape? How does the government plan to ensure that it supports measures that are accessible and equitable for businesses across different regions and sectors of the tourism sector? What metrics or indicators is the government using to track the effectiveness of its interventions in supporting the tourism industry, and how frequently will these be assessed and adjusted as needed? Will these be shared with the public, and if yes, what budget line item would that fall in?

The business plan for 2024 to 2027 does not address issues surrounding wages, which I find particularly concerning, especially as it is applied to the tourism sector. Over half, 53 per cent, report that the inability to pay the wages offered in other sectors was among the top five challenges faced this summer as well as 46 per cent report an inability to offer stable, year-round employment options. This feeds into a couple of things. First, there are a lot of businesses within the tourism sector that cannot compete with higher wage sectors. Also, our tourism sector in Alberta does tend to focus on summer opportunities. There is definite interest in the sector to expand the winter offer and to kind of even out the level of tourism spend throughout the year.

The business plan mentions wanting to create transparent policies that support investment attraction and establish a dedicated tourism and hospitality immigration stream, which the government has already announced, but how does that immigration stream apply to this wage issue? Also, as previously mentioned, what supports will be given to help immigrants whose English is not their second language to learn English so that they can be better integrated into meaningful employment in the province?

Of course, this issue also applies to this tourism career path. How is the government working with postsecondary institutions and tourism stakeholders to create and define tourism as a career path for people, that people start to see that tourism is not just changing beds in a hotel or working as a server in a restaurant for the summer, but it actually has meaningful career implications for folks? They can work their way up, or they can get different certifications; they can become managers, CEOs of Travel Alberta eventually one day maybe. There are a lot of career opportunities in the tourism sector, so how is the government helping advance those within the context of this new immigration stream and the wage issue and all the affordability pieces that we have going on in Alberta at any given time?

Then moving forward a little bit, some of the asks for the provincial strategy from businesses and associations in tourism weren't necessarily represented in the strategy, so I'm wondering if we can see what funds are being used and what exact steps the ministry is taking to establish a supportive Crown land policy framework, integrated, obviously, with the Forestry and Parks ministry and integrated with other ministries, that embraces tourism as an industry and one that is prioritized for growth. Basically, how does the tourism sector fit within the Crown land vision and policy that is currently being established? Is there intention to establish Crown land allocation principles to guide public servants and agencies in administering this framework, or will there be a concierge service for tourism project proponents that maps the processes, requirements, contacts, and intergovernmental integration required to successfully advance projects on Crown land? Will an inventory of Crown land tourism and recreational resources be completed?

The Chair: Over to you, Minister.

Mr. Schow: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Now, I have to say that I suspect that the Member for Banff-Kananaskis might have heard my speech that I gave at the TIAA convention when I talked specifically about careers in tourism and not just jobs; I thought it was a great line. Certainly, I appreciate her bringing that up because that is absolutely correct.

9:30

Our year-round tourism strategy, the four-season tourism strategy, is geared towards exactly that, beginning with postsecondary, the Minister of Advanced Education, which is the government collaboration portion of this, the people and careers pillar of this, recognizing that, you know, the greatest resource or the greatest asset Alberta has is its people and the ability to train people into careers in tourism. If their year-round career is in tourism, it's more of a job. We see that with things like, you know, maybe ski hills, where people are just working for the winter season and they're going back to their country of origin. It's important that we develop a year-round tourism strategy; otherwise, there will not be careers in this industry.

I'll give you an example, Mr. Chairman. Waterton Lakes national park, as we just mentioned with that really cold water, is predominantly closed in the wintertime. Most of the employees who work at Waterton are summer students that probably live in Pincher Creek or Fort Macleod or Cardston. I know a whole lot of

them. When they come back from university, they want to work in Waterton because it's a beautiful place to work, but when the summer season is over and they go back to school, there isn't much of a workforce there. Having a four-season tourism strategy enables us to actually drive people into careers that are paying the wages that the member was talking about, paying the wages that can put groceries on the table, that can support a mortgage and can help build a life here in Alberta.

That's also why we developed the tourism immigration stream. It's a great path toward citizenship. There are people who are coming here, and they're finding how much they love the Alberta lifestyle, and they want to stay here forever. I cannot tell you how many times I've heard people tell me that they came to Alberta, whether it's from inside of Canada or from outside the country, for six months, and that was 25 years ago. Like, that is a story I hear on repeat because the Alberta advantage is real. We are the lowest taxing jurisdiction in the country. We have a wealth of opportunity in a multitude of sectors, not the least of which, of course, is tourism. It's an exciting career to be in, and it's an exciting time to be in tourism.

You know, I definitely understand that we want to develop tourism. With regard to marketing and not just advertising in the summer, we don't really do a lot of advertising for summer tourism in Alberta because 80 per cent of Travel Alberta's budget is geared towards winter travel. Helping us get people here into Alberta outside of the summer season is knowing that that's where we're a bit deficient.

I will turn the time over to Mr. Goldstein to talk a little bit about some of the monitoring trends in tourism, making sure that it's equitable, and some of the metrics used to track success that the member had addressed. I'll leave him a minute and 25 seconds.

Mr. Goldstein: Thank you, Minister and to the chair. Just to pick up on the minister's comment, we hope to create an ecosystem where there is fluid work throughout the year and that creates jobs and opportunities. I hope sincerely that somebody aspires to be more than the CEO of Travel Alberta. The issue of the analytics: again, I go back to the data points. Everything that we're doing through this process is data driven. Everything is run through our analytics team. There are KPIs at the end of the year that are demonstrable and public in our annual report. There are sub-KPIs that are available in regular discussions with our industry stakeholders.

I'm surprised to hear that there are industry associations that have not been included because it's been pretty comprehensive, and we've had several ongoing rounds of consultations. Again, I think, as the member put it well, Mr. Chair, this is sort of an ecosystem. It's not a family tree; it's a family shrub. It sort of moves sideways, and there are a lot of different subsectors, but we've spent a lot of time going through the analytics with our industry partners, including Indigenous Tourism Alberta, to make sure that we get it right, and we will be reporting on an annual basis.

The Chair: Perfect.

Now we'll put it back over to the government side. MLA Cyr, are you looking to go back and forth?

Mr. Cyr: Through you to the minister, is it possible to go back and forth, sir?

Mr. Schow: Sure.

Mr. Cyr: All right. Thank you.

Minister, you had a grand total of 11 seconds to answer the former government member. I'd like to hear your more fulsome

answer when it comes to what we're doing internationally to attract people into Alberta, sir.

Mr. Schow: Yeah. I appreciate that, to the member through the chair, a chance to chat about this. The other day – and by “the other day” I use that term very loosely; it was in November – we had a chance to go showcase Canada in Hamburg, Germany. Before I get into Hamburg, I do want to talk a little bit about our experience as we travelled through Paris. We had a chance while we were there to meet with Canada's ambassador to France, Stéphane Dion, Ambassador Dion, and we chatted a lot about tourism and, you know, the way that Canada is doing it so well and, of course, Alberta's advantage that we have there. It was a good conversation.

In the following couple of days we had a chance to do some other meetings, but one in particular that was incredibly rewarding to me was an opportunity to represent Alberta at Vimy Ridge on Remembrance Day, where I had a chance to speak. My grandfather flew a bomber in World War II, so the military is held in very high regard in my household, and I'm grateful for their service. It was one of the greatest honours of my life to speak there at Vimy Ridge and tour the facility, tour the grounds – it's maintained by Parks Canada – and go through some of the tunnels and the trenches and just get a glimpse into what the soldiers experienced during the World War.

Then we went over to Hamburg, Germany, and it was a great experience for me to interact first-hand with the travel agents who are out selling Alberta's product. What I found unique is that whenever I'm planning travels or trips, I've usually kind of done it on my own: you know, start researching locations and finding hotels to stay at and booking your own flights. But I found that in Europe it's far more commonplace to use travel agents, so it's a chance for us. We went over with Travel Alberta to the largest showcase in Europe, where we were able to host a dinner there for these tourism operators and travel agents and really talk a lot about the Alberta experience.

Now, in fairness, a lot of them have done familiarization tours in Alberta, and some of them are probably – a lot of them have seen more of the province than I have, probably more than everyone in this room combined, actually, because they've been doing it for decades. What I'm hearing is that they want more Alberta; they want more Alberta product. When we go back through the tourism strategy and we talk about all the visits that I've done – and I've really only touched on a couple because it's really been quite a whirlwind for the last nine months – they really sing the praises of Alberta and how we do it, but they say that they want more opportunities to talk about Alberta and more products, things like more resorts and an opportunity to get more travellers to the mountains, get more travellers into places like Drumheller, more travellers up north in Alberta.

Another thing that they haven't really talked about in great detail in this meeting but is a huge economic driver is outfitting. It is a major business for Alberta. People are coming to the province from around the world, spending a significant amount of money to hunt here and experience the Alberta landscape. Though I'm not a big fish-eating guy, I do love the catch-and-release. I share that with my deputy minister, Mr. Goldstein.

You know, we understand that it's important that we make sure that these parts of the province are accessible to our travellers, the high-spending travellers who will help us reach our goal of \$25 billion by 2035.

Mr. Cyr: Well, thank you, Minister. I really appreciate the answer. I do see that you're putting a lot of work in internationally as well as in Alberta, and I myself am very thankful for that.

I will say that there's been a lot of discussion about the cold temperatures of Waterton. I would challenge the minister to put his feet into the lake of Cold Lake to see which is colder, sir. I would say that we would meet that challenge and probably succeed.

Now, Minister, you had recently done an announcement for the 2026 Alberta Winter Games. This was a big announcement for my constituency. This is a partnership between the MD of Bonnyville, Cold Lake, Bonnyville, and Glendon. This is one of those remarkable success stories, sir, that our area is going to be seeing a real boom in our economy.

We also had the Scotties Tournament of Hearts for the young ladies in St. Paul. This shows that you're really getting out there and you're trying to ensure that the northeast has got a real success story going forward. It shows our business community that we matter to you, Minister. Can you just walk us through how you make these decisions on how you choose the placement of different events, sir?

9:40

Mr. Schow: Absolutely. I'm happy to do that. First off, you're on. Not only will I dip my toe in Cold Lake; I will jump in Cold Lake. So bring it on. Let's do it. I'll try anything twice.

Now, in terms of the Alberta Winter Games rural Alberta always punches above its weight, and when we're weighing the balance of how we're going to host these events or who's going to host them, we look at a number of factors. Of course, we look at the ability to actually host the games with the facilities. We look at a volunteer base that's available to support these games. We look at transportation infrastructure, what's available there. In your case, for example, through you to the chair – through the chair to you. Yeah.

The Chair: It's been a long night.

Mr. Schow: No. We're good. I got my juice here. We're good.

We look at a multitude of factors. I was really grateful to see your community step up and be able to do that announcement because the Winter Games there are going to be amazing.

I got a chance recently, as I'd mentioned, to see the Alberta Winter Games on full display in Grande Prairie, where I was able to deliver opening remarks and declare the games officially open. And what a time to be alive it was. I felt like I was at a Mötley Crüe concert with the fire and the streamers behind me and the confetti cannons. The energy in that room was something to behold, and I was able to get everybody riled up and get them going. They went on to host, you know, a whole handful of games over the course of a weekend. That wasn't possible without well over 2,000 volunteers, I think it was.

When you're talking about these games, it doesn't happen without the athletes, of course, the coaches, and the parents who helped them get there, but it also doesn't happen without the towns who are willing to put forth the effort, put forth their own resources. The business community is getting behind these events, and this is a great example of how small towns do such an amazing job. I said that they punch above their weight. As a government we supported this with \$830,000, knowing that it's an investment well made in the future development of Alberta's athletes. I have to say as well that these are not just, you know, run-of-the-mill athletes who are there just to compete. I mean, these are future Olympians. These are future world champions. There is a whole host, a whole list of athletes who have competed in the Alberta Summer and Winter Games who've gone on to win medals at the Olympics.

We are playing just a small part in the success of future athletes in Alberta, and I'm so grateful that the province is investing this

money because we get to see the success long term. What I always say to the athletes – they kind of snicker, but I say it anyways. I say: “Every single one of you is going to go pro one day. Every single one of you. Now, maybe it’s in the sport of your choice, or maybe it’s in something completely different. You might become a dentist or a doctor or a physiotherapist or do public relations or whatever, but you’re going to go pro.” All the lessons that they learn at these events, the relationships they build, the experiences they have, the skills they develop – time management, leadership, stress management – all these things, carry them through the rest of their lives into that professional career, and they become the best professionals that they can be. You know, it’s amazing to hear the stories of these athletes. When you go into these events, I’m so proud to be behind them.

The same thing: we did the Special Olympics kickoff just a couple of weeks ago, and there were 800-plus athletes plus another several hundred coaches there coming from across Canada to compete. I think Ontario had a contingent of over 300 athletes. It was so impressive to see them all come here and compete and have such an amazing experience at the Canada Special Olympics.

The Chair: Over to the opposition members.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Minister, for your answers. I think we’re painting a really great picture of tourism in Alberta here.

I’ve got a few questions, and some of them are follow-ups, but I want to start with that Travel Alberta has created and promoted must-visit destinations in the annual report on page 27. I think we’ve established that some of the result of this effort is getting tourism spending back to pre-pandemic levels, but I’m specifically interested in a little bit more detail around, like: did more visitors come to the destinations that were marketed? If more, how much more, and were there visitation targets for these destinations by which to monitor success?

If we look at the business plan, on pages 140 and 141 performance indicator 1(c) is about visitation and performance indicator 1(d) is about tourism sector employment. Both of those performance indicators don’t actually define targets in future years; they just show an increase over time from 2021 to 2022. We do talk about that increasing visitation will equal increasing expenditures generated from the tourism sector, but what are the targets for visitation and for tourism sector employment in the coming years?

I also have some questions about the CEO of Travel Alberta, who is doing a great job in Travel Alberta, and I don’t want to take away from that. He is also the deputy minister for tourism, and I find this very interesting, and I’m curious if there are potential conflicts of interest for being the CEO of Travel Alberta and the deputy minister for tourism. Maybe some explanation of how those roles are different that might justify the two salaries that contribute towards that. Does his job with Travel Alberta influence his work with the ministry and vice versa? I think that because both of these are taxpayer-paid positions, they’re fair questions to ask.

My other line of questioning for tourism staff is that Miranda Rosin has recently become the new director for tourism strategy. Is this position in the Ministry of Tourism and Sport public service? Was it publicly posted? What were the defined qualifications for the position? Most directors in the public service . . .

The Chair: Member, we’ve got to really get back in again. We’ve given lots of latitude. Try to tie this back into if there’s an org chart or some question that you’re looking at. Again, you’re getting a lot of latitude, so I’ll let you continue, but you’ve got to pull it back in a bit.

Dr. Elmeligi: Sure. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

This is a position, as I understand it, that would be one of the FTEs that is reported in the budget for the tourism ministry staff.

The Chair: Okay. If you’re asking questions on the FTEs and how they staff, maybe bring it in there a little bit. Again, I’m trying to give you lots of latitude so you can get your question asked.

Dr. Elmeligi: Okay.

I guess I’m trying to understand what the process is to become a director of tourism strategy in the ministry and what qualifications are required for that position given that it is an FTE in the ministry.

I want to revisit a couple of questions I had before. We’ve talked a lot about air access tonight, but roads are existing infrastructure throughout the province that connect many communities. The Roam regional transit system in the Bow Valley in 2015 had a budget of \$1.9 million for 19,891 service hours and in 2023 had a budget of \$11.3 million for 75,423 service hours. The reception and the growth of Roam regional transit in the Bow Valley has been staggering. It is clear that there is a need among tourists for regional bus transportation connecting rural communities, and I’m just wondering: if we’re talking a lot about air access, why are we also not talking about regional bus connecting services that might connect different rural communities? You know, every tourism development zone, basically, in the strategic plan has an opportunity for a regional bus service. Is there allowance for that?

It took us five years to get the provincial tourism strategy. I’m wondering why it took so long, and I’m also wondering about: in this tourism career pathway what is the ministry’s responsibility in partnering with postsecondary institutions to create accreditations or degree or diploma programs like with Mount Royal University or SAIT or NAIT or Lakeland College, even, to help foster the recognition that tourism could be a career pathway for young people and that they can create jobs through that sector? I used to teach tourism and recreation at Mount Royal University, and I can definitely see an interest in young people in creating a career, but that postsecondary pathway isn’t necessarily there. So are there intentions to work with postsecondary institutions to help that grow?

9:50

The Chair: And over to you, Minister. Obviously, there are some areas that are outside of your ministry, but I’ll leave that for you to navigate through.

Mr. Schow: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Chair. There’s a case with it, that most of it is outside of my ministry, but I’m happy to answer some of it.

With regard to roads we are in conversation with transportation, but that is a conversation you’d have to have with Minister Dreesen.

With regard to the tourism strategy, why it took so long, COVID certainly played a role in that.

SAIT was also just awarded as one of the top tourism schools in the world, so I’m very happy about that.

With regard to Mr. Goldstein’s salary he has one salary, not two. That would be a mistake and an error in making that assumption, and his position of dual role as CEO and deputy minister is not without precedent; Saskatchewan does the same thing.

So far as Ms Rosin is concerned, I will turn the time over to Mr. Lamoureux to talk a little bit about that. Then Mr. Goldstein can elaborate on some of the deeper questions you asked earlier on in your statements.

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Chair, to the member: departments use a standardized process for all ministries. It's led by the Public Service Commission. With respect to a director position in the government of Alberta for tourism it requires both government and tourism ministry experience. You inquired as to what the competitive process was. It was, according to our processes, posted publicly, an open competition where anyone with the credentials, including being a Canadian citizen, was able to apply. There was a screening with the Public Service Commission of all the applicants, and standardized processes, including interviews, were conducted, which led to the decision to hire.

Back to you, Minister.

Mr. Schow: Sure. I know there were some deeper questions that were asked as well. Mr. Goldstein, do you want to jump into some of those?

Mr. Goldstein: Yeah. I think I'm referring to the performance metrics that you outlined. I believe the question, Mr. Chair, was about: what is the length of those, or what is the future of those? I believe that if you turn to the actual strategy itself, it outlines the revenue projections that we would take to 2035, how we would get to the \$25 billion. This is the pro forma piece that we do for Treasury Board, so that is why those numbers only run for the next three years, because that is the business plan component as laid out by Treasury Board. Projections are projections, but I see no reason why Travel Alberta couldn't furnish the committee with some extended projections for the next couple of years as well.

Mr. Schow: Awesome. Then that's probably the end of our – anything else? I don't have anything else to add.

The Chair: It's block time, Minister, so if you kill the clock, it's over to the other . . .

Mr. Schow: I have nothing else to add.

The Chair: Okay. Perfect. Government members? Is there a particular member? Ah, there we go.

Mr. Wiebe: Mr. Chair, thank you very much for allowing me to speak. I just want to . . .

The Chair: Did you want to go block time or back and forth with the minister?

Mr. Wiebe: Back and forth.

The Chair: Okay. Go ahead.

Mr. Wiebe: I would love to go back and forth if you're okay with that, Minister.

Grande Prairie has been referenced a number of times in your talking points today, and I was just going to say that we hosted a fabulous Winter Games. It all started out with the minister's opening remarks and the stadium full of young athletes and fans and coaches and parents. What a great weekend it was. To reference MLA Stephan, it was a super-duper weekend.

I would like to ask a question regarding the capital plan, that we're investing \$30 million over three years in a new community recreation infrastructure program and supporting recreational facilities across the province. The program will be Alberta's first grant program that solely is dedicated to funding sport and recreational facilities. What types of projects do you see this program supporting, and how do you believe it will impact our youth and seniors in our community and their daily lives? Given

that the capital plan for this program this year is \$10 million, are there any additional funds that can be allocated to this program should the amount of the community applications indicate more significant need?

Mr. Schow: Well, Mr. Chair, I want to thank the member for that question. I think it draws back to one of the initial points that I made, which is that Alberta has a rich history of hosting national, international, multisport games, but that's not possible – that's not possible in the slightest – unless we had the facilities to do that. Those facilities don't just happen by accident; they need partnerships with municipalities and with the government of Alberta and, in some cases, with the federal government as well, so we've been in contact with the federal government on a number of projects that I'm excited, you know, to continue working with them on.

As far as this grant stream is concerned, it was just recently introduced in the budget. If Budget 2024 is approved and passes through the Legislature, then we'll be able to move ahead and develop this grant stream in full. That will allow us to develop the parameters of that and determine what kinds of projects are available.

But I think it speaks to the larger goal here, the lofty one that we've set up, which is \$25 billion in visitor spending by 2035. That's going to put Alberta in first place. We're on track for that. We're out here trying to get Ws; we're out here trying to get wins. I had a coach once harshly tell me that moral victories are for losers. In Alberta we're out here looking for the win, and this tourism strategy that we have laid out is an absolute win because we have the landscape, we have the people, we have the access, and we have the opportunity. We're going to explore everything that we have to bring the high-value travellers into Alberta that will help us reach this lofty goal.

You know, Alberta is this beautiful province with so much to showcase. It's why the ministry was formed in the first place, to focus on opportunities that will increase the visitor economy. These investments will drive local economies, and they'll allow Albertans to share the best of what this province has to offer the rest of the country and the rest of the world. As we work towards our bold and ambitious goal of growing the visitor economy to more than \$25 billion by 2035, Alberta's government will continue to prioritize tourism because we know that tourism means jobs, the same jobs that members around this table on both sides have talked about. It's a driver of growth, and it's a driver of economic prosperity. By developing new products and experiences, we will position Alberta as a premier destination for visitors both at home and abroad, and when these visitors come, they will discover what we here in this province already know, that Alberta is the best place to live, to play, and to visit.

I thank all members around this table for coming here and being interested in talking about Tourism and Sport, because it is jobs. It is the Alberta story. It's a beautiful story. It's a rich history that dates back to time immemorial, and I am so grateful that as the Minister of Tourism and Sport I get to carry this file forward and I have the opportunity to help tell and sell the Alberta story around the country and around the world.

I have a fantastic team, and I'm so grateful for them as they've helped me through the learning process of this file. I'm thankful for Paul and for David and for Carmen and my chief of staff, Ben McKay, and everyone who supported me through this process and who continues to help us get here, because we've got a great squad. It doesn't happen without a squad. This is a winning team.

You know, as we move forward towards reaching this lofty goal of \$25 billion, I can assure members around this table and anyone

watching at home and members of the Legislature, as you deliberate the budget, that the money allocated to Tourism and Sport is going to be well used to position Alberta as the leader in tourism in Canada and, I may be so bold as to say, the leader of tourism around the world. When people around the world think about where they want to visit, Alberta is going to be top of mind.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: There we go. Well, thank you, ministers, and a heartfelt thank you to everybody here on this team as part of the committee to keep the decorum up, to get your questions out, the minister and

staff for answering the questions to the best of your abilities. Thank you very much for that.

We'll adjourn the meeting, but as a reminder to all of these members that are around the table – it's like déjà vu all over again – we have a meeting tomorrow at 9 a.m. for this committee. That will be for the estimates of the Ministry of Advanced Education, so sharpen your pencils and make sure you refer to those estimates manuals.

Thank you very much, everyone.

[The committee adjourned at 10 p.m.]

