



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Standing Committee
on
Alberta's Economic Future

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

Tuesday, March 19, 2024
7 p.m.

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The 31st Legislature
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

Ceci, Joe, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
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Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Participants

Ministry of Arts, Culture and Status of Women

Hon. Tanya Fir, Minister

Anne Davidson, Executive Director, Community Engagement

Mark Ham, Executive Director, Cultural Industries, and Alberta's Film Commissioner

David Link, Assistant Deputy Minister, Heritage

Carmen Vidaurri, Acting Senior Financial Officer and Assistant Deputy Minister of Finance

7 p.m.

Tuesday, March 19, 2024

[Mr. Getson in the chair]

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

The Chair: Good evening, everyone. I would like to call the meeting to order and welcome everyone in attendance. The committee has under consideration the estimates for the Ministry of Arts, Culture and Status of Women 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, if you could introduce the officials you have joining you at the table. Please note that the mics are operated by *Hansard*, so you don't have to reach out and grab those. To kick things off, I'll introduce myself. I'm Shane Getson, the MLA for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland. We know what it's called as well. I'm lucky enough to be the chair of the committee tonight. I'll start with the introductions, to my right.

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

Ms de Jonge: Chantelle de Jonge, MLA for Chestermere-Strathmore.

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

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

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

Ms Fir: I'm Tanya Fir, Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women. At the table with me is Kim Capstick, deputy minister; assistant deputy minister for status of women and creative and community development, Nilam Jetha; assistant deputy minister for the heritage division, David Link; Carmen Vidaurri, ADM of financial services and acting senior financial officer. Also joining me, from my minister's office, in the gallery are McKenzie Kibler, chief of staff; Garrett Koehler, press secretary; Jason Kwong, policy adviser; and many other outstanding individuals from the Ministry of Arts, Culture and Status of Women.

Member Ceci: Good evening. Joe Ceci, Calgary-Buffalo.

Ms Hayter: Julia Hayter, Calgary-Edgemont.

Member Tejada: Lizette Tejada, Calgary-Klein.

Member Loyola: Rod Loyola, Edmonton-Ellerslie.

The Chair: And no substitutions tonight, so this is really neat. We have the whole crew here.

Committee proceedings are live streamed on the Internet and broadcast by Assembly TV. The audio- and videostream and transcripts of the meeting can be accessed via the Legislative Assembly website. Please put your cellphones to silent mode, the least disturbing mode you may have possible. That'd be greatly appreciated.

Here's the fun part, everyone. I am terrible at reading from a script – we're going to try to attempt this; please let me get through it – but I do have to read it into the record apparently. I can't get our clerk to give me a break.

Hon. members, the main estimates for the Ministry of – I'll make sure I have the right one; hence, the script – Arts, Culture and Status of Women shall be considered for three hours. Standing Order

59.01 sets out the process for the consideration of the main estimates in the Legislative Assembly policy committees. Suborder 59.01(6) sets out the speaking rotation for this meeting. The speaking rotation chart is available on the committee's internal website, and hard copies have been provided to 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 agree. If the 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 shall adjourn. Should members have questions regarding speaking times or rotation, please e-mail or message the clerk or raise your hand. He's just to the left of me here in the room.

With the concurrence of the committee I would ask for a five-minute break near the midway mark. Again, it's basically a biobreak, folks. Are there any concerns with taking it? Excellent. The chair and, I'm sure, the minister greatly appreciate that as well as her staff.

Ministry officials who are present may, at the direction 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 before they start speaking so we can get that into the record.

Pages are available to deliver notes and other material between the gallery and the table. Attendees in the gallery may not approach the table. Space permitting, opposition staff may sit at the table to assist their members; however, members will always have priority while sitting at the table.

Points of order will be dealt with as they arise, and the individual speaking time will be paused; however, the block time and the overall meeting time will continue to run.

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

Finally, or near finally, the committee should have the opportunity to hear both questions and answers without interruption during the estimates debate. Debate flows through the chair at all times, including instances when speaking time is shared between a member and the minister. In other words, you've got a friend in me up at the front. I'll nod and smile as much as possible, and we'll do that. If there's anything where you guys start to lock horns a bit, I'll pull it back in. We run the meetings here like I really like to do. It's like a boardroom, so all that Leg. stuff, the heckling: that stays over there.

The other thing that's awfully handy for me, keeping the decorum, and for the folks following at home. We've got lots of estimates documents, the strategic plan. We have ministry estimates. There are lots of really good ones. Just reference the page, the table, the ministry you're talking about. It'll make your life a heck of a lot easier. Decorum stays there, and it flows really well. Is everyone comfortable with the rules of engagement I've laid out here so far? Appreciate it.

With that, Minister, we're off to the races. You have the first 10 minutes to get us started. Over to you, ma'am.

Ms Fir: Well, thank you, Chair, and good evening, colleagues. I'm pleased to be here to discuss the estimates and business plan for the Ministry of Arts, Culture and Status of Women. I'm honoured to serve as Alberta's Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women, and I am proud of the work the ministry does on behalf of Albertans.

We operate our two Jubilee auditoria and preserve our past at 20 museums and historic sites, including the Provincial Archives. We ensure our growing francophone community have the services they need with help from our Advisory Council on the Francophonie. In

partnership with the Alberta Foundation for the Arts we support and profile the arts and artists. We champion and support the nonprofit community. We help make sure women are drivers of our economy, and we work to eliminate gender-based violence. By supporting our growing cultural industries, we tell Alberta stories and encourage others to tell our stories, too. I'm very proud of this ministry and of this budget, and I'll share some of the highlights.

A key area of my mandate is to increase women's economic participation. Women are instrumental in shaping the upcoming chapter of Alberta's story. The status of women branch, with a budget of \$19.8 million, is empowering women to pursue careers in trades and in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, STEM, fields. These careers are found in many industries, including cultural industries and the arts, and they are pushing our economy and our society forward. That is why we have programs like our women in STEM and Persons Case scholarships, which help women enter careers where they have been traditionally underrepresented.

To truly move forward, though, we need to end gender-based violence in our province. As a minister one of my mandate commitments is to develop a 10-year strategic plan to end gender-based violence and support survivors. Budget 2024 invests almost \$16 million to support the development and execution of the strategy, which is currently under development. This is in addition to the millions already invested across government in critical programs and services. But we are not waiting until the strategy is in place to act. We know that to support survivors, we need to ensure services are available wherever they live in the province. Through the rural sexual assault support project we offer free sexual assault care training to health care professionals in rural communities, giving them the skills to support people who have experienced a recent sexual assault. This will ensure survivors get the help they need where and when they need it.

My mandate letter also states the importance of the 2SLGBTQIA-plus community to this government. I have been on the ground attending Central Alberta Pride, Edmonton Pride, and Calgary Pride festivals. I've met with dozens of leaders and organizations committed to supporting the community, and over \$290,000 has been directed towards 2SLGBTQIA-plus initiatives in recent years, including grants to Calgary Pride, Calgary Outlink, the Dinner Optimist Club, and several others. I look forward to continuing those investments through our community grant programs.

All of our work in supporting strong, vibrant communities would not be possible without Alberta's nonprofit and volunteer sector. With approximately 280,000 Albertans working in this sector, it adds billions of dollars to the economy and provides vital services. This budget supports nonprofit organizations through several grant streams, and I am proud to continue our support for the sector with an overall investment of \$128.9 million for community and volunteer support services. This includes record-level funding of \$50 million for the popular community facility enhancement program, or CFEP, which supports hundreds of playgrounds, community halls, arts centres, and recreation facilities each year, and through our community initiatives program we will invest \$16 million in programs, events, services, and one-time projects that allow our nonprofits to expand programs and help even more Albertans. Our capital plan also supports the nonprofit community.

7:10

Following historically high funding for culture and recreation infrastructure over the last three years, Budget 2024 continues support for previously announced projects like the Glenbow and adds two new projects to build more community spaces for families

and Albertans. Investing in the Arts Commons, an Olympic Plaza transformation, and the Winspear phase 3 project not only supports the arts; they also significantly contribute to downtown revitalization in both our major cities. While the budget documents outline the first three years of our commitment, I am very proud that Alberta's government will be supporting these two projects with almost \$116 million over the next seven years.

Arts are a valued part of who we are as a province. That is why Alberta's government increased funding to support the arts with a \$4.5 million increase to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts in 2024, reaching a record-level \$39.1 million annually by 2026. This increased support will allow the AFA to make the arts available and accessible to more people in all corners of the province, support more Alberta artists and arts organizations, and allow more Albertans to see our incredible art collection first-hand. This will ensure Albertans can experience the arts as a creator, as a career, or as an audience member.

This is important now more than ever because our cultural industries have witnessed substantial growth over the last few years, especially our film and television industry. This is why we're making sure producers around the world know about our competitive financial incentives, breathtaking locations, world-class studios, and exceptional crews, and our efforts are paying off as we are seeing more award-winning shows filmed right here in Alberta.

Budget 2024 allows us to continue that momentum, diversifying our economy, creating jobs, and sharing our culture, perspective, and stories around the world, and Albertans will see the benefit. With every dollar of government support towards film and television production it generates \$4 of investment back into the province, an incredible return on investment.

Much like the film and television sector, the music, book, and magazine publishing sectors also offer an opportunity for significant impact to our economy, and that's why we're maintaining funding for our Alberta media fund at \$8 million per year.

We're also telling our story to the world through the government's world-class museums and heritage sites. The Royal Tyrrell Museum welcomed more than half a million visitors last year, a new museum record, and the Royal Alberta Museum just launched its first feature exhibit in years, *Angkor: The Lost Empire of Cambodia*.

To continue drawing Albertans and tourists to our government-owned heritage facilities and to support our other heritage programs, Budget 2024 invests \$52.9 million to the heritage division. That sees programming at the Royal Tyrrell and Royal Alberta Museum continue and expand, but it also supports historical sites across the province like Ukrainian Cultural village, Reynolds Museum, Frank Slide, and Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump, just to name a few.

Now I'd like to take a moment to wish everyone a happy Francophonie Month, an important time to recognize and celebrate the more than a quarter million French speakers in Alberta and the contributions they make to our province. Budget 2024 recognizes their importance, too, increasing funding for the Francophone Secretariat to \$4 million. This funding allows the secretariat to continue to implement Alberta's French policy and work with all ministries to enhance services in French, including increased services in Health, in Justice, and in Education.

Mr. Chair, these are just some of the highlights. The Ministry of Arts, Culture and Status of Women is supporting communities in every corner of the province, from north to south to east to west. We are enabling people to volunteer for a cause, championing women, and inspiring through art. From dinosaurs to festivals, from

books to award-winning screen productions, we are bringing economic benefits to our province. We are telling Alberta stories because when arts, culture, nonprofits, heritage, and women thrive in Alberta, we continue to be the best place to live.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We're into the first 60-minute – well, the only 60-minute block time; I guess we should correct that. In this block you can cede your time back and forth among the loyal opposition members. No more than 10 minutes per speaker. And if you make the request back to the minister, whether it's combined or block time, both parties have to agree at the outset.

Which member would like to go first? Member Ceci.

Member Ceci: Thank you, and thank you for the highlights, Minister. It's appreciated. It's a pleasure to be here to discuss the Arts, Culture and Status of Women estimates. To all of your staff and for all the work they do: thank you, all.

I'd like to also recognize that it's Francophonie Month this month and just wish everyone, a quarter million French speakers in Alberta, a great month. Also, I recognize that it's Treaty 6 territory that we're on, important territory also to the Métis people.

The Chair: Just for the chair's edification on the timer, are you looking to go block time or back and forth, Member?

Member Ceci: I'm comfortable doing either.

The Chair: Okay. Minister?

Ms Fir: I'd like to do block time.

The Chair: There we go, and we're off. Thank you so much.

Member Ceci: The ministry business plan, page 24, key objective 1.4 says, "Develop a strategy for investment in Alberta's world-class cultural and heritage sites, including museums, zoos, science centres and theatres." Minister, can you share where your ministry is at regarding the development of this strategy? If it's in progress, how far along is it? When will it be complete? Who is working on it? What is the breadth of engagement with communities, including Indigenous people, that will be done in its development, and how much will it cost?

The next question is with regard to the same page in the ministry business plan, page 24, key objective 1.5: "Stand up for Albertans by advocating for equitable federal funding for Alberta's arts, culture and heritage sectors and increased federal funding for the provision of government services and programs in French." Minister, you've referred to Alberta not receiving its fair share when I've raised questions about funding for the arts, as recently as last Wednesday. An article by a SAIT, the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology, reporter, Lily Polenchuk, from January 11, 2024, reviewed the amount of Canadian Council for the Arts funding received in 2021-22 and noted that the Canadian Council for the Arts funding supported 114 arts organizations, 53 groups, and 297 individual artists. Artists cumulatively received \$7.5 million in grants, and overall CCA gave Alberta \$28.4 million in grants. In that same year, 2021-2022, provincial Alberta funding for the arts was \$25.6 million, about \$3 million lower than the federal government. Minister, can you share how you've gone about trying to achieve this key objective? What steps have you or your officials taken, in your words, to receive fair federal funding?

In the Other Initiatives budget line – that is 2.3 on page 54 of the estimates – Minister, can you expand on the Other Initiatives line

and identify a project or two that receive funding that the description says falls outside the parameters of CIP and CFEP?

My fourth question: is this the kind of budget line – or are there others potentially at your disposal? – that could assist entities like the Edmonton Fringe Festival on an emergency basis, which just yesterday indicated it's in financial difficulty?

My fifth question: can the minister table a list of projects from last year that received monies from this budget line, Other Initiatives, 2.3, or indicate where it might be published?

7:20

On to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. In estimates, page 54, line 4.2, and on page 25 in the business plan, outcome 2, key objective 2.3 reads: "[to] ensure the Alberta Foundation for the Arts prioritizes and invests in Alberta artists, art and cultural materials." The AFA funding, it should be noted and as you noted, is going up \$4.5 million in this budget, '24-25, which, it needs to be said, is significant and will benefit individual artists and arts organizations. This comes, however, after five years of either cuts to this program or zeros under the previous UCP government and last year's second flatlining of the AFA budget at \$25.6 million.

My sixth question. Minister, you've said that you'd like to see additional funds go into – let me just read this once more. The minister has said that she'd like to see these AFA additional funds go into more artists' hands. Can she share how that might take place? How many more artists in Alberta will be incrementally assisted with the addition to the AFA budget this year?

My seventh question. In this same budget line, which is going up, the eligibility criteria, I'm told, prohibits funding to arts groups within universities, the very same places that have arts professors and others supporting young people. One arts professor is quoted as saying: we have incredible strength in training young people, in reaching students who are not exposed to the arts, and partnering with civic organizations; this potential is lost with no AFA funding. Minister, is this a possibility in future AFA funding? Can arts organizations within universities, that typically probably only get Advanced Education funding, be considered in the future?

I'd like to go on with more questions regarding the AFA. In the business plan, page 24, outcome 1, key objective 1.6 speaks to enabling and promoting "the philanthropic and business sectors to support Alberta artists and non-profit organizations." With this in mind, can the minister advise how much the AFA's art sector donation program received in donations in 2023-2024 and whether it is providing value to the arts sector or if a reworking of this program is possible that would include matching grant programs from the government, much like the community spirit donation matching grant did in the years between 2010 and 2015?

The ninth question. Coming through COVID, performance spaces are still struggling to see their audiences return. The Rozsa Foundation is doing in-depth study and research on this currently. Minister, has your ministry's budget addressed in any ways the real challenges and gaps in revenue that arts and cultural organizations are experiencing; for instance, through estimates, page 54, line 2.1, community engagement? I recognize that just yesterday the executive director for the Fringe commented that they originally thought it would take three years to get back to the revenue potential that their Fringe Theatre had pre-COVID. Now they think it's going to take 10 years.

The 10th question. In estimates, page 54, line 2.2, the community initiatives program shows a \$1 million drop in the estimate for this upcoming year and from the forecast 2023-2024. The forecast is \$500,000, or half a million dollars, less than budgeted in the 2023-2024 year. Since the program is to fund various grants that support

community-based nonprofit organizations, why has this occurred, and what is the message being sent to the many nonprofits in Alberta who could benefit from last year's unspent budget monies?

The 11th question is: on estimates page 54, line 3.1, program support, I notice a \$470,000 drop from the forecast to March 31, 2024. Can the minister share why this is?

On to capital investments. One last question, I guess. On estimates page 55, line 6.10, under Capital Investment Vote by Program, heritage capital and repairs, it looks like just under \$2 million is budgeted yearly, and last year \$1.1 million was expended. It was underexpended by \$800,000. With 20 museums, historic sites, and interpretive centres in the province one can imagine the need for repairs at many of these facilities going up with time. Are you confident that this budget amount is correct, or should it be reconsidered and moved higher? If it's not for capital and it's for programming, why is less being spent on programming or planning or other kinds of ways of dealing with the heritage sites and museums and interpretive centres?

The Chair: Thank you, Member. With five seconds left on the shot clock, well done.

Minister, over to you for 10 minutes.

Ms Fir: Great. Well, thank you to the member for that question. Maybe I'll start with some overall initial comments. The member talked about the importance of our museums and cultural sites, and I couldn't agree more. As I'd mentioned, I think, in my introductory comments, it was quite extraordinary to go to the RAM museum and be part of the opening of the Angkor exhibit. Also, the Calgary Zoo is quite extraordinary. Our government was proud to provide funding to the Canadian Wilds redevelopment exhibit. I've been there a few times. Everyone is very excited about the polar bears, as am I, but I have a soft spot for the otters. But that's a different conversation. I'll come back to that in further detail for the member.

With respect to advocating for increased funding, again a couple of high-level comments there. Yes, the member is correct. I will say that we're not receiving our fair share of federal funding on either the arts side or the francophone file, so I've advocated and have reached out to both of my federal counterparts for increased funding, for federal funding, especially as we're working on our French policy and providing more services in French. I'm looking forward to the upcoming federal-provincial-territorial meeting in May on the culture side, where I can do more of that advocating face to face.

With the Alberta Foundation for the Arts I'm really pleased about the increased funding there and all that it will do to support more Alberta artists. My mandate letter and the mandate letter that I sent to the chair of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts do stress the importance of supporting Alberta arts and artists across all four corners of the province. Some of the programs that they do, that I hope will be enhanced, are things like their TREX program, their travelling exhibition program, which takes art to all four corners of the province: rural, urban north, south, small town, big town. I was amazed when I started in the job and had an opportunity to tour some of the art that we have in storage and just to have row after row of wall pulled out with this amazing art that is gorgeous and should be more on display and for more people across the province to see and celebrate and promote our amazing Alberta artists.

You know, just to name a few, I'm proud of the Alberta artist in residence program. We have some of the incredible work that Aeris Osborne has done. Just the other day, when we did the Alberta Foundation for the Arts announcement at the King Eddy in downtown Calgary, Sharon Rose Kootenay was there. She's a Métis Cree artist who is our current Alberta artist in residence and

just unbelievably talented and who gifted me the most beautiful teacup and saucer that was made out of moose hide, that she had beaded with little green beads, because she said that she liked my last name. So there is this incredible piece of handmade art in my office that everyone should come and check out.

What else did I want to mention? Maybe I'll leave it there and go into some other notes to answer some of the member's questions.

The plan for historical and cultural infrastructure is under development now, and we'll work with our stakeholders to develop that plan over the next year.

7:30

With respect to advocating on behalf of artists and the art sector, our government is standing up for Albertans by, as I mentioned, advocating for equitable federal funding for Alberta's arts, culture, and heritage sectors. I did write to the Canadian Heritage minister to strongly express my disappointment in how little federal funding goes to Alberta artists, and additionally I've asked the AFA, the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, to continue to advocate to their counterpart, the Canada Council for the Arts, to ensure Alberta artists receive their fair share of federal arts funding.

With respect to the other initiatives program Budget 2024 invests \$3 million into the other initiatives program, which is a flexible grant program that allows us to make strategic investments in one-time projects that benefit Albertans and grow our economy. This program supports community organizations with their efforts to benefit the public and stimulate economic activity in our province. One example would be past funding that was provided to support Explore Edmonton with hosting the Canadian country music awards in 2024 and the Juno awards in March of 2023, which brought more than \$12 million in economic impact, as stated by Alberta Enterprise Group. The slight reduction in this grant is a result of Tourism and Sport now funding the Canadian Finals Rodeo event.

Edmonton Fringe Festival. Yeah. Speaking to that a little bit, it was brought to my attention the other day with the media release that they are facing some financial challenges there, and they had highlighted some of the issues there in addition to inflation and rising costs. You know, they tried to have the artists get all the profits – right? – from the ticket prices to try to support the artists, which is admirable, and I appreciate that they're looking at multiple sources of ways that they can deal with the issue while still keeping it affordable. One of the comments they've made is that if every attendee just gave \$5 a month, that alone would increase their revenue. So I appreciate that they're looking at many ways of increasing their funding to make it still sustainable. I mean, it's an incredible festival that brings Albertans from around the province to celebrate the performing arts, and we want to see it be sustainable.

I will be meeting with them. I have an open-door policy. I will be having a meeting with them soon, in the next couple of weeks, hopefully no later than April, to speak with them a little bit more. I am proud that our government has provided them over \$2.5 million since 2019 through the Alberta Foundation for the Arts and the community grant programs, again, another reason why I need to continue advocating for more federal funding.

In Budget 2024, if passed, you know, we take a responsible approach to funding the arts in Alberta via the Alberta Foundation for the Arts with the \$4.5 million in new funding for each year, and that increased funding goes precisely to individual artists and cultural organizations like the Fringe Festival to help create and promote Alberta art and artists. While I can't sit here and promise what we may or may not be able to fund – it's a decision of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, which is arm's length from me – I just think their past history and record of supporting the Fringe

Festival speaks volumes to how they value what the Fringe Festival brings to Edmonton and surrounding areas. When the opposition was in government, the Fringe Festival received an average of \$346,000 per year. We've funded \$510,695 per year, so it is something that our government recognizes and values.

Speaking about the AFA and funding, again, you know, the overall theme of our budget is to take a responsible plan for a growing province while still funding what's important to continue to enrich our province. The additional \$4.5 million represents an 18 per cent increase for the AFA over last year, and this is a significant injection of funding for the AFA, which has been working with a stable annual budget for the past three years. The commitment to provide a further \$4.5 million in each of the next two years means the AFA will be at record funding levels of \$39.1 million in annual funding by 2026, bringing us in line and on par with several other provinces.

With respect to how the money will be allocated, as we know, the AFA board is responsible. Their agency is arm's length from the government but under my ministry, and they're responsible for allocating funding according to its legislative mandate, strategic plan, and direction from government. As I touched on, part of that direction is making sure that we're supporting Alberta artists from every corner of the province. I know that in meeting with – I know the member as well has met with many stakeholders I've met, including individual artists that I've met with, from larger, more formal round-tables to gatherings that people in the community have held for me in their homes, three or four of those gatherings, where each of those had 15 to 20 artists of various backgrounds in attendance, hearing lots of feedback on how they would like to see that money allocated.

Of course, we know one of the challenges of government is trying our best to make everybody happy. The increase in funding is definitely a starting . . . [Ms Fir's speaking time expired] Oh, that went fast.

The Chair: It sure does.

Back to the loyal opposition members.

Ms Hayter: Thank you for taking our questions today. Mr. Chair, on page 53 of the government . . .

The Chair: MLA Hayter, I apologize. I'm starting to be a stickler as well. Before you go, you have to ask the minister whether it's shared or block.

Ms Hayter: Oh, sorry.

The Chair: And once we have that established, we'll go . . .

Ms Hayter: I just assumed – she said "block" with Mr. Ceci . . .

The Chair: No. No worries.

Ms Hayter: . . . so I was just going to follow the lead of the last one. I'm assuming you'd like to do block.

Ms Fir: Yes, please.

Ms Hayter: Okay. Sorry.

The Chair: Perfect. Clerks are good. I'm good. We're all good. Away you go. Thank you.

Ms Hayter: Okay. Perfect. Now I'm going to have to speak faster. Page 53 of the government estimates describes the status of women ministry as the ministry to promote "strategic policies and

solutions that improve women's economic security, address gender-based violence and support diversity and inclusion." So, broadly speaking, the status of women should be promoting women's rights and advancements across all ministries. The spend went from just over \$6 million to \$19 million, but not much other information has been provided. I'm hoping that I could get a breakdown to let us know what that funding is and what it goes towards. It's a very small spend of \$19 million. The key of your mandate of the status of women is to promote economic security, so I'm also wanting to know what you are doing to advocate across the ministries to support women.

Alberta is currently developing a 10-year strategic plan to end gender-based violence. Unfortunately, right now we are currently the fourth-highest rate of police-reported sexual assault and the fifth-highest rate of police-reported intimate partner violence causing bodily harm or death. Page 26 of the business plan shows performance measure 2(b). I'm wondering: how are we working to end violence against women? What specific steps are being taken? The Alberta government is to receive \$54 million in federal funding to develop and deploy a 10-year plan to end gender-based violence here in Alberta. How is this funding reflected in the budget, and how are you allocating it to address gender-based violence? I was hoping to know which line item it is under. How are we tracking the efficacy of the spend from this grant? Based on the national action plan, how are we earmarking funds to stabilize the sector as well?

Does ensuring women's shelters are adequately staffed not also play into this? Women's shelters are essential spaces to preventing the revictimization of women and stopping domestic violence in its tracks. These shelters need to have staff to run, yet staff, who are predominantly women, are not making wages that allow them to live in Alberta. Is funding for women's shelters as well as shelter staff going to be increased?

I'd also like to know what you are doing to advocate for more funding within your own ministry to address gender-based violence. The Alberta Council of Women's Shelters has been actively calling on the government to better fund women's shelters and has stated that they need an additional \$10 million a year. Just today it was announced that the government would be providing \$10 million over four years, with the largest amount coming in its current fiscal year and decreasing going forward. However, you know, as the critic for status of women I'm concerned about the priorities of this government.

7:40

I've asked the government repeatedly to increase investment into women's shelters, gender-based violence training, and providing resources for women in dangerous situations, yet this money has never been available. I'm wondering if the minister could explain why this government can find an extra \$11 million annually for sports but continues to dole out pennies when it comes to protecting women. Does the minister feel that this is the best use of money? 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 with a violent partner, they can die as a result. Can the minister explain why funding stadiums and athletes is a priority over that of the safety of the women . . .

The Chair: Just to try to help you navigate through that, just so you understand, the ministers can't comment on the other ministries, so they may not be able to answer your question. Just to guide you through it, just to make sure that we can keep our sticks on the ice, when some of those comments come up, just so you know, they may not be able to answer it. If you can tie it back to the specific

budgets, it works. But a contrast and comparator between the two might be getting towards that edge, just to help you out there.

Ms Hayter: Okay. I'm just hoping that we could discuss, I guess, the advocacy, when she's at the cabinet table, on how we're prioritizing the safety of women in our government. Something that doesn't seem to be coming up within the ministry is – I'm wondering, like, women within sport seem to be neglected and face gender-based obstacles. These range from lack of funding and accessibility, compared to our male sports and athletes, to gender-based violence and sexual assault of women in sports.

Additionally, considering that Hockey Canada has recently been involved with the cover-up on gender-based violence and sexual assault of five of its athletes, who have been arrested and charged with sexual assault in London, Ontario, I'm wondering what amount, if any, is going towards protecting our own women in sports and supporting women who are experiencing gender-based violence in athletics. What steps are being taken to address the culture that sports breed in regard to violence against women?

Alberta's government has given out their first year of spending so far to Advanced Education to help stop campus sexual violence; public safety to help stop human trafficking; Indigenous Relations to support the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls work group recommendations; Justice for provincial court sexual assault awareness training; and Seniors, Community and Social Services to help stop elder abuse. I'm hoping that I could get a breakdown of the funding for each of those lines.

Page 53 of the government estimates says the status of women ministry "promotes strategic policies and solutions that improve women's economic security." I have been calling on the government to provide universal access to free prescription contraception in Alberta that would ensure that women would have more control over their lives and their economic future. This policy would improve the health of children and mothers. It strengthens Alberta's families and makes life more affordable for everyday Albertans, and it saves the government some money. With this, you know, research, the cost of universal access to free prescription contraception in Alberta is estimated to cost less than \$35 million in the first year. We would expect cost neutrality at year 2, \$4.5 million cost savings after year 3, and \$24 million cost savings in year 4. Studies have shown that every \$1 invested in universal access to free prescription contraception can result in \$4 to \$7 saved in direct health costs and up to \$9 in savings in the public sector overall. Simply put, the cost of providing free prescription contraception is considerably lower than the cost of unintended pregnancies.

While we're in the middle of an affordability crisis, with the rising costs of our rent and our groceries, birth control shouldn't be a luxury item. With the ability to effectively time pregnancies, people could better provide for things like food, education, and housing for their children. Children who are planned for have a better health and social outcome than those who are unplanned, and this contributes to a better overall health but also economic outcome for women and all other individuals. The time has come for the government of Alberta to invest in women's participation in the economy. I'm wondering if we would relook at doing universal access to free prescription contraception. I don't think that this actually should be a partisan issue; it's a human one. I'm wanting to know what is going on with the ministry to advocate to the government on how we're going to assist women with the call of universal prescription contraception to participate in Alberta's economy.

My next set of questions is going on to metrics. I'm wondering: how many FTEs are there in status of women? What are the duties

of the FTEs, and what role are they playing? The metrics in the business plan to measure success for the status of women are incredibly narrow. They are only violence and STEM. Is ensuring women have access to health care not critical to the status of women? Is ensuring women have the most advanced cancer screening options available to prevent catastrophic diagnosis not critical to the status of women? Is ensuring women's participation in sport not also essential? How are these two metrics decided on to be the only measures? I see so many ways in which women could be empowered through this ministry, yet only two metrics exist to be measured. How well is the government doing, and why are these metrics so narrow?

How is the ministry prioritizing women in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics? Are you working with other ministers? Where can Albertans access public information to see the progress? Page 25 of the ministry business plan shows the performance indicator of women's postsecondary enrolment in STEM remaining at 14 per cent. How much of your budget is designated to growing this number? What are you doing to increase women's participation?

Recently in the House you announced that you had provided \$13 million to Women Building Futures to help women enter the transportation and trade sector. This is a great step forward to assisting women to get into the workforce, but what plans do you have to support these women in staying in these sectors? I understand that you have continued with the women in STEM and Persons Case scholarships. How much of the budget goes to this? How are you supporting Indigenous women entrepreneurs? How are you supporting the Calgary Immigrant Women's Association?

The Chair: Right to the wire. You did good. Usually I call the second part the rapid fire, but I think we might have to move it up with this one.

Minister, over to you.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the member for those questions. Again, I'll maybe speak at some higher level points and then delve into a bit more detail. What's interesting about having the status of women portfolio is that it does touch on and overlap with all ministries across government because women are part of all ministries in government. I deal a lot with all of my colleagues, and I think that in January and February I had done round-tables with all the relevant stakeholder groups in my ministry, women's economic participation being one of the round-tables that we did, and certainly that was a common theme that came up, you know, to promote women and make sure that we're removing barriers and helping their economic participation, how it touches on so many different ministries. I'm happy to touch on some of those at a high level. More detailed questions as might relate to, say, the sports ministry, for example, would perhaps be better delved into with the Minister of Tourism and Sport, but I do have some comments that I'd like to make on that.

I am a proponent of getting to girls when they're young. The member talked about STEM – science, technology, engineering, mathematics – and I couldn't agree with her more, but sometimes I think – not I think; we know – that even by junior high or high school it's too late. If they haven't sparked that interest with them at a young age, sometimes by junior high or high school it's too late. I think the importance of introducing women to those fields – even if they don't end up choosing them, it's fine. My dad was a carpenter. I didn't end up becoming a carpenter, but I was exposed to it at a young age, and, you know, I know how to fix things around the house. Even if they don't go into science, technology, engineering, and math, I want that to be because they were exposed

to it and decided it wasn't for them, not because, in the absence of information or being exposed to it, they felt it wasn't for them. I want to make sure that our government is continuing to work with that, and again that's the overlap with other ministries. That would be working with the Minister of Education in terms of: what sort of programs do we offer in schools around that?

I apologize if I'm not going in the order of the member's questions, but she brought up good points about sports and girls in sports. There are stats that show – and I should have it in front of me – the percentage of CEOs and presidents of companies that are women and how many of them played sports when they were younger. It's astounding. I should get the exact number, but it's 80, 90 per cent of them, something like that, who played sports.

7:50

An example of where my ministry would maybe tie into sports and gender-based violence would be funding that we provided to a program a while ago called Be the Voice, which was a program that aims to target bullying and harassment through athletes coaching and mentoring other athletes, because, yes, it can sometimes be more prevalent in certain areas. That was something that our government was proud to fund, the Be the Voice program, which, again, has athletes coaching and teaching other junior athletes in sports about bullying and harassment, which I think covers many goals. It addresses gender-based violence and harassment. It creates a safer environment for girls in sports. Again, I think it's important, just like with STEM – I'm jumping all over the place – but with sports, that girls have to be exposed to it early, and there have to be opportunities for them in it early.

The Persons Case scholarship, the women in STEM scholarship: yes, it's very important to continue to support those.

I'd like to move to – the member was asking about gender-based violence. Yes, our government is proud that we are working to develop a 10-year strategy on the national action plan to end gender-based violence – survivor-centric, supporting survivors – but making it a plan tailored to Alberta's needs and a made-in-Alberta action plan. It's about enhancing the existing work that's being done but identifying gaps as well, identifying root causes. Again, the stats that the member quoted are correct, and it's not acceptable to have those rates of violence in this province. The engagements that are under way and will continue will include with community organizations, Indigenous people, 2SLGBTQIA-plus community members, refugees, immigrants, rural and remote areas, engaging men and boys and, most importantly, engaging survivors. The important work that CIWA, the Calgary Immigrant Women's Association, does cannot be overstated.

The Women Building Futures announcement: I recently partnered with the Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors on the important work that they do in terms of getting women, in that particular case, into the underrepresented field of trucking and transportation. Some of the stories that the women told there were so inspiring, serious things from “Well, I was told that was for men; I couldn't do it” to “Well, I didn't think I could do it because I didn't think that I could reach the gas pedal.” Well, yes, you can reach the gas pedal.

Women's shelters. Just this morning I was with the Minister of Children and Family Services announcing that funding, which is important. I was there with Jan Reimer, who does such important work. I just want to comment on my own experience as a status of women minister in touring many women's shelters. It's tough. It just makes you realize how fortunate you are. For me, it's the children. Touring some of those shelters with the little kids that are there in daycare and just seeing the variety, from the ones that are just thriving and full of life because they've been removed from

such a difficult environment – I still see their faces at night – to, you know, the ones that still have very kind of vacant and shell-shocked looks on their faces because of what they've been through. That's why, taking it back to our gender-based violence strategy that we're working on, I think that part of engaging men and boys and focusing on prevention and breaking the cycle is so important, because the survivors don't deserve this. But, oh, my gosh, the children, who are just innocent victims in this, don't deserve it. I agree with the member about the importance of women's shelters and the life-saving work they do. I will continue to engage with them and get their feedback.

With respect to some of the more specific questions on the gender-based violence funding, just to give you a little bit of a breakdown of where the year 1 federal money went, the initial \$6.9 million from the bilateral agreement is being spent on reinforcing existing work already under way across the province, supporting survivors, identifying new gender-based violence prevention opportunities, supporting awareness and education initiatives, and amplifying best practices in Indigenous-led services. An example would be the funding to support Advanced Education to help stop campus sexual violence; Public Safety and Emergency Services to enhance awareness of Clare's law; Indigenous Relations to support the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls working group recommendations to explore the criminal and family court link in relation to gender-based violence; and Seniors, Community and Social Services to help stop elder abuse.

A portion of the funding is also being used to develop the 10-year strategic plan to map existing programs and services in an effort to identify gaps. Again, it's about identifying gaps and enhancing existing services. We'll be engaging with more than 600 stakeholders through the process, with more than 170 hours of planned engagement.

In addition to the funding from my ministry, I'm very proud of the work being done in all ministries for women. As I touched on it, it does touch literally every ministry. Just today you referenced, I referenced the minister of children's services when they announced the \$10 million to support women's shelters and the life-saving work that they do.

You mentioned about birth control. We have coverage for many contraceptive drug and health products. It's provided to Albertans who are enrolled in government-sponsored drug and supplemental health benefit plans. Oral contraceptives, injectable contraceptives, intrauterine devices, and other support for women in their reproductive health care choices are included in the supplemental health benefits.

I just want to share a story, too, about the United Way's Period Promise. Our government supported the United Way's Period Promise campaign to dispense free menstrual products to students in 50 select schools in vulnerable areas, including rural, urban, and First Nations schools across the province. The campaign also included a targeted educational campaign to promote menstrual health and address destigmatization of women and girls' health concerns, targeting schools, workplaces, communities, and community organizations.

With respect to FTEs, as we know, status of women develops policies and programs that improve women's economic security, address gender-based violence, as we talked about, and support diversity and inclusion. They're also responsible for planning and delivering key ... [Ms Fir's speaking time expired] Twenty-one FTEs.

The Chair: Right to the wire.

The Official Opposition. MLA Tejada. Did I say that correctly?

Member Tejada: Tejada.

The Chair: Tejada. Oh, there you go. I'm absolutely brutal at it, so thank you.

Again, just ask if it's shared or block.

Member Tejada: Thank you. To the minister: would you like to do block or shared?

Ms Fir: Block, please.

Member Tejada: Okay. All right. Thank you so much for taking our questions and answering with so much detail. I feel like every estimates I'm learning more and more.

I just wanted to refer to outcome 2, which is on page 25, that "all Albertans have the opportunity to enjoy and benefit from vibrant, inclusive and active communities to enrich their lives." Under objective 2.5 on page 26 one of the measures noted is to continue to engage with and support members of the 2SLGBTQIA community. Would you be able to provide, through the chair, some detail as to what that engagement and support can be defined as for this ministry?

Member Ceci: It's block.

Member Tejada: Oh, sorry. It's the first time.

The Chair: You have 20 minutes. No worries. You've got lots of time. Just take your time. You're good.

Member Tejada: Thank you so much.

Okay. In particular, is there a listing of 2SLGBTQIA organizations in Alberta that this ministry has engaged with, and what does that engagement look like? Is there data collection? Are there regular meetings? Are there deliverables? Are there documents at the end of those engagements in terms of what-we-heard documents? What does that ongoing engagement look like with the 2SLGBTQIA organizations, and how is it reflected in the current budget? I just was looking through many of the documents, including that I was looking through the estimates and then looking at the business plan, and I wasn't able to get a read on what those numbers would look like.

On page 25 we also look at gender-based violence. I know that my colleague MLA Hayter had mentioned that before. Specifically, though, when I'm looking at page 25 in comparison with previous estimates documents, in our previous business plans – for example, from 2022 – it was to

work with federal, provincial and territorial colleagues to develop a 10-year National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence, including an implementation plan for the Government of Alberta, to prevent and address sexual and family violence, violence against Indigenous women and girls and the 2SLGBTQIA+ community.

8:00

What I am noticing on page 25 of this business plan is that the mention of Indigenous women and girls and the 2SLGBTQIA community has actually been removed from that section of gender-based violence. I know that you had explained that, through some of the various things that you're doing, there's still work being done on that end, but one of my questions is: why was the mention removed specifically from that actionable on gender-based violence? The national action plan has also been removed in mention. I know that you had said that there was talk of an Alberta-based plan, but the national plan actually does mention Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQIA communities in the effort to end gender-based violence. So I guess my other question would be: are they still included within that general plan to end gender-based violence?

Then moving on to page 26 of the business plan, under 2.5, if I look at the business plan – I'm just going to take a look at the listing here under 2.5 – one of the initiatives is to continue to support and engage with members of the 2SLGBTQIA community. I would like to ask: what support is specifically being given to those 2SLGBTQIA organizations, especially given the rise of hate crimes against this vulnerable group of people? I know from the antiracism and the diversity parts of my file that two councils had been created to address hate and barriers to access for racialized people; that's economic and in terms of the violence they might face. So one of my questions would be: are there any plans to create a similar council for 2SLGBTQIA folks given that increase in hate crimes and the rise of antineer rhetoric?

On page 26 of the business plan, still looking at outcome 2, we've included a performance indicator that looks at the rate of police-reported intimate partner violence as reported by Alberta women. In terms of the 2SLGBTQIA community, reflecting on the fact that they were previously included in the gender-based violence plan and are now not listed under that same line item, will this ministry be looking at a metric on how we measure the safety of 2SLGBTQIA Albertans? I ask this question specifically today as I was honoured to attend two-spirit awareness celebration day, as it's been proclaimed today by the city of Edmonton. One of the questions that also came up there, that still relates to this safety item on page 25 of the business plan, is: are there any plans to create shelters specifically for 2SLGBTQIA folks as they have very specific needs in terms of safety, in terms of culturally competent care?

The next question I have is from page 54 of the estimates. I see, through the chair, that \$30.1 million in funding is going to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. One of my questions is, which relates to my antiracism file as well and the 2SLGBTQIA parts of my file: is there a portion of any of these funds through the Alberta Foundation for the Arts that is earmarked for 2SLGBTQIA organizations or BIPOC organizations to ensure that equitable access and representation of the Alberta story, especially for those groups that have been proven to have less access to capital for such projects?

Moving on to page 23 of the business plan, one of the things that I've also noted in just the general government strategic plan is, you know, something I was very heartened to read and to learn more about this year, which was the Alberta Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) Roadmap. I'm just going to quote what's in the road map but also in our strategic plan for government, which is the express goal to "guide government action through the years to come as we work [on] reducing violence and increasing safety and economic security for Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ people." Through the chair, can the minister inform Albertans on how this road map is being used across government ministries and, specifically, if it's being used to guide this ministry in terms of its ongoing initiatives and grants? And can you tell us how it's being implemented or referenced in activities across the ministry?

I already asked my question about the two-spirit awareness day. Okay.

If I look at the statement of operations on page 27 of the business plan, to the minister through the chair, what I'm looking at: for revenue I see that there are transfers from the government of Canada in roughly the amount of \$42 million. Would you be able to specify what these transfers have been earmarked for and for which initiatives they'll be used? I know that there was some reference to grants earlier, and I'm not sure if that's the full amount or how else that gets broken down. I wasn't able to find a lot of detail in the documents.

Now, if I can move on to page 23 of the business plan, in reference to the Francophone Secretariat. I won't be asking my question in French, as my colleague Marie Renaud likes to do, because my French just isn't that great. So in terms of . . .

What's that?

Ms Hayter: You've got one minute, 44 seconds.

Member Tejada: Okay.

. . . the secretariat I see that there's an increase of spending here of about \$1.7 million. I'm just wondering if you can clarify what that increase is for and if any of the funds allocated are specifically servicing racialized communities. I've had several stakeholder engagements now with members of the Afro-Caribbean communities that are French speakers, and one of the challenges that they face right now, especially as they have a growing senior population, is to be able to provide those culturally competent services to their senior population. So I was just wondering if there's anything earmarked for that.

Ms Hayter: Two seconds.

Member Tejada: Okay. I had one more left.

The Chair: It's like that game as a kid where the timer is going and it pops.

Member Tejada: I know. I know. I was, like, starting to get nervous.

The Chair: But great job, Member, especially for the new members and, you know, my colleagues as well. This is, yeah, a perfect pace. Just take your time. We'll work our way through it.

Minister, back over to you.

Ms Fir: Thank you to the member for those questions. Ten minutes goes really fast. Let me again touch on some high-level items first. With the 2SLGBTQQIA-plus community, just to list some of the engagements I've done – I certainly will go into more detail – as I mentioned in my opening comments, I had the opportunity to participate in Central Alberta Pride, Calgary Pride, Edmonton Pride. Looking forward to doing those again in the upcoming months.

The round-tables that I referenced earlier that we had. That was across all areas of my ministry: francophone, film and television, women's economic participation, arts and artists. With the LGBTQ community, actually, I did three separate round-tables – one for Calgary, one for Edmonton, one for rural areas as well – just to try to, with as many stakeholders and members of the community as possible, hear as many opinions and feedback as possible. One of the interesting attendees – forgive me; I'm forgetting his name – is an adviser or a partner to the Calgary Police Service in providing training and coaching around making sure members of the Calgary Police Service have the skills and knowledge they need in dealing with members of the community.

I think I had mentioned that, as an example, in the last two years there has been over \$290,000 provided in CIP, or community initiatives program, funding to 2SLGBTQQIA-plus organizations. We look forward and encourage members of those organizations to continue to apply to our CIP funding grant stream.

8:10

There are also the Stars of Alberta awards. We do those every year. Recently a breaking barriers category was introduced for the Stars of Alberta award, which specifically focuses and highlights

on advocates in the community who advocate and promote for inclusion. So that was great.

We also have a dedicated staffer in the Premier's office – I think it's one of the first-of-its-kind type of positions – who also works with the 2SLGBTQQIA-plus community.

Hopping over to gender-based violence for a moment, yes, we know that members of the 2SLGBTQQIA-plus community and Indigenous folks, unfortunately, do face those higher rates of violence. When I was mentioning the stakeholder engagements that we're doing and the wide range of groups, absolutely – I just want to reiterate again – those stakeholders and those participants will include the Indigenous community and members of the 2SLGBTQQIA-plus community.

I meant to mention earlier to the previous member's question: the work that we're doing around gender-based violence is complementing the work already under way through the Premier's Council on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and the human trafficking action plan.

The Alberta Foundation for the Arts: the mandate letter that I've provided to them makes clear my expectation that there be a focus on representing a diversity, a range of artists. I have not mandated a specific amount or percentage that goes to certain groups or categories, but it has been made clear that representing a diverse range of Alberta artists is an expectation.

The French secretariat: I'm pleased to see that increased funding as well to work on the French policy implementation, to offer increased services in French and happy to be working with my colleague the Minister of Technology and Innovation, who was appointed the francophone community liaison, which allows us to have two ministers that are working with our amazing francophone community.

Just to touch on a little bit more to the member's questions around promoting equity, diversity, and inclusion, in 2023 the Alberta Foundation for the Arts provided grants to 14 organizations to promote equity, diversity, and inclusion through art. One example is Calgary-based Trickster Theatre, which created new positions for emerging Indigenous artists to be trained and mentored within the organization. Founder and producing director David Chantler said of the project, quote: Trickster Theatre works in Indigenous communities all over Alberta, and the funding provided to our emerging Indigenous artists program enabled us to bring a more culturally relevant team of artists to those projects.

A little bit more around engagement, going back to your question, with the 2SLGBTQQIA-plus community. Our community grant program has provided support to several 2SLGBTQQIA-plus organizations, including Calgary Pride and the Grande Prairie Pride Society. Our government raises the rainbow flag in recognition of pride at the Legislature Grounds and at McDougall Centre every year. Our government recognizes Transgender Day of Remembrance on November 20, a day to memorialize those who have been murdered because of transphobia and to bring attention to the ongoing violence directed against the transgender community. We recognize March 31 as Transgender Day of Visibility, and we recognize May 17 as International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia.

With respect to budget components my mandate letter clearly indicates the importance of the 2SLGBTQQIA-plus community to this government. I'm working with and supporting people in the 2SLGBTQQIA-plus communities to make sure that we're building safe communities through our community grant programs, and we'll be ensuring the specific issues facing the community are addressed in our 10-year strategy to end gender-based violence.

With respect to women as it relates to this, while we know that intimate partner violence impacts women and girls the most, as I mentioned a few moments ago, there are many other groups who we know that are at higher risk of violence such as those in the 2SLGBTQIA-plus community.

With the 10-year strategy we're engaging with gender-based violence leaders, survivors, municipalities, community organizations, Indigenous communities, academics, and other gender-based violence partners from across the province to hear their thoughts on how to end gender-based violence. Over 600 stakeholders and community members have been identified to take part in the engagements, and the extensive engagement will ensure the strategy reflects the input of all Albertans, again, including Indigenous populations, racialized populations, seniors, those in rural and remote areas, and 2SLGBTQIA-plus people. We want the strategy to be informed by Albertans, including the people and organizations throughout the province who are working to address this critical issue. We also had an online public survey that was available to all Albertans, and we had more than 1,100 responses. I'm also working with my cabinet colleagues to ensure a government-wide . . .

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Now we're over to the government caucus. MLA de Jonge, it's a 20-minute block, with no more than 10 minutes speaking at a time, and up to you to ask the minister whether it's combined or block.

Ms de Jonge: Thank you very much, Chair and through you to the minister for being here tonight. Would you like to have a dialogue or block time?

Ms Fir: We can go back and forth.

Ms de Jonge: Okay. Awesome. Just to start off here, I want to talk a bit about women in STEM, Minister. I know you've been doing incredible work on this front. As Alberta's economy continues to flourish and grow, it's extremely important that Alberta's government continues to build on its successes, attracting investments, building partnerships, and creating new opportunities for all Alberta sectors. Key objective 1.3 on page 24 of the business plan 2024-27 states the intent to "support women's participation in [the Alberta] economy, including continued support of women pursuing careers in fields like science, technology, engineering and mathematics." Ensuring women have equal opportunities to not only participate and compete in our economy but also to pursue the foundational education that supports their future careers is of utmost importance.

I have a few questions for you, through the chair, in this regard. Minister, how are you advocating for women's participation in Alberta's economy, and can you highlight the key initiatives or programs that the ministry has implemented to support women's participation in the Alberta economy? As well, looking to performance metric 1(d), the number of women in STEM is increasing year after year. What factors is your ministry monitoring in this growth? Will you adjust the funding to those scholarships to fund even more opportunities for women in STEM? Finally, how will your ministry work to ensure that the participation rate continues to increase in the future?

Ms Fir: Well, thank you, Member, for those questions and for recognizing the crucial contribution of women in shaping the upcoming chapter of Alberta's story. My ministry actively solicits input from stakeholders about how we can continue to support women's economic development and enhance opportunities for women. I referenced previously, to the member's questions, that back in January I hosted a round-table discussion with an incredible

group of women from around the province on this very topic, and stakeholders highlighted many ways that our government could enhance women's economic development, including providing education opportunities for women. I shared what I heard through these valuable discussions with my cabinet colleagues.

As I was mentioning earlier, the status of women impacts all ministries, and I want to make sure that these important contributions are reflected in our policy and our programming. Last month I was pleased to support Minister Dreesen in announcing \$2.8 million to Women Building Futures to help more women train for jobs as professional drivers and commercial trucking, in areas that they are traditionally underrepresented in, which is a win-win in terms of how it benefits them but also addresses a labour shortage. Alberta Education and Advanced Education also support Women Building Futures in their efforts to promote educational opportunities for young female students. The Ministry of Jobs, Economy and Trade provided \$5 million to Elevate Aviation last year to increase the number of training seats for women in our growing aviation sector.

8:20

In response to your question about what programs the ministry has in place to support women, a good example is the women in STEM scholarship. Budget 2024 includes \$125,000 for the scholarship, which will support 50 students, with \$2,500 to go towards their studies. Since it launched in 2021, we've supported about 500 students through this program. I also mentioned earlier that we have the Persons Case scholarship, which supports students studying in the arts, humanities, and social sciences fields whose work advances gender equality. Again, Budget 2024 continues to support this scholarship as well, with \$100,000 to support about 40 students.

Further on women in STEM, the scholarships are important because while women make up about half of Alberta's population, they represent only a third of enrolments in STEM programs and about one-quarter of employees in STEM fields. The number of women enrolling in postsecondary STEM programs has continued to increase, but proportionally it has remained at 14 per cent of all women's postsecondary enrolments. That's why we track this performance metric. As you know, it's a priority for me to ensure that that number increases.

Ms de Jonge: Thank you so much, Minister, through the chair. I hope you're able to hear me all right. My voice is a bit raspy.

You talked about the women in STEM scholarships and the Persons Case scholarships. Minister, are you able to shed some light on what the eligibility is for those scholarships? How can women in Alberta apply for them?

Ms Fir: Yeah. And I can hear you just fine. My voice is raspy all the time, too.

The eligibility is very straightforward. For both the scholarships you just simply need to be a Canadian citizen and an Alberta resident studying at an Alberta postsecondary institution. The application forms are available online at alberta.ca.

Ms de Jonge: Awesome. Thank you very much, Minister, through the chair.

In key objective 2.4 your ministry outlines that it is developing a 10-year strategic plan to end gender-based violence and support survivors. This is a very serious and important strategic plan, and it requires collaboration not just between government ministries but also with community organizations that help women and families who are survivors of gender-based violence. Can you outline the collaborative approach that your ministry will take to develop this strategic plan? I know you've already touched on this, but maybe

you can expand on that. As well, page 85 of the fiscal plan states that there is \$47 million over the next three years to support the development of the strategy. Can you explain what specifically will be funded by this three-year commitment?

Ms Fir: Certainly. With respect to the approach that we're taking on the 10-year strategy to support survivors, I want the strategy to be informed by Albertans, including the people and organizations throughout the province who are working to address this issue. I've had the honour and the privilege of meeting with many of them already and wish to and will meet with many more. The work they do is inspiring. It's life changing. It's literally saving lives. As I mentioned, we're going to be meeting with more than 600 stakeholders and community members as part of our ongoing engagement because it's going to require the full attention of all of us.

As part of the work to end gender-based violence, the Premier mandated me to negotiate a funding agreement with the federal government, and we were pleased to complete that funding agreement as one of my earliest mandate deliverables, negotiating \$54 million in support from the federal government towards our goal. The \$47 million in Budget 2024 is years 2 to 4 of that funding.

Ms de Jonge: Thank you.

I see that performance metric 2(b) measures the rate of police-reported intimate partner violence for Alberta women. Can you explain the data in this metric and place it in the context of where Alberta's rate of police-reported violence is at in relation to the rest of the country? While the 10-year strategic plan to end gender-based violence is under development, I'm hoping you can speak to some of the current programs, supports, and strategies that work to target gender-based violence and to support survivors.

Ms Fir: Yeah. The strategy will help us address all types of gender-based violence, including intimate partner violence. From some of the stats that were quoted earlier, Alberta has the fifth-highest per capita rate of police-reported intimate partner violence in the country. We need to change that, and we will. We will. In addition to the strategy, my ministry is already working with partners across government to take action. To give you an example, we're working with Advanced Education to help address campus sexual violence, with Public Safety and Emergency Services to help address human trafficking, and with Indigenous Relations to support the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls working group recommendations.

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, through the chair, to the minister for your answer.

Alberta is a very large province in terms of land mass, and in addition to urban centres, we're comprised of many rural and remote communities like the ones in my constituency of Chestermere-Strathmore. Albertans that reside in rural and remote communities in the province may not have immediate access to health care providers and counsellors like those available in larger urban centres. Sexual violence is, as you've spoken about, one of the most underreported crimes in Canada; 95 per cent of sexual violence survivors do not report their assaults to the police. Every person who has been sexually assaulted deserves access to care and forensic evidence collection regardless of where they live.

Minister, key objective 2.4 on page 25 of the business plan states the intent to develop that 10-year strategic plan to end gender-based violence that we spoke about earlier. Can you provide details on the work your ministry has done for rural and remote community sexual assault survivors, and can you highlight some of the other ways that Budget 2024 or the work of your ministry has undertaken

to end gender-based violence and support survivors in these communities?

Ms Fir: Yeah. How we're supporting survivors in rural areas is really important. Budget 2023 allocated \$1 million to my ministry to develop a new training course in partnership with Northwestern Polytechnic to give health care professionals in rural communities the skills they need to collect forensic evidence and care for individuals who have experienced a recent sexual assault. That funding continues in Budget 2024. I had the opportunity to be part of that rollout in my previous position as parliamentary secretary for the status of women.

To hear some of the stories of the trauma and devastation of being sexually assaulted is horrible enough, but then to be in a rural or remote community, where you don't have access to proper medical care or a proper sexual assault kit and have to make that difficult decision of, "Do you forgo that, or do you travel potentially hours in a vehicle to get to the nearest centre where you can get that when you've already been through one of the most unimaginable experiences?" – for us to be able to provide this training to those medical professionals that work in those rural communities: it can't be stated enough how important that is for survivors of sexual assault to have that option available to them to receive that treatment and medical care where they live.

We've also allocated funding to support survivors in every corner of the province. For example, we provided \$260,000 to the Alberta Native Friendship Centres Association last year to develop specialized culturally sensitive supports for sexual assault survivors, and we invested \$300,000 in collaboration with the project led by YWCA Edmonton, YWCA Banff, and the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters to expand delivery of remote counselling services in rural women's shelters.

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Minister, through the chair.

Switching the topic now to the film and television sector, with the recent success of – and this is just to name a few – HBO's *The Last of Us*, which I'm a huge fan of; the Emmy award winning *Fraggle Rock: Back to the Rock*; FX's *Fargo*, season 5; and Netflix's *My Life with the Walter Boys*, season 1, these productions have shown to the world that Alberta is such an incredible destination for filming, a testament that Alberta is capable of successful productions regardless of its production size. I believe that we won an award for filming locations at the Cannes Film Festival in France recently.

8:30

Budget 2024 maintains funding of approximately \$16 million to Alberta's cultural industries. I have a few questions here. I'm hoping you're able to expand on how this funding will support Alberta's cultural industries. Maybe you can also speak to how your ministry is supporting a clearly growing and thriving cultural industry sector. How does this impact the Alberta economy?

Also, under initiatives supporting key objectives the Alberta-made screen industries program is providing \$5.4 million – that's up from \$1.4 million from last year – to eligible Alberta-made film productions in 2024-25. Can you speak to the eligibility of this program, how filmmakers can apply to that, and how this program will attract investment into Alberta's film and television industry?

Ms Fir: You're absolutely correct. Film and television production in Alberta is booming. Between 2020 and 2021 volume more than doubled over 2019, from \$260 million to \$560 million, and in that same period the number of people working in the industry more than tripled. Amazing for jobs, amazing for the economy and diversification of our province's economy. And nearly half of the

productions filmed in Alberta happened outside of Edmonton and Calgary. It's amazing to have those opportunities within our big cities, but that stat speaks volumes for what it does for rural and small towns in every corner of the province. I'm excited to report that our continued support in Budget 2024 – that boom will continue.

Within the \$16 million allocated to the cultural industries branch in my budget, \$8 million is for our Alberta media fund grants, and part of this program is the Alberta-made production grant, which supports Alberta film and television producers with smaller budget productions. And because a booming industry means we need to help develop the workforce, we added a training and mentorship incentive, which has been received so well, to encourage more on-set training, job shadowing, and mentorship. We also have grants to support our postproduction sector, including visual effects and digital animation, and Alberta writers, directors, and producers developing commercial-ready projects. While the grants my ministry provides support local productions and projects, through the Ministry of Jobs, Economy and Trade we also have the film and television tax credit, which is available for larger budget productions in Alberta, whether local or from elsewhere, making our province an even more competitive place to do business.

Investment in film and television and in all cultural industries creates jobs. According to Statistics Canada Alberta's cultural industries, including film, television, magazine, books, and music, contribute \$2.7 billion to Alberta's economy.

We actually have Mark Ham here, executive director of cultural industries. I would like to give him an opportunity to supplement my answers if that's okay.

Mr. Ham: Where do you want me?

The Chair: Just get to the podium, and then repeat and get your name back into the record, and you're good to go, sir.

Mr. Ham: My name is Mark Ham, executive director of cultural industries and Alberta's film commissioner. Yeah. Just to build on the minister's comments, she touched on the exceptional growth we're seeing. I think one of the big things that we're proud of is the growth of local content and the support that we're providing. The minister mentioned the Alberta-made screen industries program and the three subprograms that make up that overall program. We have our Alberta-made production grant. It's for Alberta-made projects under \$500,000, often the smaller projects just getting going, with the aspirational goal to get to access the tax credit, which is projects over \$500,000. We've seen a lot of success in that program and major uptake.

One of the biggest challenges we have in Alberta – and we're not alone – and in other jurisdictions is our crew depth. We need about 50 per cent more crew than we currently have based on a labour market study we recently did, so we're working towards that, as the minister mentioned, on our training mentorship incentive as part of that program, which has seen great uptake, and we're really optimistic about the growth there.

One of the key features of economic growth and development in the sector is Albertans developing their own IP, intellectual property, and we're helping and assisting with that through our project script development grant. That's helping writers, producers take their project to the next level. It was a hugely oversubscribed program until additional investment came in. We've added an intake, and we've quadrupled the number of applicants we've approved in this last year, which we're really excited about. The minister mentioned our postproduction grant. You know, these are

bricks-and-mortar shops in Alberta, high-tech jobs, hiring local grads. We're really excited about the growth there, too.

I think, you know, just overall this ecosystem feeds the larger service production sector. The minister mentioned a number of projects. Obviously, hugely proud of *The Last of Us*. [A timer sounded] Oh, sorry.

The Chair: You didn't touch anything. It's okay.

Mr. Ham: Did I break it?

The Chair: No, no; you didn't break it. It's all good.

With that, folks, I hate to interrupt. We are at that promised break point. Five minutes. We'll give that back to you. And if you're not back in five, we're going to start without you.

Thank you very much.

[The committee adjourned from 8:36 p.m. to 8:42 p.m.]

The Chair: Members, welcome back.

We are over to the lightning round or the rapid-fire round, as some have put it. It's going to be 10-minute blocks. Same thing: you can't cede your time, you can't speak more than five minutes on those, and, again, you just ask the minister for how you want to proceed going forward.

With that, over to the loyal opposition.

Member Ceci: I'm fine to work together.

The Chair: Okay. Member, I'm not sure what that means, if it's combined or if it's block.

Member Ceci: Oh, combined.

The Chair: Combined. Okay.

Ms Fir: I'd like to stick with block time.

The Chair: Okay. Away we go.

Member Ceci: Just to stay on the same question, I guess, film and TV, this question relates to the business plan, page 24 – there it is; page 24 – and it says, outcome 1, "Alberta's creative and cultural industries, heritage and non-profit sectors flourish, increasing investment, participation and growth." Key objective 1.1 also talks about growing Alberta's cultural industries, of which film, TV, and production are part of. Minister, you travelled to Los Angeles from January 10 to 12 of this year. I don't know if it was the Emmys, but it was something in Los Angeles. I believe you were required to complete and release an international travel report approximately two months after the trip. I recall doing this when I was travelling internationally to New York when I was Finance minister. My question is: Minister, have you submitted this report, and what was the cost of the trip to the taxpayers?

My next question is regarding business plan page 24, outcome 1 again, Alberta's creative and cultural industries, heritage and nonprofit sectors flourish, increasing investment, participation, and growth. Recently Netflix and IATSE 212 signed a three-year deal on worker travel time and other conditions related to being on the job before and after filming. Minister, what role, if any, did you play in this agreement being reached? Secondly, what impact will this agreement have for investment, participation, and growth of the film and TV industry in Alberta this year and beyond?

My next question is with regard to capital grants, 2.5 in the estimates on page 55. CFEP is flat this year again at \$50 million, but when you look at the capital plan on page 118 of the fiscal plan

2024-2027, we see that the last year target for CFEP is only half of the previous amount, and the half of it is \$25 million. Minister, can you explain this decrease when we know that these monies will assist nonprofit organizations with renewal, expansion, purchase, or build of public-use community facilities? It would seem that continuing to invest in those nonprofits for public-use facilities would be a good thing, but I see that the estimate for this year is \$50 million, target for next year is \$50 million, and then it drops to \$25 million. I just don't understand why that would be.

The next question is on page 55 again, 2.6, and that says, "Support for Culture Infrastructure." There's a decrease of approximately \$23 million estimated for this year to be invested in nonprofit organizations for the construction of community and cultural facilities. I'm just looking at it here. Support for culture infrastructure goes from \$45 million forecast for this past year to \$23 million. Minister, why is that drop there?

My next question is on page 55 again of estimates under capital grants, 2.7, investing in Canada infrastructure, community, culture, and recreation. The estimate for 2024-2025 is approximately \$10 million less than the previous year's forecast. Can the minister explain this reduction in federal funding and the almost \$8 million underexpenditure between last year's budget and the forecast till the end of March 31? So those are questions with regard to capital.

Then on page 118 of the fiscal plan again, the capital plan details, as you started to identify in your highlights in the 10 minutes in the beginning, under the heading Arts, Sports and Recreation I note three arts capital projects.

The Chair: It's the rapid-fire round.

Minister, back to you.

Ms Fir: Thanks to the member for those questions. Yes, I did have the opportunity to travel to L.A. in January. I did not co-ordinate it with that horrible cold snap we had, but there were many people mad at me for being in L.A. during the cold snap. I flew on a Wednesday, was there all day Thursday, came back on a Friday, and it was an incredible opportunity to meet face to face with so many studio executives and promote Alberta, all we have to offer, you know, from our low taxes to our skilled crews to our breathtaking landscapes. The face-to-face meetings are invaluable, and to have the opportunity to meet with that many people in such a condensed amount of time was incredible.

No, I did not attend the Emmys, but on the Thursday that I was there, in partnership with Alberta's film commissioner, the Canada Media Fund, and the Canadian consulate in L.A., we had the opportunity to promote Alberta as a top location to Hollywood producers and studio executives at a pre-Emmy event on January 11 and also had some one-on-one meetings, met with an HBO studio executive who talked about things like our film and television tax credit, which is through Jobs, Economy and Trade but what an absolute game changer that has been, and how it's put us in the major leagues. It's just an opportunity to promote not only all we have to offer but everything the film and television industry does to diversify our economy: what it means for jobs and investment, what it means for the boost of tourism, and the statistic that I quoted before, that for every \$1 of government support towards a production, the industry generates \$4 of investment back into the province, just an incredible ROI. Productions like *The Last of Us*, *Prey*, *My Life with the Walter Boys*, *Heartland*: what those do, again, for jobs, economy, investment but for tourism as well is quite incredible.

Trip cost. The event costs were shared between the Canadian consulate, Edmonton Screen Industries Office, Calgary Economic Development, and the Canada Media Fund. Alberta invested

\$18,000 to support the event. Mission expenses are posted on the travel and expense disclosure page on alberta.ca. The total cost of travel was \$7,500.

8:50

To touch on the member's question around the Netflix and IATSE 212 agreement: it's a three-year agreement with IATSE 212, which is a Calgary union, after months of negotiation, and it's great news. It brings stability to productions and motion picture crews in the region, and it is a strong signal that Netflix is looking to bring more productions to Alberta. Netflix plans to spend as much as 17 billion U.S. dollars on content this year, and we're excited to welcome some of that spending into Calgary. The agreement is a great example of, again, the industry's growing confidence in Alberta as a filming destination of choice. This is the first-of-its-kind deal that Netflix has signed with any Canadian union. It's a mutually beneficial agreement. It takes effect immediately. It's in force until 2027, and the agreement secures things that are unique to Calgary, like travel time and overtime structures for working in remote locations, solving a lot of issues that both sides wanted to address.

With respect to the member's questions around cultural infrastructure support for cultural infrastructure's budget varies significantly from year to year as our government completes funding commitments for previously announced projects. While other projects are added, cash flows are managed based on project requirements. To give an example, Budget 2024 awarded Arts Commons in Calgary \$103 million over seven years, and Winspear phase 3 was awarded \$12.8 million for three years starting next year. The total amount for projects included in 2024-25 is only \$0.6 million but over the span of the projects amounts to over \$115 million in new funding.

With respect to CFEP, the question around the community facility enhancement program funding, Budget 2023 provided a three-year strategic investment in community infrastructure to stimulate job creation.

The Chair: I apologize, Minister; your time is up.

It's over to the government caucus. MLA Cyr, you've caught my eye. Same rules of engagement. You'll have to ask, blah, blah, blah. We're into it. Away you go.

Mr. Cyr: Minister, through the chair, would you be okay with going back and forth?

Ms Fir: Yes.

Mr. Cyr: Okay. Thank you, Minister.

Minister, I'd like to start off with the fact that we had a welcome announcement in my constituency. One of them was a \$2 million grant from Minister Nixon for one of our local women's shelters, the Stepping Stone women's shelter. I'll tell you that for my local area, clearly, this was a huge help for helping women that are dealing with violence within the Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul region. This announcement, really, is adding a 50,000-square-foot four-storey building, and we're looking at 63 emergency shelter beds and, you know, another 12 second-stage beds. Like, this is something that I can see that our government is really moving forward and making that commitment that we need to show that women in my area can be protected. They're hoping to have that construction done by the end of 2024, and it would be great, when they're done, if you'd consider an invitation to come up and see that women's shelter because this is something that I believe is a real move forward, at least for the northeast region, Minister.

Now, moving on to my French language questions here. I had the privilege to participate in the cabane à sucre in Bonnyville. This is put on by the Bonnyville-Cold Lake ACFA. Yenny Lopez is the president. Christine St. Laurent is the regional director. You know, when it comes to our local French-speaking residents, we're one of the larger French-based residences in all of Alberta, up in my area. I take real pride in my own heritage being a French heritage. Unfortunately, I've since lost that language, but I will say for myself that I have been able to put my daughters in French immersion, and this is huge. And you know what? The fact that the schooling and the resources weren't around when I was a child to give me that opportunity today that we have – and this really gets into the crux of it, Minister, through the chair.

French really is the second most spoken language in Alberta. Furthermore, Alberta has the third-largest French-speaking population outside of Quebec, with more than 261,000 French-speaking Albertans; that is according to the recent Stats Canada study. Statistics Canada also predicts that from now to the year of 2036 our province is expecting to have one of Canada's fastest growing French language populations. Therefore, enhancing services in French to support the vitality of the Francophone community in Alberta is crucial.

That is why, Minister, my questions this evening are to focus specifically on page 27 of the ministry business plan, on expenses for the Francophone Secretariat. Minister, you've already touched on this, but can you please provide details on the funding to the Francophone Secretariat in the 2024 budget?

Ms Fir: Sure. Thank you, Member, for your opening comments. As I mentioned earlier, I've had the opportunity to tour several women's shelters, and I hope to have the opportunity to tour more of them in all corners of the province, so thank you for those comments.

Over to the Francophone Secretariat. I fully agree that supporting the vitality of our francophone community is very important in terms of what they add to the culture, the diversity, the economic vitality of this province, in terms of stakeholders that I've been able to meet with and events that I've been able to attend, especially during Francophonie Month. Their contributions to the province are immeasurable, and one of the important ways that we're going to continue to support that vitality is by increasing the number of government services we provide in French.

I've heard that at meetings, I've heard that at the francophone round-table that I did earlier this year, and that's why the Francophone Secretariat's budget is going from \$1.4 million in Budget 2023 to more than doubling to \$4 million in Budget 2024, if passed. The increase reflects our ongoing commitment to supporting Alberta's Francophonie and their important, as I mentioned, economic, cultural, social contributions to our province as well as our expectations for additional federal support, which I had mentioned earlier on this evening. The added investment will allow us to continue implementing our French policy across government.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you for that, Minister. That is a very thorough description of what the secretariat and you are doing right now and how you're enacting that.

You answered my second question, but my third question here is: Minister, what other ministries is your team working with, and what are some of the tangible examples of the secretariat's impact on Franco-Albertans' lives?

Ms Fir: Yeah. I'm very proud that we've made substantial progress over the last few years in implementing the French policy and adding more government services for French-speaking Albertans.

To share just a few examples, in Health the ministry has increased its funding to the Saint Thomas community health centre to deliver integrated services and interdisciplinary primary health care services in French. In Justice the ministry has enhanced French-speaking juror pools and removed the need to translate documents into English for court proceedings. The Court of King's Bench also ensures that signage and recordings explain linguistic rights within the judiciary system and that they're providing real-time interpretation at court counters and in courtrooms. And as it relates to economic development, several ministries have supported initiatives to bolster tourism experiences in French and continue to support French language employment services in communities across Alberta.

Alberta Education has established a French services branch, and as a government we're offering an increased number of communications and engagement products in French. We recently had an online survey, as an example, in support of the development of our 10-year strategy to end gender-based violence, which was available in French; we made sure, of course, that it was available in French. We're planning a specific engagement session in French with the gender-based violence sessions.

9:00

Mr. Cyr: Well, thank you again for that, Minister.

You know, it sounds like you're doing so much when it comes to your ministry, Minister. One of the important parts, especially for my community, is key objective 1.5, page 24, of the business plan, and I'm going to quote this: "Stand up for Albertans by advocating for equitable federal funding for Alberta's arts, culture and heritage sectors and increased federal funding for the provision of government services and programs in French." Now, I know that my colleagues across have touched on this, but I was wondering if you could be more specific on what it is that you're doing in advocating on our behalf with the federal government. You were saying that you're advocating to the federal government. What is it that you've been doing? Like, can you kind of run us through this? I know that my constituents would be very interested in that.

Ms Fir: Yeah, for sure. To implement Alberta's French policy to its full potential, we absolutely need the federal government to provide Franco-Albertans with their fair share of federal support through our bilateral cost-sharing funding agreement for services in French. I can assure you that after not years but decades of unfair federal funding I am advocating strongly for increased investment as part of ongoing negotiations, and we're optimistic about finalizing a new agreement soon.

Just to go into a little bit more detail, federal funding levels for Alberta have remained unchanged at \$650,000 per fiscal year since 2008 despite seeing considerable growth. You know, as we talked about, Alberta has the third-largest French-speaking population outside of Quebec, which I think surprises a lot of people, yet historically we received the second-lowest amount of federal funding under the Canada-Alberta agreement for French language services. To put that in context, in 2022 Prince Edward Island received \$1.4 million in federal funding for a francophone population of about 5,600 people, or a little more than \$250 per francophone. That same year Alberta received a total of \$650,000 in federal funding for a francophone population of 88,000. The math on that is about \$8 per francophone. So \$250 versus \$8.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Back over to members of the opposition. Member Ceci.

Member Ceci: Yeah. Thanks. On page 118, just going back to that question on the fiscal plan, capital plan details under the heading Arts, Sports and Recreation noted three capital projects listed in

addition to CFEP, which nonprofit arts organizations access. The three are the Arts Commons and Olympic Plaza transformation, the Glenbow revitalization, and the Winspear. Well, the Glenbow revitalization is showing completion in this budget. The Winspear, phase 3, would seem to be nearing completion. The Arts Commons and Olympic Plaza transformation, a project of several hundred million dollars, is just really kicking off.

Is the list on page 118 the only place where I'd find funding for large capital projects of a cultural nature that are nonprofit and separate from the GOA? With \$323 million projected to fund arts, sports, and recreation capital projects in this budget, my question is: why is only \$42 million of it for large cultural projects, and why aren't there any projects in medium and small urban centres in Alberta? Why are they left out of the capital funds? Are there other large cultural projects in the queue or that have been left unfunded? I think of your highlights. Again, a little earlier you talked about \$160 million for the next seven years in the capital plan, and then I heard \$107 million as well. I wouldn't mind getting some clarification on all those things when you have an opportunity.

In the business plan, page 26, performance measure 2(a), the percentage of Albertans attending and participating in arts events and activities, from a survey in 2022-2023 – when you read that metric, it includes, namely, attending events and activities, including performing arts and other kinds of things. That metric says that 70.3 per cent of adult Albertans attended these kinds of activities or events. Then targets for this year and the next year and the next year are going up 2 per cent, 1 per cent, and 2 per cent.

Minister, stakeholders that I've talked to say that this metric only provides limited information and is not indicative of the health of the arts sector. I'm wondering if in the future this metric could look more in-depth and parse out ways in which Albertans patronize the arts. For example, how many Albertans are subscribers to theatre seasons or folk clubs? Do they attend several different types of performing arts events per year? Do they donate to arts organizations? I'm wondering if you have any thoughts on improving that metric.

The next question has to do with the AFA again. In the government estimates, page 54, 4.2, assistance to the AFA, I did some quick calculations regarding the per capita spending of the new budget in this area. In 2023-2024, using about 4.756 million, Alberta's population, that per capita spend was \$5.49 in 2023-2024; now it's going to be \$6.23, then go up to \$7.04 and \$7.82 in your last out-year. For comparison, in 2009 it was \$13.25, using today's dollars when you inflate them, or \$9.53 in 2009 dollars. Crossjurisdictional comparisons with other provinces are still not extremely favourable for Alberta and for the arts sector. Does the minister have a goal in mind or a benchmark to reach for the arts per capita funding that would be necessary to ensure improved arts sector health?

Next, in the business plan on pages 24, 25, and 26 I noticed that the percentage of people visiting heritage facilities is now a performance metric for outcome 1, where it was previously measured in outcome 2. Why the change?

The next question is on the percentage of Albertans attending arts events. Performance measure 2(a) was not in the previous version. Why is it included in this business plan? Then key objective 2.1 includes the repatriation of Indigenous artifacts. That's fantastic. Can you expand on any early successes here and what, specifically, your ministry's role has been in this objective?

Lastly, key objective 2.3 mentions that the AFA is expected to prioritize Alberta artists, art, and culture but not arts organizations. Why leave out arts organizations from this prioritization list?

The Chair: Minister, back to you.

Ms Fir: Thank you for those questions. Just to start off with a couple of high-level comments with respect to the capital projects for the Winspear, phase 3, in Edmonton and Arts Commons, we're really pleased to support these projects. With respect to the Winspear it will contribute to a thriving arts and culture sector and to create vibrant communities. We're so excited about everything that phase 3 does. It's not only about adding a 550-seat venue, but it's about having more community gathering spaces, more music studios, more classrooms and educational opportunities, what it will do for bringing more locals to the area but also boosting tourism to the area, pre- and postconstruction jobs, revitalizing downtown. It's a win on so many levels, as is the Arts Commons investment as well. Even though the Winspear and Arts Commons are in the two major cities, they are for the entire province.

In terms of more funding in arts opportunities to reach rural areas, big and small, that's what the increase to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts funding will allow for. Again, in my mandate letter to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts not only did I direct a larger focus on diversity; I also have a specific note in the Alberta Foundation for the Arts mandate letter around supporting rural Alberta artists.

There was a mention of donating to arts organizations. You know, I'll just make a comment on that. When our economy thrives, donations thrive. A strong, booming economy drives everything, and it results directly in more donations from generous Albertans to arts organizations.

With respect to further elaboration on funding in recent years funding has gone to support some smaller centres. Just to give you some examples: the Badlands Amphitheater, Camp Chief Hector by Exshaw, and the McMurray Métis Cultural Centre.

9:10

Going back to the Arts Commons funding, they'll receive \$103 million over seven years. That's going to support its transformation project with an initial \$641,000 allocated in Budget 2024. This year's capital plan only shows \$7.8 million because the anticipated cash-flow needs for the large and complex project will be greater in future years. The project will include a new facility, modernization of the existing Arts Commons facilities, and transformation of Calgary's downtown Olympic Plaza. The total cost of the project is currently estimated at \$660 million, and it's anticipated to create more than 3,400 full-time construction jobs.

The member also talked about repatriation. Investment in repatriation initiatives is part of the Royal Alberta Museum budget line. The museum is leading our engagement work on repatriation right now. As part of that work, we continue to engage with an Indigenous advisory panel as well as First Nations leadership to ensure we have the right processes and policies for repatriation.

While that engagement is ongoing, we also have existing legislation and processes to ensure that objects can and are being repatriated. This has led to the successful repatriation of objects to the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation at their request, a co-stewardship agreement for the Manitou stone, and repatriation of sacred ceremonial objects to Blackfoot communities. I look forward to ongoing engagement with the Indigenous communities around repatriation going forward. In fact, the Manitou stone repatriation is so significant that we've been asked to speak about it at the upcoming FPT meeting in May.

Further on the Manitou stone, the Royal Alberta Museum has cared for it since 1972, and in September 2022 the government of Alberta and Indigenous representatives from the Manitou centre signed a co-stewardship agreement which initiates the repatriation of this important spiritual object to Indigenous care. The Manitou

centre is working toward the construction of a purpose-built centre for both ceremonial use by Indigenous peoples as well as educational opportunities for the public, and as part of the repatriation . . .

The Chair: Thanks, Minister.

Back over to the government caucus members.

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to ask the minister, through you, if she would be agreeable to back and forth in terms of the questions.

Ms Fir: Yes.

The Chair: Please proceed.

Mr. Stephan: That is delightful. Minister, I was interested, actually, in your final response to the question that my colleague asked about the disproportionate funding that we were receiving from the federal government to support Albertans who are francophone. You didn't get to finish your thought. I'd be interested in allowing you to do so and, in particular, in knowing what the federal government's response was given that we weren't getting a very fair per capita funding.

Ms Fir: I can tell you they very quickly reached out to my department, which indicated that they were looking at this quite seriously. Again, I have a federal-provincial-territorial meeting coming up with them as well. The federal minister is actually Minister Boissonnault, who is based in Alberta, so I would hope that he, too, would advocate for and promote increased federal funding for the francophone community and French services. Considering Canada's obligations and commitments to official language minority communities, as outlined in their own action plan on official languages, it's time for the federal government to finally acknowledge French-speaking Albertans and provide us our fair share of funding to support services in French.

Our government, through the French policy and Budget 2024, has shown that we're committed, we're listening, and we will continue to respond to the needs for services and supports for our French community.

Mr. Stephan: Thank you for that answer, Minister. I appreciate it when any minister in our government advocates for fair treatment from this particular federal government. Thank you for not asking for special treatment but just fair treatment. Thank you for that.

I want to turn to 1(b) on the business plan. This is a performance indicator in respect of the total expenditure of Alberta's registered charities. Very substantial numbers, Minister. What I want to ask about is something that I'm very excited that our government did, actually, for 2023. Alberta has always enjoyed the highest tax credit rates for supporting Albertans who wish to give to registered charities. For those over the \$200 amount the value of the credit is 50 cents on the dollar. That is by far the most generous of any province, you know, in Canada. But in 2023 we actually increased the tax credit on the first \$200 from donors from a 10 per cent credit to, actually, a 60 per cent credit from an Alberta tax credit. Combined with the smaller federal credit of 15 per cent on the first \$200, 75 cents on the dollar on the first \$200, that means, for example, if a lower income Albertan of more modest means may have wanted to make a \$100 donation to a registered charity of his or her choice, they would have got a tax credit valued at \$75 back on their \$100 charitable donation.

My question is in respect of this performance indicator. I know we've only got to 2021 so far in terms of the available statistics, but

given Alberta's, you know, very competitive environment in terms of supporting charitable giving in Alberta, highest per capita in Canada, I'm just wondering: do you see this number going up, especially with the change that we did in 2023 supporting, perhaps, Albertans, all Albertans, frankly, donating?

Ms Fir: Thank you for again highlighting the generosity of Albertans in terms of not only our time but our money as well. Further to what I said before, a large part of that is a booming economy and well-paying jobs that allow us to be so generous and add to what is so unique and incredible about Alberta. It's hard work, entrepreneurship, courage, bravery, and incredible community involvement and that we're humble and quiet about it. I mean, I'm bragging about it because it's true of what we do, but that's what adds to our unique culture, that we do it and we don't expect attention for it. We give, and that's what makes me so proud to be an Albertan.

Some of your specific questions around the tax questions might be best for me to direct you to Minister Horner, or I could follow up with more information for you on that.

If I could just talk a little bit about our Crowdfunding Alberta program that we have, it's dedicated to ensuring the nonprofit sector in Alberta is supported so they can continue their vital work to improve the lives of Albertans. Just to speak a little bit more about that, Crowdfunding Alberta is a proven platform that makes it easier for nonprofits to generate fast and flexible funding and makes it easier for Albertans to donate. The 2023 giving season has been the most prosperous for organizations that have been using the Crowdfunding Alberta platform, with nearly \$400,000 raised in donations. Additionally, some of the changes made in 2023 make it easier for nonprofits to unlock the match funding, with Alberta's government now matching 50 per cent of funds raised by an eligible campaign up to \$5,000. I encourage all Albertans to visit crowdfunding.alberta.ca and donate to a cause that they are passionate about.

With respect to what the metric shows for Alberta's nonprofit sector and if it's healthy, increased spending by Alberta's nonprofit sector likely tells us two things right now, that programs are expanding and costs are up, and this is further reinforced by what we hear from the sector. According to a recent survey by CCVO, the Calgary Chamber of Voluntary Organizations, revenue generation for the sector has stabilized since the pandemic, but demand has increased, and nonprofits, like all organizations, are seeing the impacts of inflation. We recognize the significant and important contribution that sector makes to community development and our provincial economy, which is why we've invested \$75.8 million into direct grant programs in my ministry as well as millions more in service delivery contracts across government.

9:20

Mr. Stephan: Thank you for that, Minister. I totally agree. I think having the highest per capita charitable giving is really reflective of the great culture in Alberta and the many great individuals and families in Alberta.

Minister, I want to ask about – under outcome 1 one responsibility of your ministry is “attracting investment, building partnerships and creating new opportunities for Alberta's creative sectors by both growing the province's reputation on the world stage and supporting local, made-in-Alberta initiatives.” Just two questions related to this. One, what work has your ministry done over the past year to promote Alberta on the world stage? And what other ministries are you working with to promote Alberta on the world stage and to promote local, made-in-Alberta initiatives?

Ms Fir: Thank you for those questions. Investment in Alberta's culture industries: we know it diversifies our economy, creates jobs, and shares our culture, our perspective, our stories provincially, nationally, and internationally. As we talked about earlier, the momentum in our film and TV industry continues to build, and Budget 2024 allows us to continue developing Alberta's workforce and profile Alberta as the go-to destination for screen-based production, which, again, I had an opportunity to do when I was in L.A. It's an honour, and I'm excited to be a vocal champion for the sector, and we want producers around the world to know about our competitive financial advantages, our breathtaking locations, world-class studios, exceptional crews and talent.

The film and television industry, like any other business: bottom line matters. When we can offer low taxes, incentives like our film and television tax credit, that matters. And affordability: the cast and crew need to live and work somewhere, and not only are we physically closer to L.A. than Toronto, but it's way more affordable to live in Alberta than it is to live in Vancouver and Toronto. I heard that message again and again. [Ms Fir's speaking time expired] Sorry.

The Chair: We're going to end on loyal opposition members.

Ms Hayter: Through the chair, Minister, I'm assuming you want to do block time.

Ms Fir: Please.

Ms Hayter: Awesome. I'm hopeful that the deputy minister would be able to respond in writing to any of the unanswered questions by my colleagues and myself, especially when it comes to the line item thing. I am wondering if we would be able to get that from the deputy minister.

Ms Fir: I'm willing to see what information we're able to provide to you.

Ms Hayter: Thank you.

The business plan on page 24 repeatedly mentions STEM, not STEAM, which seems odd for the Arts, Culture and Status of Women ministry. The arts and humanities are critical to creativity and serve science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, so we are wondering why we are leaving arts out of the equation there.

Now, I'm going to go all over the place because I'm going back to the original stuff. I'm just wondering if we could get a breakdown on the \$19 million. It's now gone up from \$6 million for the status of women designation. Under the line items we'd like to know where we could find the line item for the gender-based violence. As well, I heard about the Advanced Ed and the Public Safety with human trafficking, but if we could get your line items for the gender-based – through the national action plan, that would be great.

I'm wondering what you are doing to encourage funding for the women's shelters actually for staffing, who are predominantly women in those wages. It would help with their turnover, to not have the turnover, because it is quite emotional. I think it's great that there was funding going into training and medical, but I'm wondering what we're doing to actually continue that funding so that women will stay in those jobs.

I was wondering as well if the Be the Voice funding is still there. Is this a continued project, or is this something that is no longer happening within your ministry?

I love that you did the United Way period poverty. I'm also curious to know if you are still doing the menstrual health stuff or if that was just a project thing or if you are still doing the United Way period poverty. I love that you did do that.

Sorry. I'm just trying to make sure I get through – I've got two minutes still. I'm hoping for a breakdown of the funding again for the Advanced Ed for campus sexual violence; the Public Safety for human trafficking; the Indigenous Relations to support the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls; Justice for provincial court sexual assault awareness training; Seniors, Community and Social Services to help with the elder abuse. If I could get line items on that, that would be great.

The metrics in your plan to measure the success of status of women: once again, there are just the two items there. I'm just curious why we're not looking at health care, as it is a critical issue for women, within the status of women such as advanced cancer screening or women's participation in sports. So I'm wondering how we just discovered the two metrics.

Where can the public access the progress of the current STEM? Right now it's sitting at 14 per cent, so just kind of what are we doing to increase the women's participation? I was wondering what this women in STEM scholarship was. I heard 50 students, but I was just wondering, again, the line item there. As well, how are we supporting Indigenous women entrepreneurs? How much are you supporting the Calgary Immigrant Women's Association? Can you provide me with more information about Project HOPE and how much we are providing funding for this project?

I'm just going to move back to universal contraception. You know, it really does help with the economy, and not everybody has adequate coverage or the copays. For limited-income folks this means really subpar coverage, and it does go back to the economy. I'm hopeful that in your discussions at the cabinet table that is something that you could look at advocating for for Albertans.

In the business plan page 24, key objective 1.6 reads that it is partly to "enable and promote the philanthropic and business sectors to support Alberta artists and non-profit organizations." Minister, do you have a strategy for achieving this important objective that goes beyond the AFA's art sector donation program, which, unfortunately, is not a matching donation program like the successful community spirit matching donation grant, that provided real financial support to nonprofits between 2010 and 2015? [Ms Hayter's speaking time expired] Sorry.

The Chair: And that's that.

Minister, back to you.

Ms Fir: Thank you. Thank you to the member for the variety of questions. I might jump around a little bit as well. With women's shelters and funding most of the funding for that does come through my colleague Minister Turton, but we do work closely together, and certainly I know he and I are proponents for the life-saving, incredibly important work that women's shelters do.

You had mentioned – I maybe missed it. You were talking a little bit more about Indigenous women and girls. I know, again, when I talk about the status of women and how I overlap with so many ministries, I don't know if there's a ministry I don't overlap with. I work closely with Minister Wilson, our incredible Indigenous Relations minister, on many stakeholder meetings and initiatives around missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls.

I think you might have jumped to campus organizations as well. I had the opportunity to meet with several postsecondary campus organizations a couple of months ago now and hear their concerns and issues and priorities and their asks as it relates to involvement with the 10-year strategy to end gender-based violence.

Regarding STEAM versus STEM, in a recent round-table I heard that many arts jobs are tech jobs, especially music. It's just incredible. I think many people, when you think of arts or things like film and television, for example, think: well, there are the

actors, the writers, and the producers. Well, there are hundreds of more professions, from carpenters to techs to food services to wardrobe, and the arts play a huge part in that. The arts are the training ground for those individuals that go into that. Many of them start in some of the smaller scale Alberta productions and then move on to these bigger productions.

9:30

Back to the 10-year strategy, the gender-based violence strategy, the \$19.7 million investment will be determined by our 10-year strategy. The round-tables that we do and the recommendations that we get back will be used to inform where the investing and the funding goes. That's precisely why we're doing the engagement first, to identify the gaps, identify the needs, and that will be used to inform where the funding goes over the next three years.

Fifteen point seven million dollars is the new federal funding negotiated in support of the national action plan. We're reviewing the Period Poverty Project and look forward to additional programming in the future, so stay tuned on that. Some of the other line items you had mentioned I think we're still pulling together here.

I want to touch a little bit more on – if we want to talk about women's economic participation, you raised some more good questions there. We want to make sure that Alberta women do have access to good, quality jobs and can succeed in fulfilling careers. That's crucial to the success of our province.

When I had the round-table earlier this year, several organizations focused on improving women's economic participation, including Women Building Futures, NorQuest College, Black Canadian Women in Action, Calgary Immigrant Women's Association, Women in Film and Television Alberta, and Elevate Aviation. We did discuss ways the government could enhance women's economic development through improved access to child care, again, another ministry that status of women touches on; ensuring inclusive and safe work environments for women – we've come a long way there, but, boy, there's still lots more work to be done – ensuring there are education opportunities for women returning to the workforce; and how we can support BIPOC women entrepreneurs. That came up quite a bit in the women's round-table, the added layers and challenges that they face.

One of the ways that we're helping to reduce the pay gap is by supporting women pursuing high-paying careers in fields where they're underrepresented. I go back to – again, that's why things like our women in STEM and Persons Case scholarships are so important. That's why our continued work with Women Building Futures is important, and through funding of organizations such as the Calgary YWCA to support women's employment in the early child care development sector, again, the Calgary Immigrant Women's Association to help immigrant women start or grow careers as certified early child care educators – of course, we also recognize that child care is essential to closing the wage gap for women in Alberta.

The Chair: Back to members of the government caucus. MLA Wright.

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Minister, would you be open to back and forth?

Ms Fir: Yes.

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Chair and through you to the minister. Minister, previous to my time as an elected official I was fortunate enough to sit on a number of local community boards. I served as president for a long-standing Medicine Hat community festival,

which was able to showcase some of the great musical talent from across Alberta, including the award-winning group Nice Horse based out of Calgary.

Under performance metric 2(a) of the business plan around 70 per cent of adult Albertans attended art activities or events through 2022-2023. Given that this data in this metric includes attendance of events and activities, including performing arts, community art festivals, fairs and other cultural performances and events, visual art events in galleries and studios and art exhibits, literary events, and attending art talks or lectures, how is this data tracked throughout the year given the breadth and variety of events and the variety of attendance at each event? Why is it that we're only tracking adult attendance and not youth and children attendance? Given that your target over the next three years is to show an average increase of about 2 per cent, what specific measures will your ministry take to boost attendance at these events?

Ms Fir: Thank you for those questions. Didn't Nice Horse perform at Alberta Day at Heritage Park in Calgary? They brought the tent, the big – they were amazing. They were fantastic. Sorry. You had more questions. We'll talk about Nice Horse later.

Back to your questions. We're using several metrics in our business plan, including Statistics Canada data and our own annual survey of Albertans. When we refer to the GDP of Alberta's creative and cultural industries, we're including in that film and television, music, and our publishing sector, which includes both books and magazines. Data for our performance metrics about attendance at arts activities or events: we collect this as an annual survey conducted by my ministry. We hire a vendor for this who uses online and telephone surveys to collect the information, and the data gives us a sense of how many Albertans are participating in our rich and diverse arts experiences. The numbers also serve as targets to gauge how we're doing in continually improving the accessibility of arts to all Albertans.

Also, you were asking about performance measures as they relate to heritage site visitation. This data is also collected through the annual survey of Albertans. We use that instead of our own attendance numbers to make sure that we're reflecting attendance at all the sites our province has to offer, not just those operated by my ministry – of course, we do track attendance at our sites as well – and 2023 brought record levels of attendance to sites as Albertans and tourists alike flocked back to our facilities.

With respect to your other question additional investment in Budget 2024 will ensure we continue to see those high levels of attendance while also maintaining museums and historic sites as affordable, family-friendly, and educational destinations.

I'm excited. I mentioned before the Angkor exhibit at the RAM. That will hopefully bring in lots of people to the RAM, especially if they've not been there before. Going back to Alberta Day at Heritage Park, that was a great location for us to choose because Heritage Park allowed free admission that day, so literally thousands and thousands of people that hadn't been there before had the opportunity to experience it.

Thanks for those questions.

Mr. Wright: No worries. Mr. Chair, through you back to the minister, I appreciate you bringing up heritage facilities across Alberta as part of the answer. In my neck of the woods we've got, you know, the Medalta historical clay district. We've got historical downtown Medicine Hat as one of the older sites you find in rural Alberta.

Performance metric 1(a) tracks the percentage of adult Albertans, which we talked about previously. In 2022-2023 55.7 per cent of adult Albertans visited a heritage site. The three-year target for per

cent of adult Albertans visiting these sites is set to increase by just under 2 per cent. What steps is the ministry taking to drive that even further? Given the wide variety of heritage sites across Alberta, how are we taking steps to better collect more accurate data over the long term?

I will turn it over to you.

Ms Fir: Sure. I'll maybe answer initially and then pass it over to David, ADM of heritage, to answer the question around how data is collected. But to go back to your initial question, our government takes our responsibility as stewards of our collective history very seriously, and that's why we operate or oversee 20 provincially owned historic sites, museums, and archives where we can care for millions – literally millions – of important artifacts.

In budget funding for our heritage sites is increasing by \$2.2 million, which is mainly driven by projected revenue increases we expect to see, and sites like the Royal Alberta Museum and the Royal Tyrrell Museum are among the most visited. As we recover from the pandemic, it's clear that more Albertans want to visit those sites.

David, can I hand it over to you to speak a little bit more about, with respect to the wide array of heritage sites and facilities, how the data is collected?

Mr. Link: Sure. We collect data in a variety of ways – physical visitation in certain age categories: adult, youth, senior – because that tells us what programs we should plan for the future. We also collect data on our website hits. More and more our presentation of digital information is valued by the community, not just in Alberta but across Canada and around the world. Again, we collect that data to teach us what we should do better for the future.

9:40

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Minister and Mr. Link.

Chair, just one more question; I think it should round out the three minutes that are left there. As I mentioned, I have sat on a number of community boards. I've had both the blessing and the curse of having to revive a society. You know, the nonprofit sector plays such a huge role in our lives and the lives of everyday Albertans. We've heard that nonprofit sectors have been struggling with promoting volunteerism, cost-of-living issues, and attracting and retaining staff to do the important work. We know that not-for-profit organizations: they play such a huge role across our province, especially considering the many disadvantaged individuals they serve. In your ministry's business plan outcome 2 is for all Albertans to have the opportunity to enjoy and benefit from vibrant, inclusive, and active communities that enrich their lives. Minister, can you tell us how you're working to ensure that these nonprofits are continuing to operate and play roles in building vibrant, inclusive, and active communities?

Ms Fir: I've spoken about some of the financial supports, including operating grants, project grants, capital grants, and crowdfunding. My ministry alone will invest almost \$130 million through Budget 2024 to continue the invaluable work of the nonprofit sector to support families and communities. Our ministry also offers a wealth of educational resources for nonprofit organizations, including a new online tool to make it easier to navigate government programs and services. We want these organizations to spend more of their time doing the community work, not trying to find resources and forms and how to fill them out.

We're also going to continue to encourage Albertans to get involved by sharing the inspiring stories of the province's amazing volunteers through the recognition programs that we have like the

Stars of Alberta volunteer awards and the northern lights volunteer recognition program.

The Stars of Alberta award: it annually recognizes the invaluable contributions of volunteers and their positive impact on communities in youth, adult, senior categories. I mentioned earlier the breaking barriers category to recognize outstanding members of the 2SLGBTQIA-plus community and work they're doing to promote inclusion. Since its inception in the year 2000 the Stars of Alberta award has recognized 149 individuals for their contributions to the community. As minister I was privileged to be able to participate in that awards ceremony at McDougall in Calgary. Just to hear the stories of these outstanding individuals, how much they do and how much they volunteer and give in addition to having very full, busy lives, makes us, I think, all want to do a little bit better.

My ministry also runs the Alberta northern lights volunteer recognition program. Since its inception in 2020 it's showcased 215 individuals or groups for their volunteering efforts. I really encourage everyone to learn . . .

The Chair: With that, we're back to the loyal opposition for their 10-minute block.

Member Tejada: Thank you, Mr. Chair. To the minister: would you like to do block time or back and forth?

Ms Fir: Block time, please.

Member Tejada: Okay. Just referring to main estimates, page 59, the statement of operations, revenue, transfers from the government of Canada increased by \$5 million from the previous budget's forecast to what we now have, which is about \$42 million, and on business plan page 27 the same revenue line shows the target years going down to just under half each year from this year's estimate. Can the minister, through the chair, explain why the government of Canada revenue goes up this year and then is targeted to go down by over 50 per cent in the next two years?

Next question. Circling back to objective 2.5 in the business plan, page 26, engaging and supporting the 2SLGBTQIA community, you had mentioned the Stars of Alberta award, which is wonderful. I'm just wondering, a little bit of information on this: is this largely a recognition award? Are there any other aspects of this award that could continue to support these Albertans either personally or in the work that they do in their community?

My next question is around 2.4, which is at page 25 in the business plan, around the plan to end gender-based violence. Just curious as to why Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQIA were actually removed from mention in 2.4. They're in a separate item there, under 2.5, in more of a general objective there.

The next question I wanted to circle back to is the idea of a council. We know that in response to hate crimes, to increased, you know, rhetoric against specific communities, we've seen councils created around multiculturalism, councils created for Black Albertans, and an antiracism council. I'm just wondering if the minister will consider a similar council for the 2SLGBTQIA community to support them.

Circling back again to gender-based violence and the performance indicator, I'm just concerned that given the removal of 2SLGBTQIA Albertans and Indigenous women, the performance indicator listed might not be sufficient. I'm wondering if the minister will comment on whether or not this indicator will be expanded to measure progress for those vulnerable populations.

A related question to 2(b). From the stakeholder engagements that I've had such as some of the newcomer organizations, how is this 10-year plan engaging ethnocultural communities to ensure equitable access to culturally competent care?

My next question. Just looking at outcome 1 in the business plan on page 24, that the ministry continues to build on success, attract investment, build partnerships, and create new opportunities in creative sectors by growing the province's reputation on the world stage and supporting local Alberta initiatives, I'm just wondering: in light of recent policies sort of squarely focused on the trans community, what will the minister be doing in terms of those populations to ensure that we're still attracting the talent, so that we're assuring workers, especially in those arts and culture sectors, that they are actually coming to an inclusive province when, you know, basically, the reputation that we're having right now provincially may indicate the opposite?

With that, I cede my time.

Ms Fir: Thank you to the member for those questions. I want to touch a little bit more on the – I'm glad you brought up the Stars of Alberta breaking barriers award. Again, I just want to talk a little bit about the winner from last year. I might actually ask Anne Davidson, executive director of community engagement, just to speak after I talk a little bit about the winner. With respect to transfers from the federal government I'm going to ask Carmen Vidaurri, our acting senior financial officer and ADM of finance, to maybe touch on that a bit.

But back to the breaking barriers 2SLGBTQIA-plus inclusion category. That recipient: I had an opportunity to meet him, Jarom Moriyama-Bondar of Calgary. He's one of the founders of the nonprofit Pride in Business, that was launched in 2011. It's a nonprofit that's staffed exclusively by volunteers. Along with initiatives to create greater awareness of Calgary's 2SLGBTQIA-plus organizations, programs, businesses, networks, professionals, and charities, Pride in Business works to create that same awareness and grow commerce within the broader Calgary business community. The organization does a lot of work to spotlight to 2SLGBTQIA-plus professionals, businesses, and allies through engaging events throughout the year and their social media content and articles on their website.

Anne, is there anything you wanted to add, just as it relates to the Stars of Alberta awards?

Ms Davidson: Sure. Anne Davidson, executive director with the community engagement branch. Stars of Alberta: the Alberta government has been proudly supporting the recognition of our outstanding volunteers each year. It was established in 2000, and it has recognized 149 individuals. Again, we would say that these are our formal volunteers that give thousands and thousands of hours each year. In 2019 we introduced the breaking barriers category, which really, again, recognizes exceptional volunteers who are working to create communities that are diverse, inclusive, and addressing racism as well as advocating for 2SLGBTQIA-plus and inclusion in terms of fighting gender discrimination as well.

9:50

The second program that the minister referenced was our northern lights volunteer recognition program. This program was established in 2020, and the intent of it is, really, to recognize our outstanding volunteers each day, so much more of the informal volunteers. It is easy to recognize volunteers in our community. Our website has information. We encourage people to nominate. This year in April is National Volunteer Week, and we're promoting the celebration of volunteers across the province during the third week of April. As well, on April 15 we're launching recognition for stars. Nominations will start on April 15.

Ms Fir: Carmen, may I ask you to speak to the questions around the transfers from the federal government? If you could comment on that, please.

Ms Vidaurri: The transfers from the government of Canada. Basically, that line item and the way it shows in the statement of operations on page 27 of our business plan: within that line item the \$42 million is made up of the French language services, the Canada-Alberta co-operation agreement on the French language. We also have in there the funding for the national action plan to end gender violence, and in that line item we also have the funding for the investing in Canada infrastructure program. Now, the line that is declining in the future years is the one that's related to the investing in Canada infrastructure program, because as the program has concluded, the federal government is not awarding more money under that program, and the ministry is finishing paying off the remaining construction claims.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Carmen.

I wanted to touch on some of the performance measures. The performance metrics, we know, are an important component of our accountability requirements, and we take the credibility of these metrics seriously and continue to develop better measures. Some of the potential new performance metrics are considered on an ongoing basis as part of developing the ministry's business plan. According to government standards considerable research and analysis ...

The Chair: Almost.

Over to members of the government caucus. MLA de Jonge.

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Chair. Through the chair to the minister, did you want to have shared or block time?

Ms Fir: We can go back and forth.

Ms de Jonge: Sounds good. Thank you.

Minister, the 2024 capital plan allocates \$7.8 million over three years to support the Arts Commons and Olympic Plaza transformation project in Calgary. You've already spoken previously this evening about Arts Commons, but I'm hoping you can just expand on the scope of the transformation project and how this funding will help. Also, given the historic significance of Calgary's Olympic Plaza and the 1988 Olympic Winter Games, how will your ministry collaborate with others on this project to ensure that any elements of historic significance at the site will be preserved?

Ms Fir: As it relates to jobs, we're also creating jobs with our investment in arts infrastructure. As an example, the Arts Commons project will create more than 3,450 full-time construction jobs and have an overall economic impact of \$424 million in GDP. Again, what it's going to do for revitalization of downtown Calgary, economic benefits, tourism: first and foremost, most importantly, promoting the amazing arts and culture that Calgary has to offer and showcasing that to people within Calgary, within Alberta, within Canada and internationally. It's going to be like nothing western Canada has seen before in terms of an arts and culture centre.

Of course, you know, we'll work with Arts Commons to ensure that the plaza retains the character and appeal it held for the 1988 Calgary Olympics. I'm sure many of us in this room have fond memories of those Olympics. Some might not have been born at that time, but I was, and I remember being at Olympic Plaza and watching the medal ceremonies as a 13-year-old, 14-year-old.

That's something that we want to make sure we preserve for future generations as well.

Ms de Jonge: Thank you very much.

Through the chair to the minister, I don't recall exactly those Olympics in my lifetime.

The Chair: It was pretty cool, kid.

Ms de Jonge: It's great work that you and your team are doing, Minister. Thank you for that.

I'm looking at performance metric 1(c) in the business plan, that outlines the gross domestic product of Alberta's creative and cultural industries, measuring the economic contributions of this sector. Given that in 2021, the most recent year tracked, the GDP of the creative and cultural industries was around \$5 billion, Minister, can you explain how this data was tracked and measured and what businesses make up the creative and cultural industries? Do you have any further data that is not yet released that shows any indicators of the GDP of Alberta's creative and cultural industries in 2022?

Ms Fir: I'll maybe ask David Link to comment a little bit in terms of some of our creative and cultural industries. I mean, it's amazing: everything from book publishers to magazine publishers to film and television. We use several metrics in our business plan, including Statistics Canada data and our own annual surveys.

Actually, I'm going to pass it back to Mr. Mark Ham to maybe provide a little bit more information on cultural industries.

Mr. Ham: Hello again. Mark Ham, executive director of cultural industries. The GDP data: I think the minister did a great job of outlining what industries that entails, so music, both live and music publishing, along with book and magazine publishing and film and television.

We do see a bit of a lag in our GDP data from Stats Canada. The most recent data is the data that's reported in the business plan. We are looking at some in-house solutions to make the data a little bit more current so that we can update that on a more regular basis. That's something we're going to tackle this coming year.

Yeah, I think the \$5 billion number shows the potential of this industry only to get bigger, and I think we're making some major strides on a number of fronts in that sector.

Ms Fir: Thanks.

I'd just share with the member maybe some of the success stories in cultural industries. I mean, of course, we celebrate, as we should, and talk about in film and television *The Last of Us*, *Prey*, *My Life with the Walter Boys*.

But I'd maybe just highlight some that don't get heard about as much: I mean the Alberta book publishers. Books are near and dear to my heart; I won't go into stories about me as a kid and books. At the 2023 Alberta book publishers awards, that were hosted in Edmonton, we had more than 130 delegates gather to celebrate Albertan book publishers. Among the book publishers awarded at the event were the University of Alberta Press, NeWest Publishers Ltd., Renegade Arts Entertainment, Red Barn Books, Freehand Books Inc., and the University of Calgary Press. These publishers were past recipients of a book publishers operating grant administered by the ministry.

I'll also highlight again our amazing Jubilee auditoria, that are on track to exceed previous attendance. In 2022-23 the Alberta Jubilee auditoria hosted 372 performances and welcomed over half a million patrons through the doors. Some of the resident companies which I've been able to check out include . . .

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

I'd like to remind committee members that we are scheduled to meet tomorrow morning, March 20, 2024, at 9 to consider the Ministry of Immigration and Multiculturalism, which, by the way, for this committee is our last estimates.

I want to extend my appreciation to everybody here for their candour, good behaviour, all that good stuff. You've done such a good job that you might as well take the rest of the evening off. Meeting adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 10 p.m.]

