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HE-60

Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy

Estimates

Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport

Comité permanent du patrimoine, de l'infrastructure et de la culture

Budget des dépenses

Ministère du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport

1st Session
43rd Parliament

Wednesday 9 October 2024

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Mercredi 9 octobre 2024

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON HERITAGE,
INFRASTRUCTURE
AND CULTURAL POLICY**

**COMITÉ PERMANENT DU PATRIMOINE,
DE L'INFRASTRUCTURE
ET DE LA CULTURE**

Wednesday 9 October 2024

Mercredi 9 octobre 2024

The committee met at 1300 in committee room 1.

ESTIMATES

MINISTRY OF TOURISM, CULTURE
AND SPORT

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong): Good afternoon, everyone. The Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy will now come to order. We are joined by staff from legislative research, Hansard, and broadcast and recording.

Please wait until I recognize you before you speak. As always, all comments should go through the Chair. Are there any questions before we begin?

We will now commence consideration of the 2024-25 expenditure estimates referred to this committee. As a reminder, members may ask a wide range of questions pertaining to the estimates before the committee. However, the onus is on the member asking the question to ensure the question is relevant to the current estimates under consideration.

The ministries are required to monitor the proceedings for any questions or issues that they may undertake to address. If you wish, you may, at the end of your appearance, verify the questions and issues being tracked with the legislative research officer.

Today, we will consider the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport. I am required to call a vote, 3801, which sets the review process in motion.

We will begin with a statement of not more than 20 minutes from the ministers.

Minister, you may begin.

Hon. Neil Lumsden: Thanks to everyone for today.

Sport plays an essential role in Ontario. It helps people lead healthier and more active lifestyles and builds stronger communities. It has the power to bring families together and teach our youth important life lessons like teamwork, friendship, discipline and work ethic.

Outside of the immeasurable impact that sport has on people, it's a major economic driver for our province. According to the most recent data, in 2022, the sports and recreation sector provided an estimated \$2.9 billion to Ontario's economy and accounted for approximately 44,000 jobs. These figures are a reflection of the strength of sport tourism in our province and demonstrate how the sector

stimulates the local economy for all of our communities. It's people coming into town for a baseball tournament, staying at the local hotel and going out to the local restaurant and buying a coffee or having lunch, filling up their tanks before heading home and, of course, checking out the local shops on their way out of town. The benefits of this sector are far-reaching, and our government recognizes the importance of sport for our communities. That's why we're making new investments and doubling down on successful programs.

The commitments in the 2024 budget that target economic growth and sport include introducing the Community Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Fund and doubling the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund. These two significant items in the budget of 2024 showcase our province's commitment to the sector both now and in the future.

We will continue to work collaboratively with stakeholders to promote and support and increase opportunities for all Ontarians to participate in sport and recreation, from playground to podium.

On the Ontario Sport Recognition Policy: Through the Ontario Sport Recognition Policy, the ministry requires provincial and multi-sport organizations to have their policies in place regarding harassment, screening, inclusion, discipline and dispute resolution. To further promote safe sport, Ontario continues to discuss the establishment of an independent third-party mechanism with sports ministries across Canada, including processes for the reporting and the resolution of maltreatment allegations.

Rowan's Law: We continue our leadership on concussion awareness, building on the progress that we made with the implementation of Rowan's Law. As a result of Rowan's Law, I am proud to say that, in 2022, the Canada Summer Games was the first multi-sport national competition in Ontario where concussion protocols and processes were required to be in place. Everyone from stakeholders to academics tells us that Rowan's Law is making a real difference in changing the awareness of and response to concussions. This is something that I take very personally, and the reason why I have recently announced that I will be donating my brain to concussion research—but not for a number of years down the road, just to be clear to anyone here thinking otherwise.

Our government is working diligently to support Toronto in hosting what is arguably one of the most prestigious sports tournaments in the world: the 2026 FIFA men's World Cup.

This is the world's largest single sporting event, attracting more than 1,000 athletes from 48 countries, with an expected overall attendance of 5.8 million people for the event. The projected return on investment for such events as this includes an increase in more than \$450 million on the provincial GDP and \$826 million in overall economic impact. That's why our government has invested up to \$97 million in funding and provincial services to support hosting the FIFA World Cup 2026 in Toronto.

The Community Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Fund is something we are very proud of. We are also investing, along with that pride, \$200 million over three years in our new Community Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Fund, or CSRIF, to provide Ontarians with the opportunity to live, work and play in their communities. This new infrastructure fund is open to organizations and entities operating or managing sport and recreation facilities and related programming that is accessible to the public.

Our government is proud to be making these game-changing investments that will ensure people across the province have access to the spaces they need to stay healthy and active, which is so very important, while opening the door to more Ontarian communities to host provincial, national and even international sporting events.

Support for amateur sport: Our government continues to invest in amateur sport as part of our work in supporting sport and athlete development. Amateur sport is an important contributor to Ontario's economy and is invaluable to people of all ages. In addition to promoting physical health and community engagement, amateur sport provides an inclusive way for Ontarians to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

The Ontario Sport Hosting Program: Our government also continues to invest to help bring events to communities across our great province with the Ontario Sport Hosting Program. My ministry allocates \$3 million to this annual program and has committed funding to support 26 national and six international amateur sport events as part of the program's first intake in 2024-25, and the impact cannot be overstated. Since 2018, our government's sport hosting program has supported 170 events, generating approximately \$140 million in economic activity for communities across the province, from Thunder Bay to Ottawa, to Niagara and Windsor, and all the places in between. When a tournament or competition comes to town, that means more shift workers at hotels, restaurants and local businesses. It's putting more money in the pockets of people and their businesses and the running of the community, and that's so very important.

The Ontario games program: Our Ontario games program provides communities with hosting grants totalling \$1.54 million annually. Every two years, Ontario hosts five Ontario games; that has provided an estimated \$15 million to economic impact to local communities throughout the province.

Just a few short months ago, I attended the London 2024 Ontario Summer Games, which welcomed over 3,300 participants and their families to the region. Tourism London reported that the games provided a massive boost to their local economy.

Ontario's After-School Program: Our after-school program supports opportunities for children and youth to stay

active and healthy in more than 80 communities across Ontario, including 11 First Nations communities. With our annual investment of \$14.6 million, we are helping 111 organizations deliver programming to an estimated 13,000 children and youth.

Inclusive grassroots recreation: We are also continuing to help children and youth connect with sport and recreation at the grassroots level. We have made it a priority to increase participation in sport by under-represented groups such as women and girls, racialized communities, Indigenous peoples, the LGBTQ2S+ community and persons with disabilities. The ministry allocates \$2 million in funding annually to community organizations across Ontario through partnerships with sector leaders such as Canadian Tire Jumpstart Charities, the MLSE Foundation, Canadian Women and Sport, the Jays Care Foundation and, of course, KidSport.

Indigenous programs: Our government is committing to working with the Indigenous partners in the sport and recreation sector to deliver programs that support healthy communities. We are supporting Indigenous sport and recreation by investing \$5.25 million to help organizations and communities deliver priority programs to Indigenous peoples.

Our government knows that any form of abuse is unacceptable. Our government is investing \$8.4 million annually to strengthen the capacity of the sport and recreation sector, including funding to provincially recognized sport organizations to support programming, athletes' development and training for sport participants. We will continue to do our part in sport and make it safe so it's a place to learn, thrive and enjoy for everyone who participates.

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In conclusion, thank you for granting me the time for today's presentation, on behalf of the Ministry of Sport.

I'd like to thank Deputy Minister Palmer, who sits to my left, and all the other officials and staff who have gathered and supported everything we have talked about and will continue to do so.

I am proud of the work that our government has done, and I look forward to everything that we will accomplish in the future. We will continue to work to make sports safer and more accessible, foster culture and athletics excellence here in Ontario, and maximize the economic impact of sport tourism for our communities across the province. In short, we're going to continue to work for Ontario and make sport a big part of the development of our province.

Hon. Stan Cho: Thank you, Minister Lumsden. I could have listened to you for the entire afternoon. That was really great.

You ended with a thank you. I'll start with a thank you, to Deputy Minister Nancy Kennedy, who has rejoined us at the OPS on September 3 and who has hit the ground sprinting, as well as the amazing team here from tourism, culture and gaming for their amazing work on preparing for today's committee.

I also want to thank the committee members for your time this afternoon as well as the Clerk, Hansard. I haven't been in the room in a while. It's great to be back, and it's

always a privilege to appear before the committee, so thank you.

The tourism/culture sector is a big piece of our economic growth and every corner of the province. It enriches our cultural institutions; it maintains our appeal as a top destination for travel and for business. I think we are unique here in Canada, and we should not take it for granted. We should be very proud of the fact that we have such a rich diversity in this country, that everyone comes here from every corner of the globe. It's something we should showcase to the world, and our government is proud to be doing exactly that.

At present, Ontario is the most visited travel destination in our country, with both urban and rural regions relying on tourism as a major wealth generator and supplier of jobs. We are recovering post-pandemic, and our outlook is looking brighter every single day. Domestic and foreign visitors are travelling to Ontario once again, and attractions, festivals and events are flourishing. Hotels and restaurants are welcoming patrons at numbers that rival 2019, and our streets are filled with life and excitement again. That is really great news for our province, our economy, our people and its prospects.

Tourism and cultural activities don't exist, of course, in a vacuum. They draw from and influence countless sectors such as transportation, hospitality and retail. Every ticket purchased for an event, a festival, a concert—well, that triggers, as Minister Lumsden referred to, a cascade of economic activity, from the taxi hailed for the journey to the hotel room booked for the stay, the meals enjoyed at the local restaurants and the souvenirs purchased from local businesses. The tourism, culture and gaming sectors are not just about entertainment; they are key drivers of economic activity, and as we look to the future, our ministry is encouraged by strong signs of growth across the entire province. Our government and all Ontarians should be optimistic about where these sectors are headed, indeed.

Now I'd like to start by speaking about Ontario's current economic landscape, to help examine our actions and achievements to date. Ontario's program funding is expected to grow to support the services Ontarians need. Our ministry has a plan to continue to support tourism and culture in our province while working within our existing funding limits. The printed estimates show that MTCG and the Ministry of Sport's combined operating and capital consolidation allocation aligns with the planned 2024-25 expenses reported in the 2024 budget. The ministry's combined operating and capital consolidated allocation has increased from \$1.7076 billion in 2023-24 to \$1.9547 billion in 2024-25, to support the government's priorities on rebuilding the economy, investing in infrastructure, developing our workforce, increasing affordability and service delivery excellence. The increase includes significant boosts in operating and capital funding. And I am pleased now to highlight just some of the ways we are working to accomplish those goals.

As I mentioned before, tourism is a fundamental component of Ontario's economy. According to most recent data, in 2022, there were 114 million visits to Ontario, gen-

erating \$33 billion in GDP, supporting 360,000 jobs and providing \$12.5 billion in taxes. This past summer, tourism activity reached its highest level since early 2020, at the onset of the pandemic. While the numbers are encouraging, we're not yet satisfied. We don't want to just return to pre-pandemic levels; we want to exceed them.

That's why our ministry is working tirelessly with stakeholders of all stripes and all sizes to provide programming and funding aimed at helping Ontario's tourism business flourish. Some of that funding has gone toward helping festivals and events, which, of course, create unique experiences that encourage Ontarians and visitors alike to explore local communities and discover all that they have to offer.

Last fiscal, we invested \$19.5 million in the Experience Ontario program, which encourages increased tourism spending and economic development in local communities. From the International Plowing Match and Rural Expo, which we were just at last week, actually, to countless cultural events celebrating the vibrancy and diversity of Ontario, our investments are helping to support and expand festivals and events all across the province.

This year's budget highlighted a commitment to help grow regional economic opportunities and build prosperity everywhere for everyone; this, of course, includes the north. Destination Ontario, an agency of the ministry, operates several northern partnership programs focused on increasing visitation through collaborative partnered marketing programs.

We're also supporting northern Ontario's tourism sector with \$5 million for regional tourism organizations—12 and 13 in 2023 and 2024. This commitment will bolster regional tourism specifically in northern Ontario as we work to help local tourism deliver experiences that support the region and promote economic growth.

Tourism is booming in Ontario, and our government will continue to help it grow wherever and however we can.

Let's chat about the C in MTCG culture. According to the most recent data, in 2022, Ontario's culture sector supported over 270,000 jobs and produced a GDP of \$26.4 billion, exceeding the 2019 pre-pandemic level of \$25.1 billion. That, of course, is in part due to the robust support that our government has provided to the sector. Our targeted supports include funding for the Ontario Arts Council, Ontario Creates, Ontario Trillium Foundation, Ontario Cultural Attractions Fund, Community Museum Operating Grant, Public Library Operating Grant, and tax credits for the film and television, interactive digital media and book publishing sectors. The culture sector is trending toward record-setting numbers, and we are committed to supporting its continued growth.

To expand on what I just noted and touched on, the Ontario Cultural Attractions Fund, the OCAF, helps cultural organizations develop, promote and present high-quality, high-profile cultural tourism festivals, events and exhibitions designed to bring new visitors to communities across Ontario. In 2023-24, OCAF provided \$2.8 million in funding to support 54 cultural tourism events and exhibitions across the province. An additional \$6 million over the next three

years is being invested to bring more cultural tourism to Ontario communities.

Film, television and interactive digital media industries also continue to thrive in Ontario. Ontario reported its highest-ever production levels in 2022, with 419 productions, bringing a record-breaking \$3.2 billion in spending and supporting more than 45,000 jobs across the province. In 2023, film and television production generated approximately \$1.8 billion in spending and supported almost 26,000 jobs. And although 2023 saw a dip due to actors' and writers' strikes in the US, this year we're seeing an incredible surge in location-scouting interest from American production partners, indicating big interest in big-budget projects returning to the province.

As reported by Ontario Creates, consumer demand for made-in-Ontario content remains very high, with locally filmed *Reacher* awarded the title of most-watched program on Amazon Prime for the past two years. Netflix's *What We Watched* report listed *Ginny & Georgia* season 2 as the second-most-watched program worldwide in 2023, with *Ginny & Georgia* season 1 and *FUBAR* also making the top 20 list.

Ontario assists film and television, book publishing and interactive digital media industries with a suite of five cultural media tax credits administered by Ontario Creates, an agency of the ministry. These credits have been applauded by the industry for their effectiveness in stimulating growth, and we are confident that our investments will attract more projects in this high-yield industry, create jobs, develop skilled talent and boost local economies.

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Moving on from movies to books: Ontario's public libraries are a key pillar of building strong, vibrant communities that support lifelong learning—

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong): One minute remaining.

Hon. Stan Cho: —and help develop the talents and skills of all Ontarians, supporting approximately 260 library boards, local service boards, serving 413 municipalities, and there are also approximately 37 First Nation public libraries.

Chair, being cognizant of time—there's a long list here.

We have supports for museums as well, which are, of course, fundamental to the cultural fabric of our society. We support them through our Community Museum Operating Grant, under the Ontario Heritage Act.

And so much more—supports for music through the Ontario Music Investment Fund, an annual \$7-million business development grant program which supported 158 music businesses, providing support for 48 live music companies in 2023-24.

The ministry has two historical attractions.

We work with 13 agencies and two transfer payment entities in Ontario.

Chair, there's a lot more to list. I'm happy to continue to chat about the great work the ministry is doing, from the questions.

I will, again, thank you all for your time and consideration this afternoon, and I will turn the mike back to you.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong): Thank you, Ministers.

We will now begin questions and answers in rotations of 20 minutes for the official opposition members of the committee, 10 minutes for the independent member of the committee, and 20 minutes for the government members of the committee for the remainder of the allotted time. As always, please wait to be recognized by myself before speaking. All questions and comments will need to go through the Chair.

For the deputy ministers, assistant deputy ministers and staff: When you are called on to speak, please give your name and your title so that we may accurately record who we have in Hansard.

I will start now with the official opposition. MPP Stevens, you may begin.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Madam Chair, through you to the minister of tourism and culture—I'll start off with my questions to you first, and then I'll end with some questions to our sports tourism, because it's quite interesting that the tourism, culture and sports all combine to make sure that every community thrives.

I'm going to start off with my questions about the wine industry and private labels on wines that are haunting our grape growers in Niagara and across Ontario. You know Ontario and Niagara wine industries are keeping their ears close to the ground. As we're learning, the supply of wine is exceeding customers' demand. Increase of import international and inexpensive grapes coming into Canada and being blended in our local harvests equals a decrease in demand for Ontario-grown crops. So here we are. Ultimately, some Ontario growers are selling less of their harvests than anticipated. Basically, the grapes are rotting on the vines within Niagara and within other counties. Leaving grape growers with their grapes rotting, as I said, on the vine is quite concerning.

On top of that, large groceries, grocers and industry groups like Walmart, Costco, Loblaws are in consultation with this government to potentially introduce private label wines as early as 2026. This is quite concerning in the Niagara area. The small wineries in Niagara region are small business owners, as we're well aware, and all cannot compete with local or larger businesses. Ontario wineries and growers are becoming concerned if this becomes a reality, as big box stores will be putting huge, huge amounts of marketing dollars behind the marketing campaigns.

Elsewhere in the world, such as Italy and France, private label wines are readily available and account for a third of the market. So, may I remind this government that wineries in Niagara region are the main source of household incomes. It puts food on the table and most people are employed by them.

My question would be, again, to the minister: Have you participated in discussions with other ministries regarding the potential of the devastating impact of private labels on local growers in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Stan Cho: Thank you—through you, Chair, to the MPP—for the very important question. I'm really glad you asked this question here at the committee for a number of reasons.

If you'll indulge me for a second—I don't know if you know this, actually. Wine country is extremely important to me. You may have heard me say this before, MPP Stevens, actually, but I owe my life to Niagara Falls, because the only reason my mom agreed to marry my dad from South Korea was that he was the only suitor who said, "I can show you Niagara Falls." That's a true story. My mom is very pretty—my dad, not so much.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: We've discussed that before, yes.

Hon. Stan Cho: But in that story—I've had the opportunity to go down to Niagara and share that with many of the wineries down there, some of them in your riding.

I understand—really, since 2018, when I've been visiting—the importance of what it means to the local communities. This is local product, and we've got some of the best product in the world, and I think we are showcasing that better and better as we go. It's an incremental process.

You'll remember back in the day, in 2018, you couldn't even sell local product at farmers' markets. That was changed.

We had a 6.1% tax that wineries in your riding were complaining about. We've gotten rid of that, as a government.

There have been some great things—most recently, of course, allowing for the sale of local wines inside of convenience stores is a game-changer, and I can't wait to see the numbers come out from the Ministry of Finance on how that has promoted local product.

On this particular issue, I am aware—I have had conversations, indeed, with the Ministry of Finance. It is a Ministry of Finance issue, of course—

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Yes, it is. Public and business—

Hon. Stan Cho: Public and business service delivery. But when it comes to supporting those local wineries—from the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming, there is absolute commitment to making sure that we continue to support those local wineries.

I am with you in saying that while we've done a great job so far, the job is not quite yet finished. I can't wait until, in Australia and South Africa, people are rushing to the store shelves to pick up local Niagara region St. Catharines wine—because we can get there, and I'm confident that we can do it.

I'm committed to making sure that we have further discussions on the topic. If you want to present a letter to me, we can chat further on this topic, for sure.

I appreciate the question.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I really appreciate that I can follow up with a letter with you, Minister.

It is quite concerning—again, the VQA wines are used by local grapes. We're talking about grapes coming in from out of country into our Niagara region, as well as into the Prince Edward county's, and combining these wines, which is going to—we see it with the private labels being able to go into these big grocers. These wines are already allowed in Alberta and make up 15% of their market share and up to 40% of the total wine sales at Alberta's Costco stores.

I understand that the VQA does fall under—as we had that discussion—the Ministry of Public and Business Service Delivery. However, I believe it is just as important that the Ministry of Tourism plays a supportive role in protecting our Ontario grape growers, which are small. As we've said, it is so important. They are small business owners as well—and if we sell them off and the grapes are rotting on the ground, then the tourism is going to hurt throughout the Niagara region and Port Elgin. So I just wanted to make sure that I have the confidence in you, Minister, that I can write that letter—and I can get my grape growers to also follow up on that. That's great.

Hon. Stan Cho: I'm absolutely committed to the sector. And you can tell the grape growers that I drive a straighter grape harvester than MPP Oosterhoff. They saw it firsthand, so I'll tell you that. I appreciate it.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Thank you very much.

I'm going to go on to the staycation tax credit. We all know that the staycation tax credit provided Ontarians a 20% credit on eligible accommodation expenses across the province when booking hotels and cottages and campgrounds in 2022. This tax credit also really did encourage Ontarians to vacation within our beautiful province of Ontario—they also got to support local businesses, which is so important, through the tourism part of our government, and the tourism sector after the pandemic. Unfortunately, this was cancelled after one year—I've heard it through many, many small businesses that are now turning their signs to close. Despite industry associations such as the Ontario Chamber of Commerce revealing that the sector wouldn't fully recover until at least 2025, this government cancelled it after a year. The chamber of commerce urged the government to extend the tax credit indefinitely—which showed small businesses that are just getting off their feet that they had a chance. The credit provided approximately \$270 million in tourism supports to the provincial economy. That is \$270 million that went back into the pockets of tourism operations, small businesses and employees the sector supports.

The Niagara Falls tourism, for example, is not yet back onto pre-pandemic levels.

You mentioned your parents, and I'm sure that if that happened to them, they would have felt that crunch at that time, of small business owners.

Local tourism officials say the American market, which makes up to 35% of the visitation annually and 50% of annual revenue, is still down—a whopping 50% overall.

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As we all know that this was very important, this staycation across Ontario, for small businesses—we drive down our highways, we see the big signs of "We're open for business" that your government has planted, coming from across all borders.

Now, with an updated number coming in as to where the tourism sector sits financially, what plans does this government or this ministry have to specifically reinstate the staycation tax credit?

Hon. Stan Cho: Through you, Chair, thank you to the MPP once again for a very important question. It's an im-

portant question for me, particularly, because I remember, in 2019, I was the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance, and this was one of those files I was very passionate about in budget 2020, when we introduced it as a pandemic relief measure—and I remember it was one of those measures. I'm not making a political statement. I remember debating it in the House, when the opposition members ultimately ended up voting against the staycation tax credit. I remember saying, "This is going to really drive local tourism"—and it did; the numbers showed evidence of that. I think you spoke to some of the real, great metrics that came out of the program, and it was always intended to be one of those—well, you know what hotels and the tourism industry looked like during the pandemic. It was the first hit, the hardest hit, and it took the longest to recover, as previous ministers have said. That tax credit was a one-year program which provided a vital lifeline to an industry that needed support when things were darkest for the industry. It provided that light, and we were proud to say that the intended outcome of that program was very successful.

Where are we today? Obviously, 2020—it's hard to believe that was four years ago; it was a very different time. We are on the cusp, and I said this in my comments as well, of where we're not just intending to recover; we are intending to exceed the pre-pandemic levels of tourism, and we are headed in that trajectory. I've seen recent studies from the Niagara region that you spoke about—international travel. Some people have said, "Well, visitors from China are down"; the South Asian community is up in staggering numbers. We are drawing from other places around the world that are really accounting for an increase and an uptick in those international—

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Excuse me, Minister—sorry; Madam Chair, through you.

Our local businesses within Niagara are showing, for example, that our tourism is down; it is not yet at pre-pandemic levels, as you were saying. The numbers you're touting are not showing within the small businesses. Local tourism officials say the American market, which makes up 35% of the visitation annually and 50% of the annual revenue, is down 50% overall.

We are looking for that staycation model to come back. The chamber of commerce did reveal back in 2022 that the sector would not fully recover until at least 2025. You took away that staycation tax credit that was actually showing small businesses hope and that they could continue to not close—their signs backwards. They want to be open.

This government boasts, as I said, that you're open for business. Yet annual tourism revenue, again, in Niagara Falls, for example, is still down 50% from pre-pandemic levels.

Minister, I just want to ask you, do you have any plans to introduce some other relief programs to consumers to encourage local spending within our communities—to live, dine, play—to support critical industries and to continue to support tourism, so that all of our ridings within all of the communities with cities throughout Ontario have hope? Are you going to reinstate something?

Hon. Stan Cho: Chair, the member and I share a passion for seeing tourism grow, not just in her region but across this province, and I appreciate that passion because we all share it.

To be very clear, on the staycation tax credit that was introduced during the pandemic as a temporary measure, that was to encourage our visitors within Ontario's own borders. Now, as we sunset and we look at the pandemic in our rear-view mirror, it's important to shift, to look to where the bigger numbers are going to come from. The numbers, you're right—the MPP is saying, on the local numbers, as we come out of the pandemic and it leaves us behind, those numbers are recovering, but the intent is to surpass those pre-pandemic levels.

You speak about supports, MPP Stevens. When you look at the \$155 million, through 2023-24, that has invested into this sector through our funding program—regional tourism organization grants, Destination Ontario, two ministry attractions, tourism agencies, transfer payment entities—this is a big level of support. It is a big level of support that is intended to look beyond what were the dark times in the confines of COVID-19 and the travel restrictions that existed. There are incredible amounts of programs that we are talking about here. So, \$19.5 million for the festival and events sector, which we know draws international tourism; \$19.3 million for the RTOs, as I said; over \$300,000 to Tourism Development Fund; \$33 million for Destination Ontario; \$4.1 million for—I could go on.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Wonderful.

Hon. Stan Cho: I could go on.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: You could go on; yes, you could.

Hon. Stan Cho: The point is, MPP Stevens, that the supports are broad.

I'm encouraged to hear the tone from the member, because I'm looking forward to, when this government introduces new measures, as we did in 2020 with the staycation tax credit—that the opposition will vote in favour of it this time around.

I'm encouraged, MPP. Thank you.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Well, we will if there are no poison pills within these motions. We always look after our communities and our ridings. When there are things within a large omnibus bill that people in Ontario don't like, that's when the opposition votes against them—that's not what we're for. We're here to look after our tourism.

Minister, I just want to ask, has your ministry done an official impact analysis on the staycation credit on the Niagara region or elsewhere that would inform the decision to stop offering it to consumers and tourism-based businesses?

Hon. Stan Cho: As a Ministry of Finance lead, of course, this is not something that our ministry is privy to. This staycation tax credit was led through the Ministry of Finance, and I'm sure you could direct your question to the Minister of Finance.

Just very quickly, on budget 2020, which I remember very vividly from my time at the Ministry of Finance: I

remember in that particular—and this is not really for the scope of this committee, but there were no amendments put forward from the opposition at the time, so it was hard to say there were poison pills when there were no suggestions for what could have been changed in the document.

However, for the purposes of today and today's discussion—I think the point you're making, MPP Stevens, is that the tourism industry needs to keep growing and we need to do everything we can to continue to support that growth. I'm with you on that. And as we work together and we introduce new initiatives, please contact me at any time if you want to talk about what's important for your region.

Your region is amazing. I've been down there six times since the cabinet shuffle back in June. I continue—obviously, things are hard with a newborn at home at the moment, but I'll be back very soon.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Thank you very much for that. And we will continue—because it's not about you and I; it's about all of our small businesses, and I'm hearing it from the chamber of commerce as well as Niagara, but all across Ontario. So I think it's important that we do get together and we look after maybe reinstating that staycation—

Hon. Stan Cho: You can buy me a wine in your region. I'd be happy to join you for that.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Yes, my husband works for a winery. As I said, it puts money and food on the table. How much time do I have?

Interjection.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Three minutes. I'm going to have to quickly scoot over to the Minister of Sport, then, if you don't mind.

Hon. Stan Cho: “Scoot over”?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I have more, but I'm going to wait for my second round. Thank you.

Minister of Sport, I listened intently to your intro. I know we've worked together in the past. I think there are two main things that I really want to get out, so we'll be quick on our questions and our answers.

In the past two years, there have been numerous complaints from parents, as you know and I know, of hockey players in the community about issues regarding hazing—forms of abuse and safety concerns within our minor hockey leagues, and all sports across the board, and the Ontario Hockey League.

Can you enlighten us or tell me if there is an estimated amount for the 2024-25 budget year that is being allocated to promote and support safety in sports—it's really important, as you mentioned—and whether, through the creation of specialized or other forms of training programs, that might be initiated.

1340

Hon. Neil Lumsden: You bet.

I was going to jump on and partially answer one of the questions you were talking about, with Niagara and supporting Niagara, around the staycation, and part of it—I think it's the 108th Grey Cup. We extended it to Niagara for a reason. We did the player awards there. People stayed

there. They spent time there. One of the ideas behind that was to broaden the perspective of not only the game itself, but the reach of tourism, when sport tourism can get out there and help areas like Niagara, where, in the past, it was always very central. So the economic impact in Hamilton, which was very dramatic—

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong): One minute remaining.

Hon. Neil Lumsden: —and done by an independent source also folded over into Niagara.

I'll get on to the abuse after.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Thank you. Do you know what? I might ask you to follow up and answer my question through a letter, if you wouldn't mind, if that saves us some time, or maybe the next 20 minutes.

I've got one other one, and maybe we can get to it. It's a real quick one. Maybe you can answer it quick and get right to the meat and potatoes of it.

Parents are facing, as we know, an economic barrier for children to be able to participate in after-school extracurricular activities, whether it be music or theatre classes or soccer or baseball—they all join together. Most parents right now are working two jobs, trying to get food on the table. We all know that finances are a hardship. Our children deserve to have that opportunity and not be held back by economic statuses, especially when Mom and Dad are working so hard—

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong): We'll have to move on to the independent member. MPP McMahon.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you, everyone, for coming in. It's nice to see this duo. This is very interesting.

Interjection: Dynamic.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I'm not going to say “dynamic duo”; I'm just going to say “duo.”

We're going to keep Minister Lumsden on the hot seat and just ask, first off, about FIFA. You were mentioning that the Ontario investment is \$97 million; I think that was the number I got.

Hon. Neil Lumsden: Correct.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: So that's how much we've spent, or we're going to spend. What's the estimation for revenue that we would make from this event?

Hon. Neil Lumsden: Well, the estimation is based on previous events that have been held on other parts of the planet. I can tell you that the increase of the provincial GDP is projected to be \$456 million—probably upwards of 3,000 local jobs supported because of the event itself, \$826 million in overall economic impact, over 300,000 visitors from outside of Toronto coming to stay for either the events or the games, and \$1.66 million in federal, provincial and local taxes.

So the impact of what this event represents—and sometimes we get caught up, because the 2026 World Cup is the World Cup, and we look much closer on, “What is it going to do here? What's the legacy piece?” Well, there's a legacy piece in our investment. There is also the support piece that we have to supply with respect to security and transportation. But the overall impact of participation and

those coming to this city for that event alone, because it is such a strong event around the world, is huge. That's why people are so aggressive—people as in the United States and other countries—to host an event like this. The residual effect financially for all those within the community and who own businesses, peripherally or main—hotel rooms, the event centres—and selling Toronto and Ontario as a place to host a world-class event, will be second to none.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: That sounds fantastic.

Hon. Neil Lumsden: It is.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: How are the preparations going? There's a committee; are you on it with all the levels of government? Can you explain that?

Hon. Neil Lumsden: We have representation on the committee, and it seems to be going well. There's an awful lot of work that goes into this and I'm not sure if everyone appreciates.

In a previous life, I was involved in event management and event acquisition. I was involved in the world cycling championships in Hamilton in 2003, and I know exactly how long it takes when you're dealing with, in our case, the UCI, which is the international cycling body. We had the preparations starting at least 18 months out, which doesn't come close to what the World Cup is going to be—with respect to people coming in, it was enormous.

So there is a lot of work. Do I sit on the committees that are doing the work? No. Do we have representation? You bet we do. We are kept apprised of what is going on and how well it is going, because we're a supporter. We're not the executor of this event. We didn't bid on it; Toronto did. The city of Toronto is working very hard, and we are supporting them, not only financially, but with great people who know the business of sport, and helping them out to pull this thing off, to make sure that it is—

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Great.

Hon. Neil Lumsden: —great. Yes. That's the word: "great."

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: If you were involved in the world cycling championships, that's great. You must be a strong supporter of bike lanes. We'll talk about that later.

Hon. Neil Lumsden: I believe there is a difference between racing and bike lanes, but you can go ahead and cross—you cross the road on that one.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I biked here safely today in bike lanes, just for the record.

Hon. Neil Lumsden: As long as you're wearing a helmet—safety first.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Absolutely—and in the bike lanes.

I want to talk to the new dad.

Congratulations, Minister Cho, on your new child, a daughter.

Applause.

Hon. Stan Cho: Thank you.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: We need more women in politics. As you look across the table over there—we need to up that gender equity. We'll get her in.

Have you heard of a building called the Corleck building? Your partner in crime has been down there. It's the Canada Ireland Foundation building between the Canada Malting silos and the Billy Bishop airport. I'm just wondering about how much investment you guys are doing for arts organizations, for infrastructure versus operational funding. First of all, this building is a phenomenal adaptive reuse of a heritage building. It was the Canada Malting headquarters back in the day—a bit of a kind of madman style inside. It's in a perfect location. When you come out from Billy Bishop—you used to see a derelict building and gravel and whatnot, and the city has just invested in a huge, phenomenal new public realm and park there. Ireland Park is nearby. They're turning it into kind of a pseudo—not exactly typical museum, but event space, artists in studio or artists in residence, conference centre and whatnot. The government of Ireland has actually contributed. It's the first of its kind, where a foreign government is investing in something—in Toronto, anyway. They've invested \$2 million. The feds have invested \$4.5 million. The city has negotiated for the building and other funding, and there has been nothing from the province. Everyone has got their logos up, and everyone is very involved. It's going to be a phenomenal arts and culture event space. I'm just wondering what kinds of funding opportunities—besides Trillium grants.

Hon. Stan Cho: So, three things to respond to the member—first of all, I appreciate your congratulations, and all of the members, on the birth of my daughter three weeks ago. It's very welcome. It's the first applause I've received from anything to do with fatherhood. I have no idea what I'm doing, in that sense. But thank you very much. It was very warming.

I have not been to this particular building—

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I'll bring you down.

Hon. Stan Cho: I would love to go for a visit. I know of the building.

I'll start by saying that I think that in general, our city of Toronto, where I was born and raised and that I'm very proud of, could have done a better job in developing its waterfront over the decades. You know that many world-class cities—think to Chicago, think to New York City, and globally—have done a very good job of not just monetizing their waterways but also bringing tourists down, not just internationally but domestically, to these vibrant areas.

So I agree with you that there's work to be done when it comes down to amazing areas like this. This is a ministry of heritage lead, so I'm not sure what they have planned in terms of the general, broader heritage buildings and things like that. But I am happy to talk—through Deputy Kennedy—about some of the supports that we have been working on for arts buildings and promoting the arts sector overall, and the culture.

Ms. Nancy Kennedy: Thank you, Minister.

For the record, I'm Nancy Kennedy, deputy minister for the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming.

For this particular building—it's actually the first time I've heard of it. We don't have a direct program for it, but as the minister mentioned, we can take it back to the ministry

responsible for heritage and just sort of raise the issue. It does sound interesting.

1350

We do fund programming through the Ontario Arts Council, through other sorts of programs that we have. So when you mention some of the things that might be happening in the building—that might be something, through our different programs and funding for organizations, that they could access. The Ontario Arts Council provides about \$60 million a year in funding for arts organizations, many of which are located in the city of Toronto, as you probably know. I'd be interested to hear a bit more about the enterprise, and then we can pass on some information to our lead there and that agency to see if there's any eligibility.

Hon. Stan Cho: I'll just add for the members that for your particular riding, over the 2023-24 fiscal, there was \$1.6 million invested into the Beaches area, to that end. So it is something important to the ministry. But if there's anything further we can assist with, don't hesitate to reach out.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong): One minute remaining.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I helped create the Winter Stations big event on the waterfront to get people off their couches and off Netflix and outside in the winter and try to help Toronto become a winter city, so I think there has been funding from you on that.

We'll get you down to the Corleck.

In the two seconds that I have left because of my short timing—it needs to be changed, and we'll carry this over—what is your ministry doing in light of the climate emergency and the effect on tourism for, for example, skiing in Ontario, winter sports? What kinds of things are you guys preparing for, or how are you transitioning these groups into—if we don't have snow, like the Rideau Canal not being frozen for two years in a row. How can we help these amazing tourism providers, event spaces, that kind of thing, transition?

Hon. Stan Cho: I think the deputy has some information on that, if I have time, Chair; I'm not sure.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong): We're going to have to move to the government member—

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Carry over.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong): MPP Sabawy.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you very much for the informative submission. It's really very informative.

My question is going to be focusing on supporting the film and television sector. Lots of people in Ontario do not know that there are more movies that get shot in Toronto than in Hollywood, and this is a big industry in Canada here, not only because of the environment, but also because of the technicians and the small army of professionals who work in this to make the shooting possible—time and set-up and everything. Toronto is very well known in this industry. During the COVID period, this sector had lots of troubles in regard to sitting at home—there was no production, there were no contracts, there were no jobs—as well

as the strike that hit the south side of the borders, which made all those professionals basically out of a job. There was no investment coming. There was no new movie production here.

Can you tell us a little bit about what the ministry did, how we are recovering from this period and how we are planning to invest and grow that industry, including, of course, the gaming industry, which is booming now in Toronto—the programming of games and those kinds of activities?

Hon. Stan Cho: Thank you to the member.

Through you, Chair: It was the day after the cabinet shuffle that—I'm much more prepared to answer this question now than the day after the cabinet shuffle, because I ended up at a round table with the film industry, and I remember them talking about what they needed to continue to thrive and to support. And you're absolutely right; this is a giant economic driver here in the province of Ontario. There are so many movies and shows that we don't even know are filmed in Ontario. It's absolutely incredible.

Our government is supporting—through almost \$1 billion towards three film and television tax credits in 2024-25. I know, through the hard work of Minister Lumsden, who really championed this tax credit, that this is a game-changer for the industry. It was the round table I sat at—and the main ask was, "Please do not touch what you've already done." It is being extremely well received, and for good reason. This provides a 35% rebate on labour costs plus a 10% regional bonus for productions outside the GTA for domestic productions, and you can see it—the productions being created outside of the GTA are staggering. It's a long list of shows being filmed in the north—talk about economic drivers for regions that, really, it makes, arguably, a bigger impact in than here in a large urban area.

The Ontario Production Services Tax Credit, which is about \$524 million, provides a 21.5% rebate on production costs, labour, plus, for example, studio leasing fees for eligible foreign entities—for example, Hollywood production entities—and high-budget domestic production. This is really going to incent these big companies to come up here and to film in Ontario.

You talked about gaming, which is hugely important. The first week I was in the ministry, we got to meet some of these amazing video game producers. Did you know that the makers of Halo are from Ontario? I had no idea. These are massive games out there on the world stage that people are playing. The best part is, I get to tell my wife that video games are part of work, so I've dusted off the old console. This is a huge industry in Ontario. We've got world-class talent here. This is why we have the Ontario Computer Animation and Special Effects Tax Credit. This is over \$80 million. It provides an 18% rebate on computer animation and visual effects labour costs for domestic and foreign companies. These tax credits are uncapped as well, and that's making us competitive with other jurisdictions.

Let's remember, too, that one of the biggest selling features that we have—the Premier talks about this all the

time—is our workforce, the access to talented labour, with a very diverse population bringing all sorts of skill sets to the table.

We've got beautiful topography, locations throughout the north. The member from Beaches–East York talked about winter; we should be leaning into that. Not everybody is lucky enough to have four seasons. Now you've got beautiful leaves changing colour, and you've got beautiful snow—that may be controversial, but I'm one of those guys who will take snow over plus 35 and humidity any day, all day.

MPP Jill Andrew: Yes, that's me too.

Hon. Stan Cho: Thank you. I'm not alone in this. My wife hates when I say that.

The point is, we should be celebrating all that we have to offer. And these tax credits simply unlock the door for amazing companies, not just locally, but from all over the world, to come here and showcase what we have—because we have a lot here in the province of Ontario.

I appreciate that question from the member.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you very much, Minister.

Just to follow up on the same question, I want to state some facts: that we are having new studios built in Toronto, and we have a new studio getting built in Mississauga, in the airport area. According to the operators of those studios, they said they are booked two years ahead. That's how much demand is there for that space.

Also, in regard to the gaming and animation, there are some programs from colleges and universities here, like Humber, in conjunction with Disney studios, where students, as soon as they finish, go and have their co-op in the Disney studios. So it's a big industry, it's a big motivation, and it's a good career for a lot of Canadians—especially the people professionally working in that space.

My next question will be about the funding notification for leading festivals. We heard some complaints from many of the festival organizers about the delay in assigning the grants which help them to plan ahead of time their festivities. Again, festivals are a big industry as well. They bring tourism to different areas, and we know that every \$1 spent on tourism brings in \$21 back. So it's a big industry, and it's growing as well. So, lots of complaints about the timing and the process—what did you do—or your ministry is going to take place—to make sure that we encourage those festivities, which are a very big cultural motivation? There are lots of ethnic groups, lots of arts groups who do festivals and bring tourism to their places, as well as bring income to those industries to continue producing and continue attracting the public for their activities.

Hon. Stan Cho: Great question, MPP. Minister Lumsden and I were just chatting between questions. Timing matters, right? It matters on the tax credits, which is why we've improved the process in which those are accessible for companies. Timing matters when it comes to festivals and cultural experiences.

1400

I led with just touching on this in my opening comments, but it's worth repeating. I look to the members here, even on the opposition benches, and I think when you look around our neighbourhoods—I've noticed it clearly change

in my lifetime from being quite plain, and I don't mean that in a bad way, to becoming quite diverse ethnically. My neighbourhood is now, I think, 56% visible minority or something like that—I think that's the case across the province, which is attracting people from all over the world. That means that festivals and cultural experiences and our arts continue to evolve with this evolving mosaic, this colourful tapestry—that bill continues to get stronger in Ontario. I think that's a fantastic thing, and I think we don't celebrate that enough. We can't take that for granted, because a lot of places in the world don't have that. We have a great agency, Experience Ontario, that understands that.

That's why our government, when it comes to festivals and events, listens to the sector and the sector partners and what they need to make the program—not just the delivery but the timeliness and the effectiveness of it—better. It's a constantly improving process—hat includes the speed you're talking about at which decisions and payments to applicants are made. We launch earlier now, for example—that has been able to help make decisions sooner. And we're happy to say that we can notify applicants of funding decisions for the festival season by April. I think that helps with that clarity in planning, because of course we know there are quite a lot of events that happened during the warmer months.

The Experience Ontario 2024-25 program received 469 applications—these are across the entire province—and \$22.7 million of funding was requested from a program of \$19.5 million. That speaks to the competitiveness of the festivals area. Again, I think that speaks to the vibrancy and the cultural diversity of our province—and a growing province and a growing diversity. That's a total of 254 applications being successful with receiving funding of up to \$125,000. I've had an opportunity to visit several of these festivals that were funded through Experience Ontario, obviously contributing to our vibrancy and to the quality of life that we have here—and it's an important question.

To the member's point about making the process better—it's a constant improvement, and we're happy to partner with you as well as the agency to make sure we continue to improve on what we've done.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you very much, Minister, for the answer.

Just to follow up for the record: This summer, Mississauga had many festivities, many festivals, ethnic festivals which brought in top artists from India, top artists from Pakistan, top artists from Egypt—I think that the top 10 singers of the country were here in Mississauga this summer.

Hon. Stan Cho: I was wondering when you were going to mention Egypt, MPP; I'm surprised it took that long.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: People don't understand how big an economic movement that is—the Egyptian festival by itself, 62,000 visitors in two days. This is people coming from across the country, from outside the country, from the US, flying in to attend those activities. [*Inaudible*] was like, I think, 100,000 visitors this year. It is a very big economic motivation for the municipalities and for the people of Ontario.

I'll give the rest of the time to my colleague.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong): MPP Kanapathi.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you to Minister Lumsden and Minister Cho for your wonderful presentation. I know, for your work—you don't feel like you are working. I know your passion for your ministry.

Minister Cho, in your presentation, you mentioned Ontario's rich diversity and the culture.

I'm a parliamentary assistant to the Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism. Before I got in as MPP, I was a Markham councillor. Markham is the most ethnically diverse city in all of Canada, according to the census. And within Markham, my riding is the most ethnically diverse, culturally diverse riding. I enjoy the rich culture each and every day, the music and dances—importantly, food. Most important is the food. I'm proud to represent the most ethnically and culturally diverse riding in the country. I go to many cultural events on a day-to-day basis.

So, my question to you, Minister: How is your ministry supporting diverse cultural artists across Ontario and ensuring an inclusive and well-supported creative sector?

Hon. Stan Cho: I'd normally debate you vigorously on if your riding is the most culturally diverse, but we do share a corner border, so I won't do that here this afternoon. I appreciate the question, though, MPP Kanapathi.

For the reasons we've discussed already today, Ontario is very vibrant and has an incredible arts sector, which makes significant contributions to our province, and it's a big employer—thousands of jobs in a wide range of artistic fields.

Yesterday morning, I had a really good meeting with the Ontario Arts Council at their office to talk about the very issues that you raised in your question. The Ontario Arts Council, OAC, is an agency of the ministry that was provided \$60 million for 2024-25 for operating funding to support the arts sector that you speak of. They do a lot of great things. It helps the agency respond to the current financial climate and the emergence of new, diverse art forms. MPP Kanapathi—through you, Chair—if you are interested in seeing what they've supported in your riding, they're able to pull that up. They were kind enough to show me some of the events they've supported in Willowdale. They do some great stuff. They support events and artists that I didn't even know existed in my riding, and they're popular. These things are driving traffic. They're driving tourism. It's a big economic driver and a big employer, as I mentioned. In 2023-24, the OAC's operating funding of \$60 million included a one-time investment of \$5 million to support the implementation of their strategic plan and the continued resiliency of the arts sector here in Ontario, understanding that it's something that we need to continue to invest in. In fact, since 2018, our government has invested over \$1 billion to support the arts, including \$465 million, in that time, to the OAC directly. But our government will also support, through tourism and culture programs like the Ontario Cultural Attractions Fund, which is a separate funding line—and that program helps cultural organizations promote cultural tourism festivals, events and exhibitions.

I know this is an important issue for you. You talk about your time as a councillor. Certainly, I think you would agree, even since your time as a councillor, your riding has continued to become more and more diverse, and you know we have record population growth. It's something that we continually need to examine and to improve upon as we enrich that cultural mosaic we've spoken about already.

I appreciate the question this afternoon, to the member.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Minister, you also mentioned cultural tourism. It's an important part of our economy, and this is a game-changer. You also mentioned South Asian tourists coming to Niagara. Could you elaborate on that? I'd like to hear more about how our cultural tourism is—

Hon. Stan Cho: Yes. Well, we can do better than that. Why don't you come with me to Niagara Falls next time we go? You will see visibly that the South Asians are coming a lot, yes.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I'll come.

Hon. Stan Cho: All of you are invited to come with me; yes, absolutely.

It's not only the fastest-growing demographic in our province—and I don't have the population growth statistics ahead of me, but they're something we can get for you—they are contributing in big ways to our cultural vibrancy here in Ontario. I'm proud of that.

This Friday, I will be at a Bollywood event. I've never been invited to something like that—

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: In Niagara?

Hon. Stan Cho: In Vaughan, I believe, it is, but they're all over the province at this point.

There is a lot to celebrate when it comes to the South Asian community.

I know you, being of Tamil background, have talked about the rich vibrancy in your riding. That's exactly what the funding I spoke of in your previous question goes towards supporting. We have great agencies, Experience Ontario and the Ontario Arts Council, who understand that investing in these cultural endeavours is important.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Over the summer in Markham, the Markham Fairgrounds is filled with Bollywood stars, and 15,000 or 20,000 people come. It's a culture that is uniting people—not only the South Asian community. It's bringing people together to enjoy the rich culture, to share their culture. That is a part of the success we have in Ontario.

Thank you for your presentation.

How much time do we have?

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong): Two minutes.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: One more follow-up question for the two minutes: Please elaborate on the initiatives your ministry is implementing to promote diversity and support under-represented groups in the music sector in Ontario.

1410

Hon. Stan Cho: I'm glad you brought up the music sector, because it's something that we didn't really get to expand on in my opening comments.

The Ontario Music Investment Fund, the OMIF, delivered through Ontario Creates, provides \$7 million in support

annually in targeted economic development investment to our vibrant music scene here. To maximize the return on that investment and create more opportunities for emerging artists to record and perform in Ontario, OMIF supports Ontario music companies with strong potential growth. If you look to 2023-24, the agency supported 158 projects, including support for 48 live music companies in presenting their events and festivals to Ontario audiences and to continue that live music experience.

Ontario Creates also delivers a time-limited AcceleratiON program whose objective is to invest in new, emerging Black and Indigenous-owned music businesses that demonstrate high potential for growth and cultural impact. In 2023-24, \$384,000 was provided to 34 funding recipients.

As I mentioned, OAC continues to support artists and organizations working in a variety of styles and genres of music. There's some overlap when it comes to the various entities that fall under the ministry, but the point is to celebrate, understand that whether it's music, film, gaming, we appreciate the diversity that we have. We need to continue. This is a special place, and that sector has a lot to do with it.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong): Moving on to the official opposition: MPP Andrew.

MPP Jill Andrew: I'll be directing my questions and comments to Minister Cho.

First of all, I'd like to thank the government for underscoring the importance of festivals in our province of Ontario. They're an incredible part of our sense of identity, belonging, heritage, and of course, they support our small businesses, tourism, and all of the pieces that every single one of us in this room knows.

That's why I would ask why the government has slashed the Experience Ontario funding from \$50 million to \$19 million—and that is after Minister Cho himself has said there were 469 applications. So we know that there's a ton of need, yet if we speak to some of our friends from Rastafest, if we speak to folks from the Toronto Caribbean Carnival, if we speak to folks from the Toronto Outdoor Picture Show, we know that there are many festivals that are struggling. Sure, some of them have gotten a bit of funding. Carnival, for instance—what did they say? I believe they were allocated \$125,000, even though we're talking about a festival that attracts over two million visitors annually and really is crying out for sustainable operating funding.

So I'll ask the first question: Why cut Experience Ontario, from \$50 million to \$19 million? Of course, because I have a short amount of time, if I have to interject, I will.

Hon. Stan Cho: I appreciate the question from the MPP, and I'm going to turn to the deputy for the funding line, specifically.

I will agree with you on the importance of it. You said that it is important to you. In your riding, in fact, we recognize how important funding is for your festivals, and there has been, in 2023-24, in just your riding, over \$1.8 million invested into those very festivals that you speak of. In fact, since 2018—it's almost \$22 million into the riding to just support what's happening locally for you. I know that's important to you, and we recognize that.

I'll turn it to the deputy to talk about the Experience Ontario funding.

MPP Jill Andrew: I just want to express that Rastafest hasn't received a penny.

I'll go to your colleague.

Ms. Nancy Kennedy: Thank you for the question.

You're right; the money has gone down to \$19.5 million. But the \$50-million figure was during the pandemic, and that funding was put in place to keep organizations viable, in fact, when they couldn't have in-person events—and so the money now is back at steady state. Now it is an annual, competitive program.

You mentioned Rastafest. We are going into the time of year when people can apply again for the program, and certainly—if you tell us the information—I would encourage them to reapply. Open festivals is quite a competitive program, and every year is a new year. So we'll take that away.

MPP Jill Andrew: Thank you so much. I appreciate that.

The most important thing that I want to have on record is that we have 469 applications—one of those is TOPS, Toronto Outdoor Picture Show. These are folks who have received some pennies from the Ontario Arts Council, and of course, I say that relative to the thousands of folks they bring in as the largest in-person Toronto picture show—and other organizations that are hurting for funds.

So we've covered Experience Ontario and what I've mentioned—the slashing of \$50 million to \$19 million.

I'd like to go to the Ontario Arts Council. This is another pocket of funding that, as we know, is in dire need of support. OAC targets all of our communities. They support our communities as best they can. They support priority groups, including francophone communities, BIPOC communities, 2SLGBTQ, people with disabilities etc., etc.

I'm hearing from everyone, including folks at OAC, folks outside of community, that OAC is starved and has been underfunded for several fiscal cycles. So the \$60 million that has been touted around here several times this afternoon—we're talking 2018, sitting in 2024. TAPA, CARFAC, artists, cultural workers are calling for at least a \$95-million operating budget for OAC, and to actually have it thrive, they're looking at \$140 million. So I'm just wondering, why are we stuck at \$60 million? Why are we stuck in 2018 in 2024?

Hon. Stan Cho: Thank you for the question, MPP Andrew.

About 26 hours ago, I was in the Ontario Arts Council boardroom with CO Michael Murray and chair Simon Foster, as well as other members of the board and some employees of the Ontario Arts Council. We went through, for over an hour, a lot of the important work that they do and where the \$60 million our government has provided has gone to enriching the cultural fabric and experience that Ontarians get to—

MPP Jill Andrew: I apologize for this, Minister, but if you can just go directly to the piece around funding—we're in 2024; \$60 million is not enough. That's what OAC is saying, that's what artists and priority groups—with \$60 million, we're talking six bucks a person, if we look at all

groups. We can't make a lot of arts and culture and heritage moments for six bucks a person.

So I'm asking, why are we at a \$60-million operating budget when experts, artists, cultural workers, arts organizations and associations are demanding a \$95-million operating budget just to keep it afloat and \$140 million to see it thrive? I'll give you about a minute, if we can get that.

Hon. Stan Cho: I appreciate the time there, MPP Andrew.

I think it's important to talk about the work OAC does. You can talk about dollars, and you can talk about—

MPP Jill Andrew: We all know what it does, Minister. I'm asking you about the dollars. This is estimates.

Hon. Stan Cho: The point is, though, I chatted directly with the OAC, and we talked about how we can lead to better outcomes for the amazing attractions—the cultural vibrancy that they contribute to. It's important to understand what is actually coming out of an agency, to talk about funding—you can't delineate the two. You can't say, "Here's the money, and let's ignore the outcomes."

MPP Jill Andrew: So we'll stick a pin in OAC—because I've done this rodeo before.

What's my time check, Chair?

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong): Thirteen minutes.

MPP Jill Andrew: Thank you so much.

Just for the record: I'm bringing up Experience Ontario, which has been slashed from \$50 million to \$19 million. I've brought up OAC funding, which we've seen pretty much stagnated where it's at—2018, 2019.

You mentioned the \$5-million pandemic funding. Guess what? The arts and culture world has said it will take five to six years to even survive the pandemic, so we need more help now—even now, in 2024—not less.

We've gotten some responses from the government on Experience Ontario and OAC.

I'd like to talk about our tax credits. You said a great deal about your passion of film and television, and I thank you for that. However, can the minister explain the \$10-million estimated reduction to the film and television tax credit from 2023 to the 2024-25 budget year?

Hon. Stan Cho: As I mentioned in the question from the government side—

MPP Jill Andrew: Page 65.

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Hon. Stan Cho: I appreciate that.

The tax credit program is not a capped program, so there are no actual limits on who can apply for this. There are several metrics that those who apply have to hit, and I'm happy to go through some of that, if you'd like.

As I said, the government has budgeted almost a billion dollars towards the tax credits that I spoke about, in 2024-25. And being uncapped—really, our focus has been on how we can deliver these faster, which the film and television industries themselves, the companies themselves, have been telling us is something that they're looking towards.

I don't know, Deputy, if you want to add anything to that.

Ms. Nancy Kennedy: No, I think you're right. I think the important point is that it's an uncapped program, so it depends on who applies.

MPP Jill Andrew: Thank you both for this.

I thought I heard it in this committee meeting where you mentioned that you were talking to the film and TV people the day after you were appointed to your ministry, and they pretty much said to leave things where it's at. From what I'm hearing from TV and film, the idea is, if anything, do better by tax credits; certainly, do not reduce—an estimated reduction, albeit, of \$10 million to tax credits. So we can't underestimate or can't understate the billions of dollars that film and TV contributes to our GDP and the tens of thousands of dollars of jobs that are created alone in that one sector.

So I would simply ask that we not reduce film and television tax credits, and if that's on the table for this government, that you rethink that. Considering that it's actually there as an estimated reduction, can the minister tell us if this reduction has been communicated to the film and TV sector? Have you done consultations on this film and TV tax credit reduction?

Hon. Stan Cho: Let me start with the topic of consultations. We have been communicating with the industry non-stop since June. Again, I'm picking up the torch for a lot of hard work that Minister Lumsden had done with the sector for a very long time to get it to this point.

Being an uncapped program—I'm not sure where it was communicated there's a reduction of \$10 million. This is the first time I'm hearing of any figure of that kind—

MPP Jill Andrew: Well, in that case, then, let's follow up again, you and I, off of committee, and I'll bring you up to speed. And this time, I would hope that we get a response. When we sent a letter to you some months ago about Toronto Outdoor Picture Show and Experience Ontario and just sort of cuts to festival funding in general, we did not get a response.

I want to move over to the Community Museum Operating Grant. I'm glad that you mentioned museums, because, interestingly, heritage fell off of the table of the ministry. So I'm glad you mentioned museums.

The CMOG, according to my research and conversations with museums, has been closed to new applicants since 2016. From what I understand, the CMOG grant has not received any funding for almost 20 years, and that's making it really difficult for our museums across the province to keep up with interactive activities, staffing, building infrastructure. You guys talk a lot about sports and all the money being injected into sports, but from what I hear from stakeholders—arts and cultural heritage buildings, not as much. And we won't go to the science centre today; that's for another time.

I'm just wondering about CMOG and if we can expect to see real, sustainable funding to that grant that has not been touched in almost 20 years.

Hon. Stan Cho: So a couple of pieces there, to the MPP, because there are two letters you were referencing, and I just want to make sure—I did respond to both of the letters, the one you wrote yesterday as well as the one that you were referencing earlier in your question.

Of course, heritage buildings are not under the purview of this ministry at the moment—

MPP Jill Andrew: Understood. But you mentioned the CMOG grant, so I'm asking you point-blank—it's frozen for 20 years. How do you explain that to museums across our province?

Hon. Stan Cho: Again, CMOG—and this goes to the conversation we were talking about with the Ontario Arts Council as well. It's important to communicate with these agencies on what funding is going towards, and CMOG has—in those conversations, they've talked about their supports to museums, to provide nearly 2,000 jobs; they've generated \$100 million in income and welcomed over 1.8 million visitors through 166 organizations. Those are important topics to talk about when you're talking about funding. It's not enough to just say, "Well, here's \$4.9 million, and where has that gone"—

MPP Jill Andrew: My apologies, Minister. What's my time check?

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong): Seven minutes.

MPP Jill Andrew: Okay.

Again, Minister, here's the thing: I'll admit I'm not an expert on museums, but I'm talking to the experts, and the experts are saying that the CMOG funding that supports our community museums has been frozen for practically two decades. The minister has spoken around it—but you're not explaining why that budget has been frozen. I'll follow up with you on that again offline, but I just want you to know this is not coming from me—community needs to see better investments in our museums across Ontario. I'm just being frank on that. I just want to be really direct on that.

Next up, because you mentioned libraries as well, I just want to give a little side note here that Ontario public libraries propose a targeted \$25-million annual investment in additional operating funds. Apparently, investment in public libraries is down 60%, and I was told that the province must "increase base provincial funding for Ontario's public libraries." Again, we're hearing from a stakeholder who is saying, "Thanks for whatever you've given us, but our needs and inflation demand more."

So can you tell me what our libraries can expect from the province?

Hon. Stan Cho: It's not just one level of funding. You've got your base level of funding for grants, programs, operating, pay equity; that's \$21.4 million. You've got Digital Archive Ontario; that's \$1.4 million. Internet connectivity—for those who don't know what that is, it's for populations less than 20,000, for library services to have Internet connectivity; that's a \$582,000 investment to provide that access for more remote or less populated communities. The Ontario Library Service—that's \$2.7 million; Centre for Equitable Library Access, \$925,000; library association, \$40,300.

And if you're asking about new programming, just on October 1, the day after the national day of reconciliation, I was at a First Nations library to announce a really great program for First Nations libraries—two funding streams that were topped up. The public libraries operational grant was doubled to nearly \$1,500 per library, as well as the First Nation Salary Supplement—this is a game-changer;

this was increased from a floor of \$13,500 to \$35,000, a 170% increase for libraries in First Nations communities to hire, to retain. I heard directly from the First Nations libraries who were saying that this is a game-changer when it comes to recruiting talent. These are inspirational libraries—

MPP Jill Andrew: I'm going to interrupt, and I'm going to agree with you. Anything we can do to support and amplify and uplift Indigenous communities is key.

On the note of Indigenous communities, I want to remind everyone in this room that it was this government that slashed the Indigenous Culture Fund, which also meant several jobs lost for Indigenous women. I understand that we haven't heard a lot about the Indigenous Culture Fund, but I do know that some Indigenous artists, cultural organizations and arts associations are looking at or have been asking the government to consider at least \$10-million investments directly in Indigenous arts. I'll stick a pin in that.

I will ask for the minister to follow up on the questions that I have posed today with some written responses. Of course, I'll reach out to you for those.

I want to also remind you about the Nia Centre for the performing arts in my community. It's Canada's first professional Black arts centre. We were very thankful to receive an OTF Grow grant, which really helped our community. And I know that the former minister for culture, Minister Lumsden—their staff had had some communications with Nia Centre, but I just want to flag for Minister Cho that Nia Centre supports thousands of folks and is only receiving \$23,000 of OAC budgets. We need more funding towards Nia Centre.

What's my time check?

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong): Two minutes, 40 seconds.

MPP Jill Andrew: Wonderful.

I also wanted to follow up on a question that my colleague wanted to propose in her 20 minutes, but it's also a question that's good for all of us here in Ontario.

As we know, families are struggling. Middle-class families are struggling—rent, mortgage, food, you name it—and they're having to make tough, difficult decisions between the haves and the needs and the wants and the needs. And do you know what is a need? After-school programming.

So I'm wondering, is this government planning on subsidizing after-school extracurricular activities, as they relate to cultural-based industries, arts and sports teams, in some way to lessen the financial burden on hard-working families? These aren't people who are asking for handouts. These are folks who are asking for a hand up because they've done their part, and now they're expecting this Conservative government to do their part too.

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Hon. Neil Lumsden: I'm happy to address that, absolutely.

The \$14.6 million goes to the after-school programs, and there are 111 partners as part of that. Boys and Girls Clubs also supports that.

When I was in Hamilton about a week and a half ago, I wanted to see—we talk a lot about the money, but it's really important to find out where the money goes and how it lands and the impact that it makes. I think you would agree with that.

MPP Jill Andrew: Absolutely.

Hon. Neil Lumsden: I've done a couple of visits to see exactly what that is—

MPP Jill Andrew: Can I get a—

Hon. Neil Lumsden: —and I find the locations that I've gone to, again supported by Boys and Girls Clubs—

MPP Jill Andrew: My apologies, Minister. We've got 30 seconds left. I promise you that I'll follow up. You've been great. We've had conversations in the hall. I will follow up.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong): It's one minute.

MPP Jill Andrew: I need to put on the record, as well, Ontario book publishers, since Minister Cho also spoke about them.

Recommendation 1: Expand the Ontario Book Publishing Tax Credit, and please include translated works and graphic novels. This gets at the heart of some of our under-represented communities. We have to include translated works and graphic novels.

And secondly, create an accessible and dedicated fund for public schools and libraries to purchase books produced by Canadian independent publishers. Currently, here in Ontario, the majority, 90%, of our books are foreign publishers, and that's a pretty big disgrace.

So thank you for mentioning book publishers, Minister Cho. I'm hoping that you can work with the Ontario Book Publishers Organization for us to get more Canadian and, heck, Ontarian curriculum in our schools.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong): We're moving on to MPP McMahon.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: We're going to work on our carry-over, if you remember it, because it was such a scintillating question. You recall it—about snow, winter, and how we're helping out tourism in winter months, given the climate emergency we're in that I know you are well aware of?

Hon. Stan Cho: I actually did remember your question from the previous round, so I would have gone on anyway.

The deputy and I were just talking about, after you finished your last question, that climate change is real and it's an important topic to be discussing. We'll be talking about it next week when we go to Alberta for our federal-provincial-territorial meetings with the other tourism ministers from across the country. It's something that we should all be aware of. We spoke of the importance of having four seasons. I agree that winter ain't winter without snow on the ground, and the last time I was in Ottawa, the river was not frozen, which kind of changes that dynamic of things. So it's an important topic of discussion. I'll let you know how things go after that meeting next week in Banff, and I'm happy to talk about what next steps we can take from there.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Okay, sounds good.

Let's go to the Las Vegas of the north—I'm just trying to get my head around this, because this is not my region and I'm not a casino lady. Mohegan has the business of casinos in Niagara. I know the Premier is not big on sole-sourcing or monopolies because when I was with him at city hall, he and his late brother were very vocal about a restaurant in my riding, the infamous Boardwalk Café, which was sole-sourced. I guess what's happening is that there's an agreement with the OLG, with Mohegan, and it's supposed to last until 2040, but you're looking at different ideas and kind of diversifying that for future casinos. Is that it? Can you tell me a bit about that?

Hon. Stan Cho: Chair, if you let me, through you—when is the last time you went to Niagara for a personal vacation, not for work?

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I've been to Niagara-on-the-Lake, but not Niagara Falls.

Hon. Stan Cho: The reason I ask, MPP Triple M, is because when I was first tasked with looking at a Niagara strategy, I made a couple of dozen phone calls to business community leaders, and I asked them that very question: "When was the last time you went to Niagara Falls—not for work, but for vacation?" I got exclusively one of two answers: "Not since I was a kid" or "Never." I challenge you to ask a city of a similar size with similar access to a destination like Niagara Falls—let's take LA, for example. Ask any of the same people in LA if that's the case about Las Vegas—"When is the last time you went to Las Vegas?"—and the answer will be drastically different. I think we identify what the problem is when it comes to a vibrant region, the Niagara region, right there in that one question. What are we missing?

We refer to it as "building the Las Vegas of the north." Well, I look forward to the day where we don't have to say that, where it's Niagara Falls, and you can call other places the Niagara Falls of the south or the east or the west. We have everything we need. We just need to unlock it in the Niagara region. We have world-class wineries, like the member from St. Catharines talked about. We have deep water in Port Colborne, where cruise ships are docking there. There are the Great Lakes tours that are touring all around the Great Lakes. You have some of the most beautiful beaches on the planet, Nickel Beach and Crystal Beach, again, with beautiful deep water you have. You mentioned Niagara-on-the-Lake, with vibrant theatre programming, beautiful wineries. All of this is within 30 minutes of a world-class attraction, the seventh wonder of the world, Niagara Falls, the reason I'm alive. What we have not done is connect all of that. And what are we missing? The connectivity. We're missing the amusement parks. We're missing the five-star dining. That's why people go to Las Vegas. That's why that is a one-week destination.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Sorry; how many casinos—two casinos right now that Mohegan has?

Hon. Stan Cho: Casinos operating in Niagara Falls?

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Yes.

Hon. Stan Cho: We have Fallsview casino and Casino Niagara.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: And how many casinos does your government want to attract to Niagara Falls?

Hon. Stan Cho: When it comes to gaming—and thank you for indulging me on that, Chair. It’s important for the context of the question.

When you’re talking about gaming—it is but one piece of what we are saying we want the Niagara strategy to be. We have an MPP right next to you who comes from very close to the Niagara region, understanding that gaming is just one thing. Right now, if you ask people, when you go to Niagara Falls, “How long are you staying there?”—it might be a three-hour trip, it might be a one-night trip; it’s not that four-night, five-night trip yet. And while it has so many great pieces, it’s missing those pieces that our government needs to focus on. What am I talking about? I’m talking about infrastructure.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: But the question is, how many casinos are you guys looking at?

Hon. Stan Cho: What we are looking at doing is creating the conditions for the private sector in Niagara region to robustly build this place to what it can be. I know this is going to be a world-class destination. This government is focused on making sure we enable private entities to be able to invest into Niagara, and that is going to be what we do.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: The 2023-24 public accounts show that OLG had lower net income than expected. So is the government renegotiating Mohegan’s casino operating and services agreement to try to increase OLG revenues, and if so, by how much?

Hon. Stan Cho: I may get this number wrong, member—through you, Chair—but the last time I checked, there were something like 192 agencies, boards and commissions. You have to have government constantly ask the broader public sector to improve, right? It is something that is crucial to not just respecting taxpayer dollars, but to outcomes of Ontarians—the OLG, of course, being a valuable part of that broader public sector. So if the question is generally, “Is the OLG tasked with constant improvement and looking at streamlining efficiencies?” Yes, absolutely, and that is the case across all of the agencies, boards and commissions that we oversee.

When it comes to the private dealings between an agency and the entities that they’re speaking to, the government, of course, and rightly so, in my opinion, should not be privy to that information. There are sensitive commercial dealings, for example, through the Niagara Parks Commission that I am not privy to.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: This committee—we’ve been travelling all over Ontario for the regional governance reviews and listening at length to politicians who represent their areas in different communities. So how does our regional governance review affect this strategy and this Las Vegas of the north idea?

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Hon. Stan Cho: I haven’t seen the review yet, but I’ll tell you this: I’m a former member of this committee. I respect incredibly the hard work that you do. I remember

those trips to Dryden in the dead of winter. I remember the long hours. I remember how difficult the work can be—

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: So when we come out with the report—

Hon. Stan Cho: When you come out with your report or whatever you have done, of course we’ll take that very seriously and under consideration.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: We’re supposed to be doing a second round, but I don’t know when that’s coming. I think we’ve exhausted that part.

Now let’s talk transportation. How are you working with the Ministry of Transportation to address transportation to these large tourist and cultural events? And will bike lanes be a part of that?

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong): One minute.

Hon. Stan Cho: I bother Minister Sarkaria daily. I bother him hourly, actually. One of the things we’re asking for desperately in the Niagara region to be worked on is an international airport. It’s something that the regions are asking for—

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Okay, but I’m just talking all over Ontario now—I’m kind of done with Niagara; sorry.

Hon. Stan Cho: I will also talk about Ontario—and into the strategy.

That’s why we’re building highways, roads, bridges. We have a growing population that’s not connected, and that’s also why, for every dollar we’re investing into transportation, we’re investing \$3 into transit—the largest subway expansion in North America’s history. You’re looking at building new connections across the province. This isn’t just about a Toronto-centred focus. It’s a big province that fits 14 European countries, has two time zones. We’re looking from southwestern Ontario and Windsor, all the way up to Kenora, across, all the way to eastern Ontario—

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Sure. I guess, in conjunction with that, we need the Eglinton Crosstown open at some point in my lifetime.

Hon. Stan Cho: Let’s remember the Liberals started the Eglinton Crosstown, Triple M.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong): We’re going to move on to MPP Byers for the next questions.

Mr. Rick Byers: Thank you to both ministers for your presentations this afternoon.

I want to ask the outstanding Minister of Sport a couple of questions. First, I want to ask you about the Community Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Fund. This was an exciting announcement in the last budget. We all know how important community facilities are, but I think, in particular, in rural—and I see this first-hand. These are such important facilities in these small communities, where people gather and the towns gather for events and other exciting things. This program has both a repair and rehabilitation element and new facilities and applications open to municipalities, not-for-profits, Indigenous communities and all sorts. Given the importance of sport and recreation facilities, I wonder if you could give us a sense of how this fund is going and how important it is.

Hon. Neil Lumsden: Thanks for the question.

Through you, Chair: This is something that will have immeasurable reach in communities. One of the things I had the good fortune of doing in the past 25 years is to travel to communities around Ontario just based on what I was doing at the time, be it coaching or otherwise, to see that in many of the communities, including mine in Hamilton and all of ours, the infrastructure is deteriorating in community centres, arenas, family areas and playgrounds. The idea behind this, and a strong one supported by the Premier, was, when you look at where the rest of the world stands with respect to activity within a community, we fall way behind, so not only do we have to repair, but we have to look to new—and the looking to new and the repair does a lot from a sport-tourism side that I won't touch on right now.

As an example, when we launched and then did a webinar for information, there were 600—not people, but groups—on the calls, to get information, then talked to regional advisers from there to move forward. That was both for stream 1 and stream 2. They're both very important. I can see stream 1's deadline to get the application in is October 29. So much has gone on and so little support has been shown because of the use—that comes down to the activity level. Amateur, minor, recreational sports are growing in our province, and we haven't got places to put people. Thank goodness for the new developments that are taking place and the ones that are going to get refurbished through the R and R program in stream 1 that you identified. Without that in our communities, they will suffer. We cannot allow the communities to say, "I have no place to go to even get exercise."

The pickleball trend is staggering. When I was in Windsor for the national baseball championships, they pulled me—not very hard—over to the pickleball courts. There were 10 of them, and I talked to the organizers and the person who runs the membership club. They've got a waiting list of 140 people. The pickleball courts go all day long with minor breaks in between. I was getting tired watching them.

We need to be able to give that ability to the communities so they can get out and get active. If we can get our young people who are playing sport now, who may aspire to go on and play university sport or be a pro somewhere in their sport—if that's what it is, and knowing how small the top of that pyramid is—to stay in sport and those within recreation to stay active, the long-term effect on our health care will be very positive. We're going to keep people healthier longer, more active, doing better things, which also brings communities together. I could go on.

Chair, I know we haven't got enough time to talk about what sport does within a community—again, aside from the development from sport and hosting tournaments and championships. It brings people together. There's nothing that galvanizes and supports young people and allows them to develop some of the best qualities anyone is ever going to have more than sport. It can happen in dance; it can happen in any kind of activity where movement is involved. That kind of thing brings people together, and that's what we need more of.

The response that we've had is just unbelievable. I expected that. This is the start. It is only the beginning.

Mr. Rick Byers: That's fantastic. I really appreciate that work. It's so important. Well done.

A quick question on the World Cup—you touched on it before. I'll confess, when I was in my youth, which, as you can tell, was a while ago, I always thought soccer was such a high-skill game, and I played football therefore—and I don't know whether, as a three-time Grey Cup champion and Canadian Hall of Fame member, you would agree with that skill comment. Anyway, it is the world's biggest tournament, and it's so exciting to be having it in our area now and in the years coming. I wonder if you could comment a little further on the economic development that this \$97-million investment is going to have for this city and our province.

Hon. Neil Lumsden: Well, thank you again—Chair, through you—for the question.

These kinds of events that don't come around very often start with elevating communities and the people. The diversity that we have in our province is second to none, and the participation within that diversity of playing sport and rallying around sport—you can be a sport fan, not having played soccer or football; you are engaged because potentially your grandfather or your dad or your mom played. That's what sport does.

So when we talk about soccer, which is universally, probably, the most played activity on the planet when it comes to either rec or competitive sport—and we see that in other countries, by the way. Going back to my comment earlier about facilities and what they do, they rally around those facilities, and in many cases, it's around—"football" is the proper term, but we'll call it soccer for now. The impact it's going to have just socially, and how it will lift up the province, but certainly the region—on the back of sport. There's nothing else that puts people in a better mood than sport and experiencing it.

There was research done about five years ago suggesting that those who come out of sports events, at home or away, typically spend more money in the next three days because they feel better about themselves—and you spend even more if your team wins. And that's a good thing, right?

So when you talk about how contagious sport can be, to say nothing about the legacy it will leave and how young people can aspire—it's really important to have leadership models for young people. Sometimes we get derailed by what goes on in sport and the bad side of it—when you take the landscape, it's a very, very small portion; the rest of it is nothing but positive.

My grandson is five years old, and he decided to sit down and watch a football game with me at Tim Hortons Field, and then came to a game on Friday night with me—and we were upstairs—and watched the game without me standing beside him, or his mom, my daughter, who was behind me. That's engaging. He felt good about what he was doing. He was saying, "Look at this" and "Look at that."

It's the start of an attitude and a relationship with sport that can't be found anywhere else in any way, shape or form—and now you take that and blow it up on the world stage, with the World Cup; that's what we're in for.

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Mr. Rick Byers: That's fantastic. Thank you very much for all your great work.

I'm going to pass my time over to MPP Smith.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong): MPP Smith.

Mr. Dave Smith: Minister Lumsden, I'm going to pick up on some of the things that were just discussed.

First off, you weren't at my house on Sunday to see the mood I was in after Buffalo absolutely stunk the place out—

Interjection.

Mr. Dave Smith: No, I was not happy.

Hon. Neil Lumsden: But the other half of the people watching were.

Mr. Dave Smith: Yes, I didn't care about the other half.

A little bit of background here: It's well known in our caucus—and a number of people across Ontario know—that you were very heavily involved in professional sports. You're actually, to the best of my research, only the second MPP to have their name on the Grey Cup; the other one was Lionel “the freight train” Conacher, who also has it on the Grey Cup and the Stanley Cup. You're in really good stead that way. So I recognize that you have been very heavily involved in sport at the professional level, at the amateur level.

I want to talk about recreational sport. The reason I want to bring this up is, when I was the president of the minor hockey association in Peterborough, I used to say to people that we were not developing the next professional hockey players, but we were developing the next community leaders, and that everything that you need to survive in life socially you can learn through sport. Sometimes you're on the field when your team scores; sometimes you're on the field when the other team scores; but most of the time, you're on the bench, and your job is to cheer your teammates on. Sometimes you're there playing with your best friend. Sometimes you play against your best friend. You have to learn how to interact with people you don't like, as a teammate, in order to be successful. All of those things contribute to success.

I saw a great statistic this past weekend, when I was at Trent University for the Head of the Trent, homecoming: 474 of the Fortune 500 companies have individuals who are at the C-level—“chief” something—who were university athletes. So my comments about sport being good for helping develop our next leaders are borne out in that one statistic alone.

Could you please speak about what the ministry is doing to help promote recreational sport, to keep our youth active and to give them those opportunities, then, for other forms of development that they're going to get and the life skills that they'll gain as a result of being involved in recreational sport?

Hon. Neil Lumsden: Through you, Chair: That's a great question.

I'm going to relate back to what I talked about a little bit earlier, with the after-school program and the Boys and Girls Clubs. I was with the Minister of Education. When you take kids outside and just let them hover around, that's what they do, but when you take kids outside and activate them with a ball or get them involved in a contest of sorts—and the teachers and the principal came out—you see a different group of young people; it's almost like you now have to drag them away. It becomes contagious. Interestingly enough—I was the goalkeeper, sadly, against a wall, and they were peppering me with soccer balls. One young lad got upset because he missed his turn but then came over and realized that his turn would come around—“Don't worry. It's okay.” It's part of the cycle of “you'll get your chance.”

I think that, when we talk about recreational sport, we can go in a lot of different ways. Again, I push the very small pieces of where we're hearing the negativity aside—although we are going to address that and are addressing that—to the part where we have to make sure the culture in sport stays pure. One of those things comes from the leadership, from those who are running sport, whether it's house league, rep, soccer, cricket—it doesn't matter. That leadership is so very important. Most of those people—probably over 90%—including managers and coaches, are volunteers, and those volunteers come back to the sport because it was important to them or they realize how important it is to their community. I've come across coaches who really didn't have a success—they didn't say, “Well, I've played here” and that—but they love sport, and they decided to get into coaching because they couldn't play. So when you talk about volunteers within the community and supporting young people and the lessons, it is really interesting.

When I look back to what happened on the school grounds after school that day, it is plain as the nose on our faces that when you get young people who are highly active and want something to do, when you direct them and give them an opportunity to maybe showcase their skills to themselves, not to anybody else, and the opportunity to experience that—“Hey, I did that. That was pretty good. I'm going to do that again and again”—you're now creating an activity that that young person will go home, talk to Mom or Dad or even Grandpa and say, “Can you put me in minor soccer? I was at school today, and I was kicking the ball around, and I was pretty darn good.”

The development in the smaller areas that are really very large, like the after-school program, as an example, will develop young people who will get into amateur sport, and through our PSOs and—we manage through them, making sure, as part of the agreement that we have with them, that it is safe and fair and balanced and equitable so everyone has that chance to maybe be the next star when the time comes.

I've spent time at the university level in the last little while, talking about a different topic. There's a worry that some of these young people who are coming might step back—young girls, as an example.

When I was in Ottawa a couple of days ago, they had a rally for young girls—only young girls—and they brought

them in from school, down at Lansdowne Park, or the old arena. It was all about trying to get young girls to stay in sport, because, on average, at the age of 13 they lose interest; they don't stay with it. This event had 600 young girls in it. It was crazy, especially when you fired them up. The teachers were there. The volunteers were there. They took them on the field. They played games with them. They interacted with them. They challenged them. That's what this is about. You're going to develop great people as a result of that day at Lansdowne Park, with those 600 or 700 young gals participating and doing something that they may not have had a chance to do before—but now they have—and be able to do that through a system in Ottawa that says, "Do you know what? Everyone deserves that chance." That's how you build minor sports and how you build the sport process throughout. It was motivating. It was energizing. Like I said, we were inside, and it was very loud.

Mr. Dave Smith: How much time is left, Chair?

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong): Three minutes, 49 seconds.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you.

One of the things that we have seen, especially with the proliferation of social media, is the amount of abuse that is hurled at recreational athletes, at referees. We've had a real challenge in a lot of different sports now to keep the young referees involved because of the amount of abuse that has been thrown at them, quite frankly.

When you have 15-year-old kids who are refereeing soccer or hockey and it might be their first year doing it, and you have parents who are hurling insults at them and forgetting that these are 15-year-old kids who, effectively, are giving up their weekends and their evenings so that that those parents' kids can have some activity, it's something that we really have to take seriously. I know that we have taken measures to address that.

I just want to point out that, this past weekend, back in Peterborough, we had a referee recertification. If a referee hears verbal abuse on the ice now, it is a seven-game suspension for the player who hurls that abuse—it can be as simple as calling someone a name—because the hockey world has seen so many problems with this type of abuse. They're trying to address it as seriously as possible.

Can you talk a little bit about what your ministry is doing to support all of the PSOs in a way to limit or reduce the amount of abuse that we're seeing between athletes, between coaches and athletes, between coaches and coaches, and between parents and athletes?

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Hon. Neil Lumsden: Through you, Chair: I'm happy to.

MPP Stevens and I have had this conversation before a couple of times. I think we share beliefs on this—I certainly do, because it comes down, to start, with the culture of sport. When you talk about sport and the culture of sport—it's not only on the surface or on the pitch or in the court; it's what surrounds it, as well, and how that is managed.

There was something just about a week ago that I found very disappointing—and I have had conversations with

athletic directors for the universities of Ontario, and I'll do a couple of more. I've talked with hockey organizations. I've talked with football organizations. I've spoken with the officials.

My heart sunk, a year and a half ago, when Ontario Soccer announced that they were going to put body cams on their young referees and officials because of the abuse they were taking from parents.

Again, I'm going to go back to the cultural piece. We need to step back and find out why and how, as a ministry—and address it, instead of saying, "We're going to throw this at it. We're going to find out more about it," as we are right now.

A letter came to me through a high school coach in an area that I used to coach, and he said, "I thought you'd be interested, given what your role is now." It was the football officials association saying to all coaches—and he went on to say, "We are not going to put up with what we are taking from either the coaching staff"—

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong): Thirty seconds.

Hon. Neil Lumsden: —"and/or people in the stands that are close enough and standing around a field. Enough is enough."

It is not a right, to abuse people. Sport for parents should be entertaining and fun—and watching your child do what they love to do, end of story, and be there afterwards to support them, and if they want to go further, be there.

We're going to help address that problem, to get rid of that small group.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong): Thank you, Minister.

This concludes the committee's consideration of the estimates of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport.

Standing order 69 requires that the Chair put, without further amendment or debate, every question necessary to dispose of the estimates.

Before we do that voting, if I can ask any of the audience, legislative staff or guests—if they would like to clear the room now, this would be the time to do it.

As mentioned, as the committee is concluded, the estimates of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport—standing order 69 requires that the Chair put, without further amendment or debate, every question necessary to dispose of the estimates. Are the members ready to vote?

Shall vote 3801, ministry administration, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hands. All those opposed? Carried.

Shall vote 3803, sports, recreation and community programs, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hands. All those opposed? The motion is accordingly carried.

Shall vote 3804, Tourism and Culture Capital Program, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hands. Those opposed? The motion is accordingly carried.

Shall vote 3805, tourism and culture programs, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hands. All those opposed? The motion is accordingly carried.

Shall vote 3806, Ontario Trillium Foundation program, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hands. All those opposed? The motion is accordingly carried.

Shall vote 3808, Ontario cultural media tax credits, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hand. All those opposed? The motion is accordingly carried.

Shall vote 3811, agency programs, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hand. All those opposed, please raise your hand. The motion is accordingly carried.

Shall the 2024-25 estimates of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport carry? All those in favour, please raise

your hands. All those opposed, please raise your hands. The motion is accordingly carried.

Shall the Chair report the 2024-25 estimates of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport to the House? All those in favour, please raise your hands. All those opposed, please raise your hands. The motion is accordingly carried.

I want to thank all the members of the committee.

That concludes our business for today. The committee is now adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 1506.

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