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**Official Report
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(Hansard)**

F-31

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

F-31

**Standing Committee on
Finance and Economic Affairs**

COVID-19 study

**Comité permanent
des finances
et des affaires économiques**

Étude sur la COVID-19

1st Session
42nd Parliament
Friday 5 June 2020

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42^e législature
Vendredi 5 juin 2020

Chair: Amarjot Sandhu
Clerk: Julia Douglas

Président : Amarjot Sandhu
Greffière : Julia Douglas

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS**

Friday 5 June 2020

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**COMITÉ PERMANENT DES FINANCES
ET DES AFFAIRES ÉCONOMIQUES**

Vendredi 5 juin 2020

The committee met at 0900 in room 151 and by video conference.

COVID-19 STUDY

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Good morning, everyone. I call this meeting to order now, the meeting for hearings on the tourism sector as part of the study of the recommendations relating to the Economic and Fiscal Update Act, 2020, and the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on certain sectors of the economy.

Today's proceedings will be available on the Legislative Assembly's website and television channel.

We have the following members in the room: MPP Stan Cho and MPP Sandy Shaw; and the following members participating remotely: We have MPP Stephen Crawford; MPP Mitzi Hunter; MPP Schreiner; MPP Skelly; MPP Smith; MPP Blais; MPP Khanjin; MPP Lindo; MPP Rasheed; MPP Monteith-Farrell; MPP West; MPP Harden; Mr. Miller, Parry Sound–Muskoka; Mr. Miller, Hamilton East–Stoney Creek; and Mr. Kramp.

We're also joined by staff from legislative research, Hansard, interpretation and broadcast and recording.

To make sure that everyone can understand what is going on, it is important that all participants speak slowly and clearly. Please wait until I recognize you before starting to speak. Since it could take a little time for your audio and video to come up after I recognize you, please take a brief pause before beginning. As always, all comments by members and witnesses should go through the Chair.

Please note that this virtual meeting represents an extension of the Legislative Assembly and the same standards of decorum will apply. Political slogans of any kind on clothing and backgrounds are prohibited.

Are there any questions before we begin? Seeing none, for the hearings today, our presenters have been grouped into threes for each one-hour time slot. Each presenter will have seven minutes for their presentation. After we have heard from all three presenters, the remaining 39 minutes of the time slot will be for questions from members of the committee. This time for questions will be broken down into two rotations of six minutes and 30 seconds for each of the government, the opposition, and the independent members as a group.

Are there any questions?

OTTAWA TOURISM

THEMUSEUM

ONTARIO FEDERATION OF LABOUR

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Seeing none, I would like to call upon our first witness, from Ottawa Tourism. If you could please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Michael Crockatt: Thank you very much, Chair. Good morning, members of the standing committee. My name is Michael Crockatt, and I am the president and CEO of Ottawa Tourism, which is the official destination marketing organization for the large geographic area of the city of Ottawa. On behalf of my colleagues, our board and our nearly 500 member businesses, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to share Ottawa Tourism's experiences and some of our suggestions.

Right off the start I want to repeat what Minister MacLeod said yesterday morning to this committee: Aside from health care, this pandemic has hit the tourism industry first, it hit the tourism industry the hardest and it's likely to hit the tourism industry the longest. We know that we face a steep uphill climb and we know that recovery is years away, not months, so I hope you'll hear the sense of urgency in my voice today.

Of course, the overall priority is, rightly, to address the public health crisis, but I want to share our thoughts from a tourism perspective on how the Ontario government can save some jobs, save some businesses and bring back visitor spending.

You might not know this, but in Ottawa, tourism is usually one of the three largest employers in our city. Pre-COVID, there were 11 million visitors per year in the city, who spent \$2.2 billion in our community. This helped to employ 43,000 people and accounted for a \$3-billion economic output. That translates into about \$3.8 million a day in GDP for our community.

This year, we expect visitor spending to drop by about two thirds. That's \$1.4 billion less that is being brought into our community from other places.

You don't have to look very hard to see the impact of that on businesses. Dozens of our hotels are closed. Hundreds of other tourism-related businesses are closed. The Shaw Centre, our convention centre, is closed. Our arenas and other venues are all closed. All seven of our national museums are closed, and they say they may

remain closed for months. An estimated 80-plus festivals, which account for over \$50 million in visitor spending, will not go ahead just between April and July. That really hurts our normally thriving arts and culture community. There's simply no revenue right now to support these businesses, and the brutal facts are—you've heard this before yesterday—that some businesses have told us they may never reopen.

In my time with this organization, we've never been more vulnerable either. Most of our organization's revenue comes from the municipal accommodation tax on occupied hotel rooms. This is usually a strong and stable performance-based revenue model with an excellent return on investment for industry and government.

In 2019, a normal year, for every dollar generated by the municipal accommodation tax, visitors spent \$140 in our community and generated \$50 in tax revenue for the three levels of government.

During this crisis, hotel occupancy has been, and continues to be, extremely low, and this lack of revenue has meant that the financial resources available for our community's tourism marketing are rapidly dwindling, with forecasts expecting only a very gradual recovery once our city and hotels reopen to visitors. So expecting a loss of as much as 70% of our municipal accommodation tax revenue, we've dramatically reduced our costs and had to stop most of our planned sales and marketing activity. We're a data-driven organization, and right now the data is not very encouraging.

But despite this, we have had some big successes during this crisis. We've been able to secure a couple of major conventions and sporting events for future years, and we're launching a new attractions passport for locals once it's safe for them to visit businesses. Unlike most of the rest of the province, our region has no provincially funded regional tourism organization, so no other agency is tasked with this sales and marketing responsibility or the destination development responsibility. If we don't have the resources required to operate, we will fall behind. Ottawa will be able to contribute less to Ontario's success and we will all lose market share to other jurisdictions during this economic recovery.

All this goes to say that in order to save jobs, we need businesses to survive, and for businesses to survive, they need direct financial support and we need to restart visitor spending. To generate visitor spending, we need to have a strong marketing message to attract people to our city. That's what we do: We are the sales and marketing engine that attracts visitors to Ottawa.

So to revive that visitor economy, we need a stable Ottawa tourism, and it's important that all 13 of the province's tourism regions are supported to help ensure the whole province will be firing on all cylinders.

We also propose three things that Ontario can do to kick-start the visitor economy in Ottawa and across the province. First, invest in tourism sales and marketing. Deliver emergency funds to Destination Ontario. Ensure there is a strong marketing arm to promote—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Michael Crockatt:—all regions and tourism businesses in Ontario throughout the recovery stages. Ensure strong destination marketing organizations and regional tourism organizations. Sales and marketing is what we do well, as do the other destination marketing organizations across the province. We'll start marketing locally, but we're also very well positioned among Ontario's gateway cities to entice visitors from Quebec and other provinces as restrictions are loosened, as well as the US and internationally when conditions permit.

Provide direct support to bring meetings and major events to Ontario. In partnership with the provincially owned Shaw Centre, Ottawa Tourism has a proven ability to attract meetings and major conventions to our city's convention centre and a great track record of securing marquee sporting and cultural events. With your help and co-investment, and once it's safe to do so, we can get back on track and win market share for the province.

Second, we think you should invest in destination development and innovation. Fund innovation in the tourism community. Our member businesses are adapting to the effects of the pandemic in innovative ways, and we want to continue to encourage and support creative businesses to thrive in our community. But they need direct financial support if they're going to survive. If ever there was a moment to support tourism infrastructure projects, now is the time to do that.

Provide direct financial aid and grants to tourism businesses that require infrastructure upgrades and PPE to be in compliance with all the new health and safety protocols, keeping workers and guests safe, and support our diverse tourism landscape. In our region, rural, Indigenous and francophone tourism are critical parts of our offering and help to disperse visitors out of the urban core and into underserved parts of our community.

Third, reduce the regulatory and tax burden for individuals in businesses, primarily allowing businesses to reopen. Surely, no one has more skin in the game to ensure the safety of their staff and customers than our businesses. So long as they meet key health and safety protocols outlined by the province, we think they should be allowed to reopen. To this end, we need clear, credible, sector-based health and safety protocols from our leaders.

Develop a tax credit for SMEs to assist in the high-cost phases of the reopening and recovery from COVID-19, and engage and support the most vulnerable workers at every stage of the recovery process. Many tourism workers, including new Canadians, women and youth, who have been laid off are facing permanent dislocation from the workforce.

This is our three-point plan to preserving jobs, preserving businesses and preserving visitor spending: Invest in tourism sales and marketing, invest in destination developments and innovation, and reduce the regulatory and tax burden. No question, this government has put in place a great number of programs that are making a real difference to this province throughout this crisis. But we have a collective responsibility to help—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thirty seconds.

Mr. Michael Crockatt:—those businesses and individuals who are still falling through the cracks.

We're ready to work with you to help Ontario recover, to get cash registers ringing again and put paycheques in people's pockets. The time to stave off the impacts of this threat is now if we're to protect the jobs generated by the many SMEs that fuel the tourism industry and reignite Ontario's spectacular dual bottom line, as Lisa McLeod likes to say. So let's bring back the vibrancy of Ontario's visitor economy.

0910

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. We'll move on to our next presenter, THEMUSEUM. If you could please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. David Marskell: Good morning. I'm David Marskell. I trust you can hear me?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Yes, we can.

Mr. David Marskell: I'm the CEO of THEMUSEUM in downtown Kitchener. I appreciate the opportunity to address the committee and the special guests there today. I'm just going to put up a PowerPoint presentation, if that's all right, if I'm allowed to share my screen.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): You can, yes.

Mr. David Marskell: Okay, thank you very much. THEMUSEUM is situated in downtown Kitchener at the corner of King and Queen in the heart of Waterloo region. We're a private not-for-profit and have come from the roots of a children's museum. It was a pretty amazing vision that began 17 years ago by tech workers, tech companies, and moms and dads who wanted to create something for families in downtown Kitchener to help reboot the economy of downtown Kitchener at the time. The children's museum did not meet expectations, although a glorious five-storey building was created in a former department store.

Today's board of directors is a stellar group of people from across the province, with representatives from all post-secondary schools. Our president is the chief financial officer for KPMG Canada. It's a very, very stellar group of people—a great resource for myself.

When I arrived, I had been a director of marketing at Exhibition Place and at Ontario Place, where I brought in the Chinese Lantern Festival at the end of the SARS epidemic, which helped reconnect the communities at that point. My vision here was clear: I had to expand the demographics by age and by geography. My marketing background told me that I could really drive people to this community based on its location in the province.

We had a lot of very early wins—I've been there for 12 years now—and a lot of wins placing the region on a much larger cultural map. One significant one was our creation of an Andy Warhol exhibit, which certainly was unexpected in downtown Kitchener and, at the time, in a children's museum. That got us on the radar of the Toronto Star, and we began on a path of scanning the globe for fresh cultural content and bringing it to a deserving audience, where they didn't have to go to Toronto. Actually,

people from Toronto and the L postal codes in other areas around us would come to our community.

Images here: We worked with Yoko Ono on a couple of occasions. We brought the Titanic exhibition. We brought rock carvings from China. We have celebrated many communities and cultures during the time I have been here.

The words you're reading there are the values of our organization. They are very, very important, especially today with the diverse voices and the unexpected intersections. The experiential learning is a given; that's how we approach things as we plan.

We've had some really great speakers that we brought to our community—some really engaging speakers. We also have done extremely well—I was on the board of the Canadian Museums Association and I saw the challenge to bring young adults, millennials, and, in our case, tech workers to museums. We've overachieved. We're doing extremely well there with various events.

Again, we came from a children's museum so we don't have a collection. We're very, very unique, meaning that our collection is one of fond memories. It also means that we're not viewed as a real museum and are not eligible for operating grants, federally or provincially.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. David Marskell: STEAM programming is very important to us, and it's part of the Waterloo region's DNA. We had just opened ALARM, a huge exhibit actually, when the pandemic closed us down. Without operating funding, we had to rely on municipal funding and generate 75% of our earned revenues ourselves.

Our last fiscal, we were on a roll. We are approaching 100,000 people. We're setting new records. Our earned revenue was up \$200,000. We're setting records with our gate, membership, camps and school groups, and we bring 42% of our paying visitors from outside the region. The positive impact to the community is huge. We introduced free 55 and Better Thursdays for seniors in partnership with the province, and I thank you for that. This year, we were outpacing last year, until March 12.

A very unique situation: My parents built a church in the 1930s. They passed away long ago. The church, a charity itself, was closing. My brother and I, in agreement with the church trustees, sold the property to a new group of Canadians. It remains a house of worship, thankfully. But we were able to shepherd \$1 million from that charity to THEMUSEUM. That's how much I believe in this community and the charity that I represent.

That was a catalyst for expansion and to complete a circle for global competitiveness in the missing critical mass of arts and culture. We've done a lot of work on that. What the people want in our community is to partner with the ROM and the AGO, with local innovation alongside of that.

We have a bright but challenging future. We're very integral to the Waterloo-Toronto technology and cultural corridor. We have support from OCAF and Celebrate Ontario, and that is appreciated.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. David Marskell: COVID has halted our momentum, and the impact that has been lost since we've been closed is approaching \$2 million. The municipality gives us the operating funding that we get, but they are facing a deficit of \$5.6 million.

We want to reboot. We have virtually hosted 35,000 so far. That's something that needs to be invested in.

We will announce a special, blockbuster Canadian premiere shortly.

THEMUSEUM is relevant. It's huge for this community. We are on our feet, swinging, but we require the province working with all levels of government to help us as we expand.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much.

We'll move on to our next presenter: the Ontario Federation of Labour. If you could please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation. Ontario Federation of Labour?

Ms. Patty Coates: There we go. I was trying to get us unmuted.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Patty Coates. I'm the president of the Ontario Federation of Labour. With me is Thevaki Thevaratnam, the OFL director of research and education.

The OFL represents a million workers across this province, including in the tourism and hospitality sectors, such as arts and entertainment, car rentals, food services and hotels. In fact, some of these sectors have been absolutely decimated.

For example, our affiliate IATSE, which represents theatrical and stage workers across Ontario, in Stratford and in Niagara-on-the-Lake has had more than 15,000 workers directly impacted by COVID-19. And they are not alone. Many workers across the tourism sector are in dire need of support to assist them through this recovery. We see that these workers are suffering deep losses due to COVID-19. Without government intervention and supports, many of the jobs that have been lost will never return.

As Ontario prepares to reopen the economy, it is time that this government stop relying on the federal government to solve its problems. We need action for workers in Ontario by the Ontario government.

Several guiding principles that must be followed: worker and community safety must be the priority; workers, unions and health and safety committees must have a meaningful voice in decisions at every level of policy-making; investment in infrastructure and public services is critical now; and recovery plans must put equity-seeking groups at the centre.

Ontario as we knew it left far too many people behind. The government has an opportunity to deliver an Ontario for all—one that is built upon decent work, strong public services, justice, and healthy and safe workplaces and communities for all.

It is long past time that this government acted on the recommendations of the labour movement. For example, the crisis in health care could have been avoided if this

government had listened to warnings from labour on underfunding and the dire conditions that resulted from it in long-term care. Likewise, it was labour that sounded the alarm and offered solutions on the shortage of personal protective equipment in this province.

Workers and their unions need to be consistently and meaningfully consulted on decisions that affect them, period. Ultimately, the economic recovery must support workers. This, in turn, will ensure that the residents of this province can participate in the economy, including tourism.

0920

Workplace health and safety: Workers need a government that puts workplace health and safety at the forefront. The government must hold employers accountable for their duty to ensure a safe workplace, protect a worker's right to refuse unsafe work, and ensure that every possible action is taken to allow them to do their job safely and provide the public with the knowledge and tools to practise safe measures in their everyday lives. The government must immediately establish strong, clear and enforceable workplace health and safety standards that include usable tools for worker navigating the return to work and ensuring a joint process in every workplace between workers, unions and employers.

Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development inspectors must be equipped with the adequate PPE, training and directives so they can safely enter workplaces to do their jobs.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Patty Coates: As well, the number of inspectors must be increased.

Employers must be required to provide all workers with adequate PPE and build and maintain sufficient inventory of PPE before opening workplaces. Use your power to order businesses to manufacture PPE right here in Ontario. Enhance protections against reprisals from employers when workers exercise their health and safety rights. The government must also increase access to universal, rapid, reliable and publicly funded and delivered coronavirus testing and make it free for everyone. Expand workers' compensation coverage to all workers and volunteers and include the presumption of work-relatedness to COVID-19, as proposed by the NDP's Bill 191 currently before the House.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlights the need to close the gaps in worker protections in Ontario. The government must legislate permanent increases to workers' wages and protections to correct the power imbalance between workers and employers.

During the economic downturn, workers should not be forced to accept concessions to fund the recovery of their employers. They shouldn't have to choose between feeding their family or going to work sick. The government must immediately implement the promised pandemic premium pay, and expand its eligibility and make it permanent for all front-line workers; introduce a livable minimum wage with no exceptions, and provide permanent paid sick days, plus paid days during an outbreak for

all workers; strengthen protections for temporary agency and migrant workers; and honour and respect collective agreements and their contract provisions.

COVID-19 has shown us the need for strong public services and the harm brought by austerity budgets that starve our province of the services that all Ontarians depend on. Austerity budgets are unsustainable—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Patty Coates: —and jeopardize the well-being of Ontarians.

The government must immediately provide free health care for all regardless of status; ensure that the inquiry into long-term care is independent and publicly transparent and does not preclude immediate remedies, plus a moratorium on all for-profit care; fund and deliver universal child care—this is a sure way to untap our economic engine; and ensure that any corporate assistance is directly tied to job creation and supports local development.

We must also ask this government to fund, collect and publish provincial data on the impacts of COVID-19 on equity-seeking Ontarians, including how they are disproportionately affected by this pandemic. We must put our equity lens on our recovery efforts, and we must do this immediately, and fund the Anti-Racism Directorate to end—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off. Your time has come up now.

We'll have to go to questions now. I'll start with the opposition. MPP Harden.

Mr. Joel Harden: Thank you, Chair. I want to begin the morning by saying hello to all my colleagues and thank all the presenters for being with us this morning.

Mr. Crockatt, good to see you. Thank you for standing up for our city's small businesses and tourism operators. I have a couple of questions for you just as we start. One of the things I've been concerned about, and I've certainly been hearing about from businesses in Ottawa Centre, is what happens to an enterprise that has a storefront when their landlord doesn't apply for the federal commercial rent relief subsidy. This appears to be happening quite a lot. A lot of these organizations haven't had customers, haven't put on events for months, and yet because their landlord isn't compelled to apply for this program, they're left in the lurch—in some cases, of thousands and thousands of dollars in commercial rent. I've come across one case in particular where a landlord asked for a five-year lease renewal during this period for a small enterprise.

So one of the things we've been encouraging our friends in government to consider is an immediate subsidy for rent, up to \$10,000, to a matching of 75% of commercial rent to amplify what the federal government has put into place. We're encouraging them to say that the landlord community, many of whom are wonderful and operate great organizations, but for those who are putting their commercial tenants in the lurch, they should be compelled to participate in this program so we don't lose a lot of those small businesses we're talking about. We're wondering what you thought about that.

Mr. Michael Crockatt: It's good to see you too, MPP Harden. Thanks for the question.

I've heard some of those stories too. Absolutely, we've heard some of those stories from some of our members, and not just asking for a five-year lease renewal but asking for an increase in rent, for example, during this time, for a business that's closed and has no revenue coming in. So we have heard those stories and they are, frankly, heart-breaking, because some of these businesses are so intertwined with the individuals that it's a very personal story, not just a business story.

I guess my answer to your question is, if I look at it from a tourism perspective, one of the biggest dangers that we have in this crisis is that we're going to lose some businesses. We're going to lose some pieces of the tourism infrastructure in our community. I've seen different studies saying it could 15% of businesses, it could be 40% of businesses that may not open their doors again. Let's take the smaller number: If we lose 15% of tourism businesses in Ottawa because of issues like not being able to pay their rent, that puts us in a very, very difficult position to market our community again. We've lost 15% of the stories and the businesses that we can communicate to visitors to come and visit our city to see.

I think our organization is definitely in favour of finding solutions that can keep businesses open. A subsidy, certainly, is one of those solutions to augment the federal rent program. It's disappointing to hear some of the stories of businesses that might be affected by landlords who are saying no to the program.

Mr. Joel Harden: Thank you very much, Mr. Crockatt. Thanks again for representing Ottawa Tourism this morning.

Very briefly, and then I want to actually hand it to my colleague, MPP Lindo, I just want to acknowledge our friends from the Ontario Federation of Labour this morning. Thank you for standing up for workers, as you always do. I'm mindful, in particular, of workers who are on the front lines with the COVID crisis, so I just wanted to, on the record, offer my thank you to my friends, and pass the mike to my friend MPP Lindo.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll go to MPP Lindo, and then MPP Miller and MPP West will be next. MPP Lindo?

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Thank you, Chair. I wanted to ask a question of David Marskell. Hello, David. How are you? It's nice seeing you.

One of the things that's amazing about the THEMUSEUM in Kitchener is that you've always been doing a bit of a pivot and focused on innovation in the way that you're bringing more people, including folks outside of the region, to THEMUSEUM. Yesterday, we heard from a lot of folks that were coming to the hearing that there was a need for direct funding and that there was a need for investment in innovations, which also included understanding that if the government invests in innovation when they develop their economic recovery plan, they can also support all the other asks that are coming because they'd have to think of the web of small businesses that

help, artists that need additional help etc. I'm wondering if you can speak a little bit about the importance of direct funding supports and investment in innovation.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Two minutes.

Mr. Michael Crockatt: It looks like I've been unmuted, but it's not for me; this is for David.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: For David.

Mr. David Marskell: Can you hear me?

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Yes, we can now. Thank you.

Mr. David Marskell: Okay, so my two minutes start now?

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Yes.

Mr. David Marskell: There's no question: Direct funding is required. We have zero revenue at this point, and we can last maybe through the summer or it's over. So direct funding is, in my mind, a bridge. It's something—a Band-Aid—to get us to the future. I really believe we should not try to replace what we have, because in some cases it wasn't working. We need to rethink and reboot arts and culture, and innovation is critical to that, as is the digital world of livestreaming.

0930

We've had 35,000 views with the programming we have, and I really think that's going to increasingly become important, not just—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. David Marskell: —because of the pandemic, but forever more. The innovation part of it is critical; it also connects us to Toronto, with the Toronto-Waterloo corridor. There's a lot that we can all do together, but we need that initial funding to stay alive to get us to the promised land.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Fantastic. I'll leave the second round of questions to MPP Miller and MPP West. I'm just wondering if Patty—hello, Patty—if you can speak in the last couple of seconds around the funding for the Anti-Racism Directorate. It was just where you got cut off. I'm wondering if you would be able to take the last bit of time to finish.

Ms. Patty Coates: Thank you very much for that. I do really appreciate that. What I was saying was that we fund the Anti-Racism Directorate to end xenophobia and racism, as workers, especially Chinese and other groups of racialized workers, are more likely to experience greater acts of racism. We've seen that over the past week and we've also seen it prior to that, and we think it's very important that we ensure—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I apologize to cut you off. We'll have to move to the independent members now. I'll start with MPP Blais.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, everyone, for your presentations. Michael, it's good to see you and your COVID beard. I was wondering, very quickly: How much of Ontario's out-of-province visitation does Ottawa account for, and how much of Ontario's RTO funding does the Ottawa region receive?

Mr. Michael Crockatt: Thanks, MPP Blais, and congratulations, again. Good to see you there. We get about 15% to 20% of Ontario's out-of-province visitors. About

15% to 20% come to Ottawa as part of their itinerary in Canada. But we currently receive zero per cent of provincial RTO funding in our region.

Mr. Stephen Blais: When I was on city council, I remember Ottawa Tourism receiving a fair amount of funding from RTO. What happened?

Mr. Michael Crockatt: In last year's budget, in 2019, the RTO funding for our region was discontinued. That was about \$3.4 million, previously, for our region.

Mr. Stephen Blais: What was the rationale for the province cutting off the funding?

Mr. Michael Crockatt: One of the reasons we were given was that we had the municipal accommodation tax in place—which is true, of course; we have that in place. It has, until this year, been a very strong, stable performance-based funding model. But I guess the point was that we had that ability to fund ourselves, and therefore the RTO funding was no longer required for our region.

Mr. Stephen Blais: But of course you're not getting an awful lot of tax revenue this year. I know that you mentioned it in your presentation, but can you just remind me of what the decline in that is projected to be?

Mr. Michael Crockatt: We're expecting it to be between 60% and 70% lower than originally budgeted this year. The only caveat I would put on that is that every forecast we do is worse than the last one. It has only been getting worse during the course of this pandemic. But that's a loss of revenue to us of over \$11 million.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Yesterday, during 13 hours of testimony, we heard from people from across the province that I think broadly agreed that drive traffic will really be fundamental to the recovery of the industry as we move forward, at least in the initial stages of recovery. I'm wondering about your view on whether or not Ottawa has the competitive advantage in that drive traffic tourism.

Mr. Michael Crockatt: We certainly agree that the first bits of tourism to most communities in Ontario will be from close by and drive traffic. Even once restrictions start to loosen, the research tells us that people will feel more comfortable in their cars than in airplanes, for example, so we do expect to see more drive traffic to most communities. You're right: Our geography, along with our friends in Prescott-Russell, RTO9 and RTO11—and we are right next door to Canada's second-most-populous province and second-largest city. It's not quite Sarah Palin-like; I can't quite see Quebec from my house, but it's pretty close. We do get a lot of out-of-province spending that takes place in our community. So we are definitely well positioned to attract that.

Part of the reason, of course, too, is that—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Michael Crockatt: —a visitor from Quebec can also feel very comfortable knowing that they can experience our community in the official language of their choice as well. We know that market. It's certainly a part of our thinking for a way to help Ontario's economy recover by bringing in some of that spending from outside the province.

Mr. Stephen Blais: And you mentioned, or you touched on very briefly in your presentation, the value or the addition of Franco-Ontarian culture and the opportunities that it provides in Ottawa, as well as the Indigenous elements within our community. I'm wondering if you can expand on that, just very quickly in the last minute that we have.

Mr. Michael Crockatt: Yes, absolutely. There are some great projects that we're working on in our own organization right now in terms of the Indigenous tourism incubator project. We're very excited about that, seeing some new Indigenous tourism entrepreneurs in our region.

And francophone tourism is also one of the things—for us and, again, for our neighbours in Prescott-Russell—where it is an advantage for us and a key part of our tourism infrastructure to ensure that bilingual services and French services are available to visitors when they're coming. It's not just for the reasons of wanting to make sure that we provide good service, but it's also a very strategic reason. It helps us attract people from places like Quebec and France and other French-speaking countries too, so it is good for the economy for us to be able to provide that service in both languages as well.

Mr. Stephen Blais: And finally, just to touch on the commercial evictions: Would you agree that a restriction on commercial evictions would be beneficial to operators and other elements of the industry?

Mr. Michael Crockatt: Certainly from an operator perspective, it will be very beneficial, but I think, again, as I said to MPP Harden, from a tourism perspective, the last thing we need right now is anything that is going to put more businesses out of business. We need tourism businesses to be able to survive this so that they can be part of our story going forward and part of our marketing message going forward.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Michael Crockatt: We just can't afford to lose more businesses.

Mr. Stephen Blais: And just on that in terms of additional financial burden: Are there any other regulatory elements that you think could easily be withdrawn to facilitate the recovery of the sector?

Mr. Michael Crockatt: I don't know about regulatory things that could be withdrawn, but I think that in terms of opening, there are some burdens that are on some businesses that would be helpful to have removed or reduced. Part of that is just that cost.

I think my colleague Beth from TIAO talked about this yesterday, but the costs of becoming business-ready in this new environment are enormous. I'm not sure I'm quoting her numbers exactly right, but if it costs a business \$3,000 to install new equipment to be able to ensure physical distancing and safety and all those things, and there are 200,000 tourism businesses, that's \$600 million of investment that businesses are going to have to make to just be ready to open again. It's great for the Plexiglas providers, but—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off.

We'll move to the government side for their time. I'll start with MPP Smith.

Mr. Dave Smith: My question is for Mr. Crockatt as well. I'm curious about your thoughts on something. The Canadian Museum of History and the Canadian War Museum are both run by the same organization, but they're in two different cities. They are essentially in two different provinces. Multiple medical officers of health are involved, and a federal crown corporation. Can you give me your thoughts, then: When you've got something that is multi-jurisdictional in this way, who should be the one who makes the decisions so that we have consistency across this for the opening?

Mr. Michael Crockatt: Thank you very much for that question, because that's just an embodiment of our environment in Ottawa. Because you're exactly right: This is one company that operates in two different provinces, two different cities, as a crown corporation. It has got all kinds of rules and governance surrounding it.

I think it goes back to how the best thing from a tourism perspective, the best thing for us, is if those museums can be open and be welcoming visitors, in whichever way that that's possible. We know that it's not going to be the same experience that it would have been before. From that perspective, I think we need to be able to tell businesses like that, with very clear language and direction, what their expectations should be in terms of who has the authority to give them the go-ahead to open, who has the authority to give them the rules on reopening and what the visitor experience needs to be like.

I think that for us, it's in our best interests and in visitors' best interests to have that happen as clearly as possible and as quickly as possible, so that we can work with them to help get them operational and so we know what the messages are about what is open and can be able to get that to potential visitors in the future. It's such a huge part of our visitor economy that they see us like that. It's important for us to be able to have that as part of our offer.

I appreciate that question.

0940

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you very much. I'll turn it over to my colleague MPP Khanjin.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Khanjin.

Mr. Dave Smith: You still have my mike open, not hers.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Can you unmute yourself, MPP Khanjin?

Interjections.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Hi. For some reason I was told to unmute. I think that there's a problem. MPP Khanjin, do you mind if I just jump in at this point? Okay.

My question is also for Michael. Michael, I have a cottage in the Ottawa Valley, and I spend an awful lot of time in Ottawa. One thing that really surprises me—and it's not unique to Ottawa—is the number of people who live there who don't visit the tourist attractions. Or in Toronto, for example, I've met so many people who have

grown up in Toronto and haven't been to the top of the CN Tower.

In light of the fact that we are going to see such a drop in foreign tourists, how do we promote local tourist attractions to locals?

Mr. Michael Crockatt: Thank you for that question, because that's certainly one of our big focuses right now as a destination marketing organization, and I think it is for most DMOs across the country. There is a bit of data that helps with this, too: Canada has typically got a negative travel balance, which means that we send far more people to travel internationally than we get receiving internationally. This year, all those Canadians who normally would be travelling internationally probably aren't going to have the opportunity to do so, but we do think that they are still going to want to travel. There is an opportunity, even within our own communities, to try to encourage that sort of staycation and rediscovering your own community again.

One of the exciting things that we're working on with our members in our community is the local passport. It's got a number of businesses that have already signed up for it. We're waiting till the time when we can actually launch it when the businesses are open again. It provides incentives and discounts for locals to go and rediscover some of those tourist businesses in our community. That's one of our first steps to recovery: getting locals to visit those tourism businesses.

As you heard my colleague from Tourism Toronto say yesterday: Once we've got the locals doing it and we've got the imagery again that it's safe to visit those businesses and those businesses are open, that's part of our artillery for going after other markets outside of our home cities.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Before I hand it over to my colleague, I just wanted to point out that Minister MacLeod, who has been working so, so hard on this file, has nothing but the best things to say about you, your organization and how hard you're working as well, so kudos to you.

Mr. Michael Crockatt: Thank you so much. We say the same about her.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We'll go to MPP Khanjin now.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I had a question for Dave and Michael. I went to school in the Ottawa region, so I understand the different complexities.

Both of you talked about reopening and the impact it would have. When we talk about reopening, what economic impact will it have for you, real-time, people coming to attractions? David, Mike Harris mentioned to me the Rolling Stones exhibit you're working on. Burl's Creek near Barrie was going to have the Rolling Stones concert at one point—all those things.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: What kind of impact will it have, when we reopen, on your venues?

Mr. David Marskell: In terms of that Blockbuster Canadian premiere, to me that's feel-good; it's 17 months out. We can announce it this fall and get some ticket sales, so money in the bank for us. As others have been talking

about, it's about moving people around the province and around the country. It's something that can really be a huge economic driver for our region in southwestern Ontario. Certainly for hotels—we've been building packages with all sorts of groups, including VIA Rail and on and on and on. That one is a big, big one for us.

The immediate need, though, is to get there and to be able to just stay open. As I said before, we don't have any funding. We don't have the money to continue right now, so we—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Sorry to cut you off. We have to start the second round now. I'll start with the independent members. MPP Schreiner?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Thanks to all three of the presenters for being here this morning. I want to start with a question to Ms. Coates. I've heard from front-line health care workers in my riding and across the province, particularly medical technicians and technologists, who are feeling under-appreciated, because even though they're working with COVID patients, they're not receiving the pandemic pay increase. I'm just wondering if maybe you could talk a little bit about just how that affects the morale of workers who are not included in that pay increase but are still working with COVID patients.

Ms. Patty Coates: Thank you very much, MPP Schreiner, for that question. It's a very important question, because there are a lot of front-line workers, so-called essential workers, who are not included in that list of those who are to receive that pandemic pay, yet they are doing the work, they are taking in their communities to ensure that they're safe and healthy.

I think it's important that we open that up. Union leaders have been talking about this. They've been pushing the government to expand on that list, because there are a number of people who have been on the front lines right from the very beginning of this pandemic who have not been part of that list. They hear the government stand up and talk about heroes. There's a lot more to being a hero than just being the ones who are staying, like the doctors and nurses. They are so many others who are providing the services, ensuring that people are healthy and safe. They need to be included in that pandemic pay as well.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Thanks for that. Just another follow-up question to you: I know that workplace safety is going to be vital to reopening and economic recovery, both for consumer confidence but also for workers in their workplace. I'm just wondering: What actions do you think government needs to be taking to ensure workplace safety and confidence as we reopen?

Ms. Patty Coates: Thank you again for that question. I did touch on that a little bit, and we will provide a more comprehensive list needed for supports for economic recovery in our submission.

But just to answer your question, I think what's really important is that workers need to feel that they are protected and safe within their workplaces. We can't have a tourism sector and we can't move through this economic recovery if workers are not at work, if they don't have the

jobs, if they don't have the protections, if they don't have a decent wage to be able to spend their money in their communities or do staycations in Ontario and visit all those amazing tourist places that we do have in Ontario. We also need to have that confidence that workers are safe and that those who are going to be going to tourist attractions feel safe as well. We need to be working together and we need to ensure that our economy blooms and blossoms.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Thank you. I think MPP Hunter is going to take the remaining time.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Hunter?

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you, and thank you so much to all of the presenters for giving us a perspective of what's happening in Kitchener and Ottawa.

I want to focus on the labour side of things as well, Ms. Coates, if you could really talk about how this pandemic and the sudden shutdown of the economy affects historically marginalized groups in the labour market. I'm thinking about those who are on the front line of service jobs: young people, women and immigrants, as well as racialized groups.

Ms. Patty Coates: Thank you, MPP Hunter, for that question. That's actually a very, very important question, and something that we really need to highlight. It has shown us through this pandemic that it is women and it is our equity-seeking groups that have been most affected by COVID-19, whether it is the front-line workers who are racialized, who are Black and brown—mostly women—or affected by those who have been laid off. We know that those who have been laid off are mostly women and those who are racialized, and young people. So it has really affected those equity-seeking groups, and that's why we need to ensure that any of the data that we have, whether it's the health data or data with regard to employment and unemployment, needs to be very specific. We need to ensure that we have that clean and clear data with regard to those equity-seeking groups.

0950

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Yes, I completely agree with the data being disaggregated along postal codes so we know where people live, and the housing situation, as well as sociodemographic data, racial data. All of those things are really important.

Can you touch on what you're hearing around the guidelines that have been put out for reopening and whether they're adequate?

Ms. Patty Coates: I'll pass that over to Thevaki.

Ms. Thevaki Thevaratnam: Thanks, Patty, and thank you, MPP Hunter, for your question.

I think what we're seeing and what Patty touched upon earlier on is that workers have not been consulted in this process. When we saw those guidelines being issued by the government, that was not done in consultation with the Workers Health and Safety Centre or the Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers.

Nor are those standards that have been issued enforceable, and that is super important as well. So those two elements are quite—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off.

Ms. Thevaki Thevaratnam: That's okay.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We'll have to move to the government side for their second round. I'll go back to MPP Khanjin.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Thank you. I just wanted to leave off it, and the segue of guidelines is a good one. As you know, in this pandemic, protecting workers was first and foremost, the safety of all Ontarians, with the protecting workers act. As we're rolling out guidelines and more phone lines—I think we've added more than 50 phone lines and more inspectors—in terms of helping your museum, David, and all of the Ottawa region, Michael, to reopen, what would be helpful to you in terms of either guidelines or—we talked about the public health unit. Should they be the ones who you go to for direction, or would you like to see clear direction within the guidelines that allow you to reopen safely? Then a subsequent question is: Would you have the sanitizer you need etc. to open safely as well?

Mr. David Marskell: It's very much a challenge to plan for opening. We have set policies for our staff safety and procedures for our visitor safety, but at this point we don't know if we can open—I'm talking about summer camps and summer generally. We don't know if we can stay open; we don't know if we can hold camps; we don't know if we can have five people, 10 people or 80 people in our facility. It's a very large facility. So that part makes it—all we can do is plan, and then once we hear—but those directives would be very, very helpful if we had them in advance as much as possible, even if it was a tap on the shoulder that something is coming.

In terms of sanitation and so on, we are working with the municipalities, trying to source something with a number of organizations to get the best possible price. We have some things in place, but we will need more.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Michael, did you want to comment on that?

Mr. Michael Crockatt: Yes, please. Thank you for that question.

We're not a tourism operator. We have almost 500 members who are. I think from the perspective that we're hearing from them, reopening safely is obviously in their best interests, and they'll take every possible step they can to ensure that nothing is going to happen because they can't afford to go back into a lockdown position. I think clarity on what are the standards that they need to meet, and let those businesses decide how they're going to meet those—because most of them are going to exceed whatever guidelines are put in place, just for their own business continuity purposes.

I can't answer the question on the sanitizer side of things, just because I don't think we've heard that answer yet from our individual businesses in terms of if there's a shortage of that type of supply. But not having heard it tells me at least that it's not a problem that they've identified so far as standing in the way of reopening.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Okay. And can I just get your comments? Something I've heard locally is the square footage policy: basing the amount of folks you can have in your facility on square footage as opposed to a one-size-museum-fits-all or a one-size-venue-fits-all.

Mr. Michael Crockatt: I guess that's an issue where, if anything, my hope is that Ontario is ensuring that we're in alignment with other jurisdictions. The reason I say that is, I think again of our provincially owned convention centre in Ottawa, the Shaw Centre, which obviously brings in—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Two minutes.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin:—billions and millions of dollars of visitor spending into our community every year. If the rules for the Shaw Centre or for the Metro Toronto Convention Centre are different than, say, the rules for a convention in Montreal or Vancouver, and if those facilities can bring more people into the same amount of space, that could put us at a disadvantage competitively and we might actually lose out on business for Ontario. So, fully recognizing that public health has to be the first priority, but there are some business realities around some of those rules that it's important for us to maintain our competitiveness as a province.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll go to MPP Rasheed.

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Thank you to all the presenters this morning. My question is for both David and Michael. Post-COVID-19, when we talk about marketing our strategies and to bring that confidence to consumers who are going to be coming or your guests who are going to be coming to THEMUSEUM or the tourist attractions, how are you planning to make sure that these individuals who are coming to the attractions feel that confidence that all is good now and one should not be concerned? If you just want to give us a little bit of your strategy around marketing post COVID-19.

Mr. David Marskell: I'll go, Michael. All the research is telling me, and my gut feel is telling me that those who are making things safe—when I go to the corner store and it's not safe to me, I'm not going back; I'm going to a different store. Obviously we need to make things as safe as possible and to communicate that with the public that we have done, and list all of the things that we do. It's priority number one that we have to do that.

But in terms of the marketing—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. David Marskell: I think collaborating with other organizations to use our large facility might save them money and save us money just by the way. That gives the marketing benefits to the visitor—a greater benefit for the dollar and so on. I think it's up to us to do some things differently as well.

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Michael?

Mr. Michael Crockatt: I couldn't agree more. I think it was very well worded by David. I think the communication, the visibility of standards and meeting those standards must be very important as we move forward.

Like David, we're watching the data. We're watching what people are saying about what activities and what venues they feel safe in, and that's going to help inform our marketing. We're data-driven; we're going to use that data to make sure that we are providing the right messaging to people at the right time about the right activities as well.

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Thank you, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. We'll go to the opposition side for their second round. We'll start with MPP West and then MPP Miller.

Mr. Jamie West: Thank you, Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak. I want to thank all three presenters. I, frankly, wish we had more time because I have questions for all three and I'm limited to who I can talk to and I don't even know if I'll get through all my questions.

President Patty Coates from the OFL: Congratulations again on being the first woman elected as president of the OFL. You were cut off twice on something that I think is very important and needs to be on the record about anti-racism because I'm hearing dog-whistling already about racism with COVID-19. So if you could continue and finish your statement for the record on page 7.

Ms. Patty Coates: Thank you, MPP West. I actually did finish that earlier, but I think it's really important that we ensure that everything that we do—any policies, legislation, data collection and our policies when we open—ensure that we leave no one behind. That is extremely important, and we need to ensure that we are making sure that those who are marginalized, those who are racialized, and those who are most vulnerable are getting the supports they need so that they are able to participate in the economic recovery.

1000

Mr. Jamie West: Okay. I also want to give you an opportunity to speak more about universal child care. I've been holding round table discussions about reopening the economy, and one of the things coming up again and again, specifically by business, is the importance of child care for your employees to be able to return to work when we start reopening business.

It reminds me: A year ago, I was at a Women's Day event, and the speaker was a grandmother who talked about her mother talking about the need for universal child care when she was a child. So I want to give you the opportunity to expand on the importance of universal child care.

Ms. Patty Coates: Thank you, MPP West. That is extremely important. We can't have an economic recovery unless we have a "she" recovery. We have to ensure that women, when they move back into their jobs, have affordable and reliable child care.

We need to make sure that the child care centres have support. We know that in many municipalities, they're struggling. We're hearing that child care centres may not be able to afford to open. We also need to make sure that those workers are part of the program to expand their pay. They have been essential workers. They have been on the

front lines, those that have been working in those emergency child care centres.

But we know we had an issue with child care spaces prior to COVID-19, and we're going to have a larger issue when we move back to people returning to work, women returning to work and families returning to work. We're very concerned. That is something we know: that without that child care, without not-for-profit child care—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Patty Coates: —we will not be able to move into a full economic recovery.

Mr. Jamie West: Just very briefly, because I want to leave time for MPP Miller, you talked about the worker's voice and safety, and I think it's important. We have an opportunity as MPPs to hear from you, and it's such a limited amount of time, but I think it's reflective of the importance of listening to others and listening to workers. I want to know if you'd expand on that—and hopefully leave enough time for MPP Miller's question as well.

Ms. Patty Coates: All right. I think it's very important that workers do have a voice within their workplaces and with the health and safety guidelines that are taking place within their workplaces. They need to be able to feel safe to go back to work.

I've had conversations with many workers, unionized workers and those that aren't, and it's quite frightening to hear what is happening in some of these workplaces, especially in warehouses where they're putting the need to make profit over the workers. We need to make sure that it's people over profit. We need to make sure that those work sites are inspected and that the workers have confidence and feel safe in their workplaces.

Mr. Jamie West: Thank you. Can I pass to MPP Miller?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Miller.

Mr. Paul Miller: Hello. My question—good morning, Patty—is to the OFL. As the economy begins to reopen, I'm reminded of the phone calls and emails I began to receive at the beginning of the pandemic. Hundreds of workers were confused and scared about remaining in their jobs while watching others sent home as non-essential. The mix of fear of catching COVID and the uncertainty of unemployment has been one of the biggest concerns voiced to my office. These fears are all compounded by the lack of clarity in how we should move forward during the reopening phase. As labour leaders in Ontario, what recommendations would you give to your members and to the government on issues such as returning to work procedures—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Paul Miller: —specifically in the areas of occupational health and safety? Should there be standardized training? And who should be responsible: unions, government or private sector?

Ms. Patty Coates: I think it's all of us that need to be responsible. We need to ensure that workers have a voice. At the OFL, we have over one million workers. We have 54 unions, locals and lodges that are part of the OFL. We have incredible experience and knowledge, and we could

be tapped on the shoulder to help as we move forward with this economic recovery.

I think one thing that's really important that would be so helpful for workers is that there are permanent paid sick days for workers, and then pandemic pay or outbreak pay as well. Then they don't have to make that choice of going to work sick and infecting other people or feeding their families. I think that's really important—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. That concludes our time for today. Thank you so much for your time and your presentation.

BEAR CLAW TOURS

CAMP MUSKOKA

ONTARIO'S SUNSET COUNTRY TRAVEL ASSOCIATION

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Moving along to our next presenters, the first one is Bear Claw Tours. If you could please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Can you hear us? Can you unmute your microphone, please?

Mr. Andrew Ryeland: There we go.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Yes, we can hear you.

Mr. Andrew Ryeland: Sorry about that. Good morning, everybody. My name is Andrew Ryeland, and I'm president of Bear Claw Tours. We're an ATV touring business based just outside of Parry Sound, Ontario. We have been running our business—in fact, we invented this business 20 years ago, and we had been thriving until I guess February of this year.

What has happened to us has totally devastated our business. Bear Claw Tours will not be opening this year, which is extremely disappointing to me and to many, many of our customers who will not be able to come and enjoy our [*inaudible*].

Obviously COVID-19 has caused restrictions and not allowed us to open. But one of the main reasons we can't open is because of the upstream suppliers that we have. Our biggest supplier is Honda Canada. Honda Canada, as an industry completely apart from the ATV touring business other than that they make ATVs, has decided to suspend all their partner programs for the year 2020. Of course we rely heavily on them. They provide us—and have for the last 15 years—our ATVs. Without the ATVs, we obviously can't do the tours.

The second reason we would be hesitant to open, even if we did have the ATVs, is because I'm not too sure that I can be certain of the people who are going to be walking down my driveway—whether or not they're COVID-free. I think that echoes a lot of people's concern in this area: There is no definitive answer, there is no testing, there is no tracing and there's definitely no vaccine that would allow me the peace of mind to say that I could be kept safe—and my workers and my family. So that's a big concern for me. To bring economic recovery back to my

business would require those things to be in place. Just opening up because we need to do it from an economic perspective is pure foolishness, as far as I'm concerned. We would just decimate our population.

I see that our MPP, Norm Miller, is on the picture. Good morning, Norm.

Parry Sound has been very fortunate to keep the number of cases down to next to zero. All of our customer base for tourism in this area, apart from the international stuff, comes from the greater Toronto area. Toronto, unfortunately, is the centre of COVID infections, not only in this province but probably across the country. We certainly don't want to import more of that here to put a strain on our businesses, to put a strain on our hospitals, to put a strain on our grocery stores and what have you.

Although by this time of year we're normally set up to do that, I'm more worried about the concern that I have for the health of our people and how quickly that would take hold here. When we gather, whether it be on boat cruises or whether it be on ATV tours in this area, it's with a large number of people—definitely more than five people. So that's a very, very big concern.

I also sit on a number of other boards that require ATV-ing guidance. One of them is ATV Ontario. I did send through a submission. You may be confused when you see that that's from Andrew Ryeland of ATV Ontario. But that's just another hat that I've put on. I have been running that for about 20 years as well.

In there are some recommendations on how we could have a very quick tourism recovery in that industry. It's a whole report on—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Andrew Ryeland: —thank you—on how our whole industry might take effect by putting a sticker on an ATV licence plate. You can see that for yourselves there.

I'll be quite happy to take any questions. We are a small business, but we are a big, big attraction in this area. We're number three.

1010

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much.

We'll go to our next presenter from Camp Muskoka. If you could please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Scott Creed: Thank you very much for having me today. My name is Scott Creed. I am the founder and CEO of Camp Muskoka in Bracebridge, Ontario. Camp Muskoka is an accredited member of the Ontario Camps Association; we call it the OCA. The OCA is a not-for-profit, national association of provincial camping associations, representing nearly 450 camps across Ontario.

Ontario's century-long history of providing a rewarding summer camp experience to over 400,000 Ontario children each year is now in peril. Over the years, we served lots of special needs. There are a lot of Ontario's most vulnerable and disadvantaged kids who come to our camps. Our members contribute approximately \$630 million annually to the economy. OCA members hire over 35,000 staff each year. Camps contribute significantly to

our local communities as 80% of our camps are in rural locations spread out across Ontario.

When the provincial government declared that the overnight summer camps will not be permitted to open this summer due to the COVID-19 pandemic and that also most day camps will no longer be able to operate with these strict conditions, the Ontario Camps Association's members fully understand and accept the decisions by the provincial government. The health and safety of our children is paramount, and always paramount in everything that we decide as camps. What concerns us today, however, is whether Ontario children and youth will have the opportunity to experience summer camp in the years to come.

Honourable Lisa MacLeod, when you were speaking with MPP Shaw yesterday, you both agreed that we need something when we all get through this. If the experts are suggesting that we're looking at 2024—I don't know about you guys, but I can't hold my breath for 12 minutes; I don't think it's a shock that most businesses can't survive 12 or 24 months without income. We really strongly feel that our government needs to support the Ontario Camps Association with a federal-provincial subsidy fund to ensure that Ontario's camps can continue to have the opportunity to serve the hundreds of thousands of kids that we serve.

Camp is where kids build confidence. Camp is where kids learn real social skills. Camp is where kids meet their lifelong best friends. Camp is where kids discover who they are and how to be a leader—and last time I checked, if I'm not mistaken, our current Prime Minister was a child growing up in Ontario's camps as well.

Many camps' survival is threatened. Some of us have insurance for business interruption, and we're having challenges with that as well, as some of us are now facing almost a negotiation with the way in which the payout is happening. It's not just that; it has been almost 90 days since this business was first interrupted, and we haven't seen any payout for business interruption. So there are a lot of challenges in our industry.

We really are hoping, in summary, that the government will work together to help camps with the support they need to survive. We're asking the government to make funds available to overnight camps to ensure the future of Canada's camps can survive. I recommend that a number of 25% of annual gross revenues of the camps would certainly help cover the cost of mortgage, insurance and maintenance.

These camps run year-round, despite most of our revenue being generated in just the summer months. We are faced with a big challenge. For some of our camps, we operate year-round as a leadership centre for school groups. This past year was a double whammy for us, as we first were faced with the work action with the schools and the teachers. We haven't seen revenue since November. As a result, when March came and we were normally having winter camps and we were normally having spring camps, having the COVID come through, again, was just devastating.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Scott Creed: How much time? Sorry.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Scott Creed: Thank you. As for camps, we're all in different situations; we're all very different. We serve very different demographics. Camp Muskoka is a private camp. We do operate year-round and we do hope that our government will come to the table with some support to help us through. We have amazing communities. We've contributed heavily over the years—all of the camps—for over 100 years to the culture of Canada. If the government could continue the wage subsidy until next August 2021 to help camps survive, that would definitely be a big help.

Other ways: We've applied as the Ontario Camps Association for a fund of upwards of \$200 million—again, based on our contribution to the economy, about \$157 million would equal 25% of the camps' global revenues—to support the camps through this time. When we don't have the opportunity to earn money on a year-round basis, it's not like we can just change the date of the event or open up in November. These options aren't there for us. We're definitely hoping that the government will hear our call and will help us to put together what we need.

One last thing I'll mention: We're pivoting as Camp Muskoka, looking to open up a family camp. I'm hoping the government will help our local health units to have the logic to look at our situations individually as they are. For example, if it's spread so that we can service large groups of 50—we have 600 acres. We could serve them in groups of five. Economically, it would make more sense if we could have 50 guests, but we wouldn't be able to under the current guidelines because we'd need to have at least 10 or 12 staff—who could be serving in other buildings, separate. Literally, if this was a hotel in a downtown area, they could have a restaurant next door to provide the food. I could have food created and provided, hand-delivered to their cottages and cabins in isolation, providing them with a fun family experience, but some of the restrictions because of other locations will handcuff us.

Once again, safety is always paramount. Access to rapid testing—I'm hearing of tests in the States that have five-minute results, with 84% to 94% accuracy at \$30 a test. If the government can help us get access to testing, support our pivots to providing quality experiences to other groups that are kept in their bubbles as they migrate around the hundreds of acres, as well as seriously consider extending the wage subsidy—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Scott Creed:—and make some government funding available to help all the camps survive.

I was not fortunate enough to go to camp as a kid. I, in my older years, saw what camp did for kids and I have since dedicated the last 30 years of my life to helping kids find better ways to get out of where they are. I grew up in a lousy corner of Scarborough. It helped build character in me, that all I want to do is give to kids and help them get a fresh, clean start in any way they can. This has really taken the wind out from under our wings, and I'm hoping our government will help us to get to back there.

Thank you so much for your time today. I'm happy to answer any questions.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. We'll move to our next presenter, from Ontario's Sunset Country Travel Association. If you could please state your name for the record, you will have seven minutes.

Mr. Gerry Cariou: Thank you very much. My name is Gerry Cariou. I'm the executive director of Ontario's Sunset Country Travel Association. I'm out here in the hinterland, in the northwest part of our province. I think it's important to give the committee some reference in terms of the geography of this great province we live in. We're one of the largest travel regions in Ontario. We cover the area not including the city of Thunder Bay, but the area west to the Manitoba border. We come from the US border all the way to Hudson Bay. This is an area of 100,000 square kilometres, with 70,000 freshwater lakes. The total regional population is about 65,000 people—so we have more lakes than people.

To give you some perspective, from my office here, where I'm speaking to you today, the distance to the CN Tower in the city of Toronto is 1,862 kilometres away from where I'm sitting. We've had 25 total COVID cases in our area in northwestern Ontario. I believe all have been resolved.

As a result of our location, we have almost total dependence on an American tourism market. This is a key aspect moving forward in terms of solutions for tourism in our area. Angling is the number one product. We command over 50% of total US market share of all anglers visiting this province and Canada, in fact. It is our competitive advantage. We do angling right out here, and it's a huge business. There are 400 resorts, lodges and other types of accommodations within the region.

Fishing is king and, as I noted, it's an export economy. These are US dollars being brought in, so the indirect and induced economic impacts are extremely significant. During the summer, tourism is by far the largest employer. Many Ontario college, university and graduating high school students rely on employment in the tourism industry to help pay their tuition. Impacts in that area are huge.

COVID-19 and the measures instituted by Ontario and Canada to keep its spread under control have been devastating to the entire economy, but perhaps more devastating in this area. Please allow me to explain.

1020

Some key impacts from COVID include—unlike the rest of the province, we don't have large cities such as Toronto or Ottawa to draw from. Again, it's 1,800-plus kilometres to Toronto from our area. On the other hand—let me give you some examples—Chicago, having a population of 9.8 million, is 950 kilometres or half the distance away. The twin cities of Minneapolis-St. Paul, with a population of 3.28 million people, are just 475 kilometres away. The Wisconsin border—the state has a population of 5.8 million and is a huge source market for our region—is about 200 kilometres from Fort Frances at

the border, in sunset country. Considering all these facts, I hope you can appreciate why our source tourism markets are what they are.

Fishing accounts for 80% of all tourism revenues in this region. We are the best at what we do, and it is our competitive economic advantage. One of the key issues moving forward was the rapid onset of the pandemic, starting in March with the closure. It was right at the end of the traditional marketing season. That marketing season happens in the United States, so it's very difficult for us out here to pivot to a domestic market, given the geography I just explained as well as it's a non-traditional market. Ninety-nine out of every 100 guests at a fishing lodge in northwestern Ontario originate in the United States.

Manitoba is there; however, it has a viable market of around 500,000 people. Even if we have some success attracting them, we are not going to be able to replace what we're losing by not allowing Americans into the area.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Gerry Cariou: Again, Canadians, as a domestic option, are not willing to spend what Americans spend on a fishing trip. Many have cottages or camps, or are visiting their friends and relatives. Americans, on the other hand, are not only willing to spend more on a trip; they always stay at a lodge. The trips usually last seven days, and they fish from dawn to dusk.

Ontario, given the geography I explained, is not really an option either. There is also a very similar product between our big cities in the province and our area. Of course, Algoma in northeastern Ontario offers a fishing product of quality as well, so getting people out this far from the big cities in the province is very difficult.

With our high reliance on US visitors and the closure of the Canada border in March, we are indeed dead in the water. While I appreciate that the border with the USA is a federal matter, a huge issue for many tourism businesses in our area, which are owned by US citizens, is that they have been unable to cross the border. Now with the economy reopening, those folks are still stuck stateside, with no hope at the moment of getting to try to save the season and their business. Given mitigation measures available, we should be able to facilitate the entry of US business owners to address and try to save their business with Canadian guests, and hopefully, eventually, American guests.

Of course, all those owners are willing to undergo assessment for COVID-19 at the border and, as per Canadian law, quarantine upon arrival. I think if the province could help us somehow facilitate that with the feds, we would be very much appreciative.

Again, the season here is somewhat different. Half the total revenues of tourism in northwestern Ontario, the far northwest, occur by the end of June. In fact, with the border closure, June and May are gone. We've lost up to \$50 million in economic activity already.

A lack of information has been a major problem in terms of trying to rebook guests. We are just unable to tell

them when the border might open and other information we need to manage the impacts of the pandemic.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Gerry Cariou: Thank you.

The main assistance programs being offered—loans—simply just don't work. A \$40,000 loan cap is inadequate in many instances. For small businesses with 100% loss of revenue, potentially, incurring an additional \$40,000 in debt is not necessarily a good business decision. If we have no ability to have some type of aid program that is non-repayable, we will see insolvency in this region.

With potentially no season in sight, the outfitters have been forced to roll over customer deposits made last year to next year. Normally, they use those revenues to generate income from marketing, and those revenues are not available since they've been rolled over. That's going to be a real problem come the marketing season, so assistance in that area is required.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. Your time has come up now.

Before we go to questions, I want to recognize MPP Deepak Anand. If you can confirm your attendance. Can you unmute yourself, please?

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you, Chair. I am going to be attending until 12 noon in place of MPP Stephen Crawford.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Can you confirm that you're in Ontario?

Mr. Deepak Anand: Yes, Chair, I am in Ontario.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much.

We'll start with the questions from the government side this time. I'll go to MPP Miller, Parry Sound–Muskoka.

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you. Am I unmuted there, Chair?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Yes, you are.

Mr. Norman Miller: Okay, super. First of all, thank you to all three presenters for your presentations—some real challenges that we're hearing about, for sure. Let me start first with Scott at Camp Muskoka. Certainly my riding of Parry Sound–Muskoka, and, Scott, you probably know the number, but I think we probably have more camps than likely any other riding in the province: I would guess at least 40 or 50, varying in size tremendously. Your operation, Camp Muskoka, as you mentioned, is a year-round operation; very successful. You're doing a great job, I know. But we have such a variety of camps that are so important, not just to the economy and to you as your livelihood, but to all the kids that attend those camps as well.

Really, I guess, for you it's about survival through this. There are lots of unknowns. You talked about needing government support. I didn't quite catch the numbers, but you were saying "25% of gross revenue." What was the number that you've—and I assume that's for the province, Scott?

Scott needs to be unmuted, Chair.

Mr. Scott Creed: There we go. Thank you very much, Chair.

Norm, thank you. Nice to see you. I've been speaking with many, many camps in the Ontario Camps Association and bantering around what we're really going to need to keep everybody afloat. Looking at us, now that we've stripped everything down to bare bones as we're—think of it as a cruise ship parked at the side of the harbour. It still has operating costs. We still have to have our maintenance facility running the water and doing water testing. There are still obligations and fiduciary responsibilities we have to maintain a site. We are still conversing with parents. We've got lots of communications going on—all those things happening.

For us, specifically: As I presented to other members of the OCA, my bare-bones cost—about 25% of our gross revenue would be what I need to pay the hydro company, to pay the bank and the mortgage company and insurance, just to keep our facility safe. It turned out that that number resounded through the seven or eight camps I spoke with as a sound—I could manage with that. If I had that much support, I could manage with that. Whether that culminated in an emergency fund like the OCA is suggesting, a joint federal-provincial sustainability fund; whether it's a mix of grants or just simply access to lending—I know that for some camps, just like our counterpart, getting more debt is not necessarily going to make it easier for us. In fact, for some, I think it might push them over the edge to insolvency. For us, getting access to more debt would enable us to employ more people. Getting access to—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Scott Creed: Getting access to—if we could continue the wage subsidy, it makes it really easy for us to keep employing the people we have. At this time of year, we've normally 70 to 80 people employed. Year-round, in the winter, we're at 50 or 60. But in a couple of weeks, we'd be over 200. These jobs are not happening this year. We can create a modified program with our family camp because we're a bit unique; we have washrooms in all the cabins. But we'd definitely need some help with some of red tape over that as well.

Mr. Norman Miller: So you can operate in a different format, going forward. I received an email from Glen Bernard Camp up near Sundridge from Jocelyn Palm, wanting permission to do a leadership camp. So there are other things that you can feel you do safely that generate some revenue over?

1030

Mr. Scott Creed: Yes, if we were permitted to operate. In Camp Muskoka's case, we have cottages that the kids would normally be housed in. Each one has over three washrooms in it, so we could actually transform our cottages into, instead of a kids' cabin, a family cottage. So people could come—in their own bubbles, so there's no socializing and mingling. We could have dining rooms set up within so that food could be delivered.

However, based on the way that we interpret the guidelines now, we would at best have a maximum of 50 people on-site. We have 600 acres. I could have my kitchen staff in the building and never interact with anybody on-site, but that is part of my ratio. So there's

going to be some economics of numbers. If we could have 50 guests, that might be sustainable. It would be better if we could have a full 22 families.

But we know we could keep them isolated. Mitigating viruses is nothing new to camps—H1N1, swine flu, all of these things. We deal with this stuff on an ongoing basis. I'm not naive; this a bad one.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute

Mr. Scott Creed: But with some support, with some opportunity, we could do it.

Mr. Norman Miller: And hopefully I'll get an opportunity in the next round to continue with the questions.

The current restriction, on five people—obviously, it's based on health, but the bubble would need to get bigger for a lot of things you've planned, I would guess.

Mr. Scott Creed: Not necessarily, because if it's a family unit that's coming, we can keep them in their family unit. We can have them travel all around—we're intending a concierge-level service, so we can actually provide a high level of service. But it's really under the guise that, "We're keeping you apart from everybody else, but we're not doing it with police force; we're doing it by encouraging you to go over there, where we're going to have some fun," and making it a family experience, with a one-on-one, still socially distanced at six feet, personal guide.

So there are ways we can pivot, but we definitely need to see the—we don't need large group gatherings so that we can get them all under one building. We won't do that. But we do need to be permitted to have 100 people on a 600-acre site, and we'll keep them all separate.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. We'll have to move to the opposition side for their time now. I'll start with MPP Monteith-Farrell.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Thank you to the presenters. In northwestern Ontario, I've heard a lot about the conditions and the crisis, really, that camp operators and tourist operators are experiencing.

My question is for Gerry. Gerry, I've heard from transportation and infrastructure people. Are there any supports that the government could do to assist with getting people to your camps?

Mr. Gerry Cariou: Thank you for the question. Really, the problem is, the entire bookings of the lodges were American. So that, with the border closure is, of course—unless you can open the border under safe conditions. And I think all our camps appreciate the sensitivity of the Canada-US border issue, the concerns of certain Canadians. In saying that, I think that they are looking for some hope.

From a transportation point of view, I don't necessarily think we need that. We're a drive-to market. All of the tourists usually—many bring their own recreational things such as boats and ATVs here. So for me to immediately think of something from a transportation and infrastructure point of view that would help—we could always use, of course, better waysides and things like that, and perhaps directional signing. I'm not exactly sure what would be available in the area you're referencing.

At this point in time, I think, with the loss of half of the season already, which is a fact out here, we need some type of assistance to survive. Whether a \$40,000 loan is—again, there's the issue of incurring more debt with no revenue. For many of our members and lodges out here, taking a \$40,000 loan is essentially borrowing money to pay for borrowed money. From a business planning point of view, it could potentially be a disaster. And I would agree with the previous gentleman that, yes, it will push some of our lodges into insolvency. It may let them hang on a little bit longer, but we have very little potential here. We have the issue of getting our US owners here so we have a full complement of tourism operators to make a push in the domestic market. That's a new thing for us. We've never had to. We specialize in servicing an American tourist in this part of Ontario, given our geography and that distance I explained to you. It's key that we recognize the differences—in this part of Ontario, the hinterland, the far northwest with the rest of the province—and that we do need unique solutions that help us address our huge problem with our American clientele—the zero booking.

The timing of the pandemic could not have been worse. It's the end of the US marketing season. Everyone's investment was all in the United States. The books were just beautiful this year. It was going to be a wonderful season. It's no one's fault this happened, but—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Two minutes.

Mr. Gerry Cariou: We are in a tremendous challenge where we don't know what to do. We need help, and we need help soon. That will be my plea. I'm sorry; I don't—just the details of—

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: No.

Mr. Gerry Cariou: I just don't know. Thank you.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Thank you for that. One of the other things that is coming up is a regional approach to opening up. Would you support that?

Mr. Gerry Cariou: We already are able to open to Canadians as of midnight today, or 12:01 a.m. Yes, we definitely support the regional approach. Again, we've had 25 COVID cases here in an area of 100,000 square kilometres in size. We feel very fortunate about that. So yes, 100%, we support regional differences and opening based on health risk. That is up to the health units and the doctors and the government to determine what it is, but certainly in our area the risk, as far as I understand the science, is extremely low. Our operators, I would emphasize, are willing to follow guidelines being issued about sanitation, social distancing. We are willing to work with all of this to ensure and support the government in its efforts to protect Ontarians, workers at the things, as well as the guests from the United States or Canada, wherever they come from.

We're ready to do that. We need help, though. For us, summer's not ever here yet but half the season is gone for us because of the nature of our product out here. The best fishing is in May and June, so half of the Americans come up here during that time to catch the big ones, to catch the post-spawn fishing and other things.

The other thing I want to mention would be the huge impacts on our related industries. Outfitters spend almost 100% of the revenues they take in when they need to—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Gerry Cariou:—buy infrastructure, food, lumber. It happens that that money is spent in the region. So the impacts on our lumberyards, our food supply companies, etc., are significant here. Of course, like everyone else, restaurants and retailers are suffering badly. We don't know what to do. We're desperate.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Thank you so much, Gerry, for that.

Mr. Gerry Cariou: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. MPP Lindo, if you want to add something in those 30 seconds.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: I actually have a question for Scott. What I'll do is—we do have a second round; right, Chair?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Yes, we do.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Okay. Sorry. It was a long day yesterday.

Scott, when we get to the second round, I'm going to actually come back to you so you can really expand, but essentially—I'm also from Scarborough, so whoop, whoop—I totally understand the importance of the camps as a way to help marginalized youth. Especially for youth employment, sometimes it's their first time getting jobs. That's what we'll talk about.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. We'll go to the independent members now, and I'll start with MPP Schreiner.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Thank you to all three of the presenters. Scott, I'm going to start my first question to you. Like you, I didn't get a chance to go to camp as a kid, but I've been pretty lucky: Both my daughters have been going to a Y camp in Muskoka for over a decade now. My teenaged daughter is deeply, deeply disappointed. This was going to be her one month in a canoe the whole time in the backcountry. I know just how important, from a mental health perspective, from a leadership perspective, especially for young women, I think, camps are.

If I heard you correctly, if camps don't get some support, we're going to see a lot of those camps just gone forever. So it's not an implication just for our young people this summer, but for many decades to come. Is that correct?

1040

Mr. Scott Creed: I would agree. Over 60% of our camps are not-for-profit, catering to special interest groups that are some of Ontario's most vulnerable kids. But the other 40%: Many of them are private camps. I'm the founder of Camp Muskoka and I could count on one hand how many people have founded camps in the last 30 years.

These camps have been around for many, many generations and they're all in different boats. Some of them have multi-million-dollar mortgages because we've invested so much in our facilities to cater to kids, things like the recent accessibility upgrades that have gone through the government—tens to hundreds of thousands of dollars

invested in our facilities in recent years, and this is part of what is the calamity that's happening now. As camps, keeping our facilities upgraded to meet all these standards, to keep us accessible, has cost a lot of money. Well, now we have huge debt. So closing for 12 to 24 months, or not getting revenue for months and months on end—who really could expect to keep a business going with no revenue for 12 months? It's a little unrealistic.

We're all in different boats. With some of the camps, they're more challenged than others. Other camps have endowment funds that they're liquidating completely, which has been years of funds raised that have otherwise been going to help marginalized youth in the city. They can't support their other philanthropic programs anymore because that money has been used to either issue refunds or keep the camp afloat for the next few months.

Some of us also had insurance, if I may digress to that. We had business interruption insurance; it's now almost 90 days and we haven't seen a dime. Now I'm finding that we're probably going to get our payout for our insurance, but they're actually going to be giving us about 66% of it instead of 100% because of a questionnaire they asked us, which we feel is worded wrong. The math isn't reconciling.

For Camp Muskoka, our losses are so great, we're going to get the full \$1-million payout for our insurance plan. But there are a lot of camps out there that are going to get squeezed by big insurance and not have the ability to fight them back. They paid for it. Can you imagine if you sent your kid to my camp and I called you on Wednesday and said, "By the way, we sold you a week but we decided five days would be fine"? Who can do that?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: It's really unfair, and I can hear the passion in your voice. I was going to ask you about employment, but I'm going to allow MPP Lindo to ask that.

I just want to go to Mr. Ryeland really quick. Testing: We've heard a lot of concerns from public health officials around testing, but maybe you could just elaborate a bit on how important a strong testing system is for business confidence in reopening.

Mr. Scott Creed: Sorry, are you asking me?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Yes, you had brought that up—

Mr. Scott Creed: Sorry. I apologize.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: No, sorry—Andrew Ryeland. You had brought that up in your presentation, how important testing was and your concern around challenges with testing. Maybe you could talk a bit more about how important that is for business reopening.

Mr. Andrew Ryeland: Certainly. In our case, we do groups of 20 to 25 people who park on my property and then come down the road to put all their helmets and gear on. They're coming from all over Ontario, usually from the greater Toronto area, but many of them are businesses that have brought in people from across the country. I have no idea if these people are infected or not, and I have no way of knowing through testing or tracing, and there's no

vaccine. It could be a death trap for someone like me who has got an immuno-compromised system.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I think we'll have MPP Hunter finish. I'm not sure how much time we have.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): You have a minute and a half. MPP Hunter.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Although I'm a Scarborough girl, I'm going to reserve my question for Scott for the next round.

Mr. Ryeland, why don't you continue to talk about the concerns you have for testing and tracing specifically, because I noticed you have the ATV-type equipment and that will attract—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: —those who are [*inaudible*] that type of activity. Do you think an app would help you in that situation?

Mr. Andrew Ryeland: I'm sorry. Here, I'm unmuted again.

Yes, an app would definitely be welcome. I think Alberta has done something like this. I need to know if anyone in the group has had contact with anyone else in this area. I don't see any other way of doing it. We're not going to wear badges on our sleeves or chips under our skin. We need to figure out how to do this and how to be safe.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you for being so efficient, and also for your desire to continue to operate even in the face of such challenging circumstances, and to keep our northern communities open to people from all over. I just really appreciate [*inaudible*] presenters.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. We'll go back to the opposition party. I'll start with MPP Lindo again.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: For my question, I'm back over to Scott, for Scarborough. One of my questions was this: What I'm hearing out here in Kitchener Centre—we are a university town, and a lot of university students were relying on camp positions to be able to pay their tuition. They have said to me and to folks in my office that they do not feel that they have been provided with enough support, and that the camps were doing so much more for them. It was forward-thinking. It was thinking about their upcoming jobs, how they would pay their tuition, what kind of [*inaudible*]. This is the way that they bring it to me.

I'm wondering if you can speak a little bit about the unique opportunities there, and also about PPE, because yesterday we were hearing that a lot of folks were worried that the cost of PPE will land on their shoulders when they're already dealing with loans versus grants. You can take all the time in the world to just talk.

Mr. Scott Creed: Starting with the employment opportunities: One of the things that I love about what we do is that we really give kids the opportunity to figure out who they are. Many kids will come to us, whether it's in a counsellor position or even a maintenance position, and what we do is give them the opportunity to thrive in whatever position it is. We are also brutally honest, in the

most nurturing way possible, to acknowledge when it's not the right fit, and then we don't just terminate them; we help them to discover where their heart lies, where their passion lies, where their resources lie, to get them into a position within the camp to help them discover who they are.

That's one of the things I love about camp. What we do for kids is phenomenal in helping them to gain confidence, but what we do for the staff is just magical: kids who are going through university and discover that they're on the wrong path, or discover that they're on the right path and now they've discovered that there are not just three jobs in this career field; there are actually 70. What we do for kids—and when I say “kids,” I'm now speaking of the staff—is to really help them to be in a position of responsibility, to help them to know what a work ethic is.

I think summer camp is some of the best training for any career, to the point where, as an entrepreneur—I'm a member of an entrepreneurs' association, and I speak to hundreds of other entrepreneurs. They all acknowledge that when kids have overnight camp on their resumé, they get an interview because the resiliency that is embedded into them from what they have experienced—camp is a life-changing thing for everybody involved.

The money for camp—one of the challenges many camps had vocalized to me over the last couple of months was when the federal government came out with the student and youth wage subsidy—forgive me if I'm not using the correct terms. That \$5,000 over the course of a summer is what a lot of the kids would end up getting if they worked at camp, so some of my fellow camp directors had voiced concern over that. At Camp Muskoka, we sort of felt confident that the kids who come to work with us come for the work experience; they don't just come for the money. The money is important for them to continue in their education, but the work experience is so valuable to them.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Scott Creed: You mentioned PPE. PPE is something that we are always doing. I built my camp in 2001, and in 2003, we had a Norwalk outbreak. I was mopping up vomit for 72 hours and I never got sick because I am such a germophobe.

Since then, and before that, we have so many protocols to mitigate viruses and keep a clean facility. Camp is not the sand-in-your-peanut-butter kind of place that we saw in the movie *Meatballs* in the 1980s. It's not like that. These are well-run facilities that are a combination of health care units, schools, hotels, recreation facilities, psychology—we have so many things going on. We are a small village, and so many of the camps just do it right.

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I hope the government can look to us as a way to potentially help to support in resolving these kinds of big issues, because this is what we do. We do this in our small villages, and I'm really proud of the community that I've been lucky enough to have accept me.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Thank you very much for that. Earlier, all of our hearings started with the minister saying something that has stuck with me. She said that she had

heard from stakeholders that this pandemic should not be a time to panic; it should be a time to plan.

Part of why I was asking you those questions—and to be honest, Gerry, you also brought this up, around young people—is that when we are talking about financial and economic recovery post-pandemic, we have to think much further than what's going to get these businesses or campgrounds through for two months so that they return to business as usual. There is no “business as usual.”

In the last little bit of time I would like to hand it over to Gerry, if you would like to pick up on that thread. What is it that you need, then, to think about how we support youth—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: —for the long-term plan, not just this immediate side of it?

Mr. Gerry Cariou: I think there's a lot of flexibility available to help the youth out here. The vast majority—I'd say about 60% of all students looking for employment in the summer—were going to work at a tourist camp out in the sticks out here.

What we can do is make sure that the safety regulations, the guidelines from the province and from the medical community are followed to keep them safe. But to help the students, we have to solve the revenue, or the customer, problem that we face. We're unique in the sense that all our eggs were in basically one basket out here. No one can predict a viral pandemic or incorporate anything like that in their business planning. We've marketed to the United States, we have this all customer base coming, and then, boom, we don't have any revenue.

So what can we do for our students? We're looking at trying to hire a few back under the wage subsidy program to help get things in maintenance. We could look at that and get the camps ready, maybe do some projects around there, but at this point in time, paying students without some type of assistance program from the government is needed for that to occur. That's what I would say—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. We'll go to the independent members now. I'll go back to MPP Hunter.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you so much to all of the presenters.

Scott, I wanted to ask you, regarding some of those young people and the core life skills and work experience that they are potentially missing out on, and for young people who are in marginalized communities: I know as a former Minister of Education that you have extensive relationships with school boards and with giving young people those types of experiences. So the loss that we're experiencing is not just an economic loss; it's also in terms of their future. They won't have this experience to put down on their resumé or just as a life experience.

That's for Scott Creed.

Mr. Scott Creed: Thank you so much. I never went to camp as a kid, but as I said earlier, growing up in Scarborough I went to what they call SOES—to Kearney—in grade 7. That was my first experience, pretty much, north

of Highway 7. It was my first experience seeing wilderness. We had a grey jay land in our hands and eat out of our hands. This connection with nature I attribute to my Scarborough upbringing and the fact that as a student I was able to do that. That just lit a spark in me.

In a world right now when we have global climate change and we need to inspire our young people to respect nature and to honour it and to want to preserve it, it's these experiences that light that fire. It's these experiences that really help. Again, as I said earlier, I never went to a traditional summer camp as a kid. I dedicated the last 30 years of my life to it because I love what it does. I believe it is part of Canada's culture.

If you're unfamiliar with this, there's a website, thankstocamp.ca. Take a look there. It was actually created by a camp out of Quebec. They took videos and they got other camps to put forward their short videos of "thanks to camp," what camp has done for people. If you don't cry when you watch this little video, you're not human; I'm sorry. It is absolutely heartwarming what this has done for so many people.

Camp is social gathering. That is our challenge. This pandemic is being battled by anti-social gathering. So I get it. I know that that's part of the solution. But humans need hugs, okay? We are humanity and we need to connect and be together. So when we can learn to do that safely, I urge the government to call upon camps, to let us be part of the solution. There's no better way to teach kids what the new normal looks like than if everyone at camp is wearing a face mask—if that's the new normal. I'm lucky that I've travelled to places like Hong Kong and Vietnam, where people are wearing face masks like that on a normal basis because of the pollution. But if that's our new normal, no better way to teach kids how that's going to be than when everyone is having fun doing it.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you. I really appreciate your passion for this area. I'm going to turn it over now to MPP Blais.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Blais?

Mr. Stephen Blais: Well, thanks to all the presenters. Mr. Creed, thank you very much. I grew up going to—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Stephen Blais:—Red Pine Camp in Golden Lake with my family. I worked there for three summers as a high school student and in university, so I completely appreciate the value of working at camp and attending camp, as you so passionately articulated. I know that at Red Pine, in the dining hall in particular, you're shoulder to shoulder at the tables most of the time. I'm wondering about your thoughts on economic viability in a social distancing world, perhaps into the future.

Mr. Scott Creed: One of the things that we've looked into for this summer specifically is pivoting into a family camp situation. Our cottages—we have a couple dozen of them—all have their own washroom inside. So looking at all of the safety protocols that are required, I strongly believe we can very comfortably have family units come together where we can provide a family experience,

migrating them around the property and enjoying a quality experience together, making those magical memories.

The traditional summer camp, I understand through the experts for disease tracing and tracking—I understand the methodology and the thought process. If you have kids from all over come to this one place and then go back out, there's a huge risk of spread. I get that. So I do agree with you, sir, that the traditional summer camp perspective of kids arm-in-arm going through the buffet line—that's not the way we operate family camp. We would have to prepare meals differently. We're looking into the option of the dining hall, but it wouldn't be the same. We have a 7,000-square-foot dining hall, but we could have families socially-distance and have food delivered to their table. So with slight modifications that aren't making people feel like they're lepers in a prison camp, we can give people a really positive time.

In the traditional summer camp sense, we definitely need more work. With things like Kawasaki disease as a by-product in children—these are scary things we seriously need to learn about before we open up the floodgates of traditional camp as we previously—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Scott Creed:—knew it. But can we make modifications? Absolutely. There are lots of things we can do to modify programming, to modify the experience, to provide an amazing, positive experience, but it's definitely going to be different. There's no question.

Mr. Stephen Blais: And so if the restriction on camping was changed for family camping—what you're describing is more like a resort, the family camping environment—how quickly could you get that up and running? Could you get July or August going?

Mr. Scott Creed: Where we're at right now: We are in the process of trying to get August set up. We have many of our camper families. To deal with the way in which we had our refunds, we made that one of our options. Obviously, there are seven reasons why that could just instantly have the brakes put on it. There's no question about that. But if we can keep moving in through July and life looks more optimistic and we have all of these things in place, we could definitely pull it together for the month of August. We could also—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you.

Mr. Scott Creed: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We'll move to the government side now. I'll start with MPP Miller, Parry Sound–Muskoka.

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you. I wanted to make sure I got an opportunity to ask Andrew a question. I know that my colleagues have more questions. Andrew, I know—well, first of all, I'm very sorry to hear that you decided not to operate this year, but I know you also represent ATV Ontario, I believe it is. So I'm wondering: As an industry, have you looked at how, in our current environment with COVID-19, you would operate safely?

We live not too far from Highway 400. I see lots of ATVs on trailers travelling up Highway 400, and some other recreational activities, like boating, going on.

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I'm just wondering: I would assume that in your particular operation especially, the current restriction of five people is a limitation. But have you looked at protocols and how, as health conditions improve, your industry can operate?

Mr. Andrew Ryeland: Thank you for that question, Norm. Yes, I do wear several hats, and ATV Ontario is one of them. We have made plans for that.

My other hat is on the board of directors of the Park to Park Trail Association, which is a very large tourism operation that goes from Highway 400 to Highway 11—250 kilometres. Sitting on that board, we are opening that trail. Many other trails are open in Ontario, but as my mother would say, "If everyone jumped off a bridge, would you do it as well?" So we did not open that.

For a number of reasons, we're opening it tomorrow, I believe, the 6th of June, but only to local people. The reason is that there are no other attractions in the Parry Sound area at all, so we would be the only attraction bringing people out by the hundreds to go on our trail from the GTA. Ninety per cent of the customers for the Park to Park Trail are from the greater Toronto area. We will revisit that when, again, we are sure that we are not going to be importing the disease.

I know many people think, "This thing is over and you're too cautious." That's not true at all. We have kept our community very, very safe, and the last thing we want to do is plan to make it unsafe by bringing in hundreds of people. It has nothing to do with the sport of ATV; it has everything to do with the attraction capabilities of our sport. As you know, the Wonderlands, the Blue Jays games, the Marinelands and all of those are closed, so where are people going to turn to? They're turning in by the droves to buy ATVs and to go hiking and what have you. We just can't have that happen in our community. It's a tough pill to swallow but, Norm, that's what we're doing.

Mr. Norman Miller: Thanks.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We'll go to MPP Skelly.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Can you hear me?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Yes.

Ms. Donna Skelly: I'm just trying to think of the gentleman—oh, there it is. Gerry, I wanted to ask you: I grew up in northern Ontario and—at least I considered it northern Ontario. It was north of Sudbury, but really, truly, that's more central Ontario. I did spend a lot of time in the bush, and we did spend a lot of time fishing. I recognize the uniqueness of northern Ontario. It's just so different from what we live and breathe down here near Queen's Park.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Is there a way, do you think, and have you been working with your federal colleagues to come up with some sort of a unique solution to allow you to bring the bulk of your tourists, who are coming from the States, to your facilities? Because I do believe that the ability to reopen with PPE and proper protocols in place isn't the issue; it's getting access to that American market.

Mr. Gerry Cariou: Yes, you are 100% correct. The feds have not really established a communication line with an individual like myself who could work with industry. Of course, the safety of Canadians is their first and foremost consideration in planning any border activity.

People need to remember that we sell social distancing up here. This is one of the few places in Ontario that you can actually fly in to a lake and own that lake and you're the only people on that lake for the duration of your stay. There are hundreds of lakes like that up here.

The issue, once we get people here—certainly, we're willing to follow any protocols that are necessary, including testing and personal protective equipment, sanitization, etc. But yes, we haven't had a line of communication. The communication, or lack thereof, is a huge issue for solving some of these problems. We have not been able to liaise with the federal government on this specific question.

You're bang on: that is what we need to do. I think we can be safe, but we really have to ensure that Canadians are comfortable, that we can manage this—and we can. Our operators are willing to pivot and work with Ontario and Canada to make tourism work out here in a safe manner for all concerned so—

Ms. Donna Skelly: So if I could take from you—

Mr. Gerry Cariou: We haven't been able to get that thing, though. Maybe the province could help us, perhaps.

Ms. Donna Skelly: So you haven't been able to negotiate or work with your federal counterparts, and that is one of the areas that I'm thinking we need you to work on.

Mr. Gerry Cariou: Correct. We have not been able to. I have some liaisons with the immigration people at the border. However, they don't provide you with a lot of information. They essentially tell you what decisions are, and they weren't—for example, the camp owner issue of American camp owners not being to get in yet despite the fact we can mitigate any risks, I think, for those people who are willing to quarantine for 14 days, go straight to their camp, just to get it ready so they can try to access the Canadian market initially. If the border opens up post-June 21, then we could safely work with that. We're willing.

We've got to save our season, here. We've got to do something. The human costs are mounting. The despair out here is—I'm sure it's like Ontario, but what do you say to someone who asks you, "What do I tell my kids if I lose my lodge?" That's the kind of thing I deal with at my desk here. It's riveting when you—you know, it's things that keep me up.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. That concludes our time. Thank you to all three presenters for your time and for your presentation.

Before we move on to our next presenter, I would like to recognize MPP Piccini. If you could please confirm your attendance and what part of Ontario you represent.

Mr. David Piccini: Hi, it's MPP David Piccini calling in from my office in Port Hope.

MS. MICHEL LEFEUVRE-WATSON
MRS. McGARRIGLE'S FINE FOOD SHOP
INDIGENOUS SPORT AND WELLNESS
ONTARIO

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): So we'll move to our next presenter: Michel Watson. If you could please state your name for the record. You will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Can you unmute yourself? We can hear you now.

Ms. Michel LeFeuvre-Watson: My name is Michel LeFeuvre-Watson and I'm calling on behalf of my husband and myself. We're the proud owner-operators of Kaby Lodge, which is located on Kabinakagami Lake in Lizar township in Algoma district of northern Ontario.

We are a resource-based, remote, fly-in-only tourism resort. As such, the COVID-19 pandemic has wreaked havoc on our business. We are hopeful that some things are going to improve and we will be able to continue and actually remain in business. It's a really hard time for us now.

As seasonal operators with a 20-week season in which to earn our living for the following 32 weeks, so far we have suffered a 100% income loss of an estimated \$500,000 to date if we cannot open for routine business prior to June 21 for our regular guests to come and experience what we have to offer.

Our spring black bear hunt is completely gone, and traditionally we open for fishing guests as of the third Saturday in May each year, which of course was not allowed, due to COVID-19. And with the provincial state of emergency in place until June 30, border closures until June 21 and perhaps even extended with the border closures, we have no hope of ever recovering these losses that we have suffered.

This business belongs to my husband and myself. This isn't a large corporation. What we receive and do here at our lodge is done by ourselves and a minimal staff.

As many tourism operators in the north have mainly visitors and guests from the US, we wonder what will happen after our things open up starting today. With the closure of the border, which we do understand was necessary, we lost at least 90% of our client base. And along with the fact that the largest sports show, the Toronto Sportsmen's Show, that we annually attend in Ontario was cancelled, with a complete financial loss to ourselves, we did not have the opportunity to present to and book more Ontario residents. All the money that we invested to attend this show, along with several others in the US, was lost. We hope that many residents will take the time to travel and see Ontario over the summer, but once again, we have no budget to do major Ontario promotions and advertisements, as to date, we have had no income.

Our family has been in the resource-based tourism field since 1946. We're very proud to be able to continue the tradition passed on to us by my husband's family. That being said, we are currently watching our business fail with the uncertainty of not knowing if and when we will be allowed to open for regular business. We worry that

everything that we have built as small business owners over the years will be for naught if things do not change to allow us to operate.

Our beautiful province was built on the backs of small business, and we're watching them die all over the province now. We watch things opening up in the south and see what is happening with the numbers there and wonder why we are being placed in the same category, when northern Ontario has shown minimal effects due to positive COVID cases. In reality, we are probably located in some of the safest places for people to be during this crisis.

We have plans in place for staff, guests and ourselves to ensure that safety protocols are being followed. We have modified all of our packages to make things work. The air service that we work with and fly with has modified their aircraft to make certain they're working safely and within protocols. These modifications all cost money, and as of right now, none of us even have an income to cover those new expenses.

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The programs put in place, both provincially and federally, to help businesses out are really not helping us in tourism. We have applied for and received the \$40,000 loan due to commitments we made in 2019 to purchase new motors for our facility. But the reality is, with no income, paying back this loan may be next to impossible.

Simple things like getting our water tested for safety to meet the guidelines and regulations are next to impossible in the north. I just spent almost 17 hours trying to find a way to get our sample sent to Thunder Bay for lab testing, which is required by regulations prior to opening. Despite being told that the infrastructure is in place to make things easier and accessible, I'm afraid I would beg to differ. Messages have been inconsistent and often seem to be based on decisions that are being made regionally, not provincially, not with regard to public health units in our government offices.

We're also trying to employ some of our long-term staff by taking advantage of the 75% wage subsidy, but once again, with zero or minimal income, we are unsure of how long we will be able to do so. This is very concerning. We have many long-term staff who have come to us year after year. We're very worried that if we cannot employ them so that they get enough hours over the course of the summer this year, they will not be eligible to collect EI, which is what happens to many people who live in northern Ontario. There are so many seasonal positions that employment insurance is definitely something that is used by many, many people who live in the north. They may not have the hours to qualify. We're concerned as to what will happen with them.

As a seasonal business, we feel that we have been completely left out, both federally and provincially. Yet the reality is that in northern Ontario, tourism brings more to the Ontario GDP than mining, logging and agriculture combined. We feel that there has been no real recognition of that fact, and it's extremely disappointing to feel that we are not being taken into account for what we provide

for everyone in the province, not just the people in the north.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Michel LeFeuvre-Watson: We have gotten nothing but inconsistent messages from government and their agencies. We're very fortunate that we have local people who are working with us, but provincially, it's becoming more and more challenging.

Just as a note of interest, this one-day notification that we got with being allowed to open is just not enough for people like us. I'm an 11-hour drive from my home, where I live and where my office is. I have to fly myself, my staff, and supplies. This is next to impossible. We are already losing another week of business, minimum, in order to get things prepared and on-site to our staff to be able to open up our facility.

We would simply wish that people take note that the financial hardships that we are facing as tourism operators due to COVID-19 will take a long time to recover from. As Minister MacLeod stated yesterday, we do not expect to recover our 2019 numbers until at least 2024, if ever. We were the first to be shut down in this crisis and we will be the last to recover. May I strongly suggest that our government representatives, both elected and bureaucrats, take a drive—not a flight—across this great province to witness first-hand the lack of infrastructure supports and the effects of COVID-19 in our true northern Ontario.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much.

We'll move to our next presenter, Mrs. McGarrigle's Fine Food. If you could please state your name for the record, you will have seven minutes.

Ms. Janet Campbell: Yes, hello. I'm Janet Campbell, and I'm the owner-operator of Mrs. McGarrigle's Fine Food Shop in Merrickville. We're also a specialty mustard producer. I started the business in 1988, so this is my 32nd year. We're located in Merrickville; we've been named the prettiest village in Canada a couple of times. Tourism is really the lifeblood of our community.

Some of the things that we offer are cooking classes, which I don't see—we cancelled, of course, our spring session, and I'm sure we'll be cancelling our fall session as well. Another thing we do in the store is feature a lot of locally made products from our region. We have sampling stations, about a dozen of them. I really take seriously the opportunity that I have had over the years to introduce all of the talent of the area and give them that platform to get these specialty products, handmade products, into as many mouths as possible. Sampling: We have about a dozen stations in the store, which of course we won't be doing any time soon. That represents about 25% of our income—the products that we're sampling that day.

We've already had five businesses that are closing in our small village of 1,000 people. We've had our mayor go on television and talk to the local papers and tell people, "Do not come to Merrickville. Do not bring COVID-19. We don't have any COVID here. Do not come to Merrickville and do walkabout and walk on our streets and go into our stores."

Meanwhile, I closed for the first two weeks in March. I've been running this store pretty much on my own, with one other staff member just recently. I've lost several staff. It's totally unhelpful. We are a food shop so we were allowed to stay open. I've been doing a lot of meals-to-go and that sort of thing. We have all of the measures in place to serve people safely.

I'm worried about what our village is going to look like a year from now. We've already lost five businesses in a very short amount of time. What are things going to look like? We're very seasonal as well, and like Michel said, I had to take the \$40,000 loan, pretty much, because we had ordered a lot of our inventory. We have 3,000 square feet of housewares, giftware and food, so we had a lot of inventory that had arrived for our summer season. We, of course, need to maintain our relationship with those important suppliers and keep them paid, without paying myself at the same time.

I think the recovery is going to be several years. The more I think of it, I think it's going to be difficult to pay back \$40,000 in two years with virtually—I might be up to about 40% of our normal sales right now. The first two months, I was down about 85% in income.

We also supply a lot of restaurants—bulk. All of our 14 mustards and chutneys and salad dressings: That is pretty much at about zero, or maybe 5%, of our normal income. We sell to about 200 shops in Canada, all of our McGarrigle's products, which is pretty much at zero as well.

The other thing we had to do was, we were an early—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Janet Campbell: We had to cancel our TODS signage because it more than doubled this year, and I couldn't really justify that expense. I think that you're going to end up with a lot of fast-food restaurants on that signage for people that can take about a 120% increase in the fees for that TODS program, which I think was not its original intention. I think it's a great program; like I said, we were on it for about 15 years or whenever it started.

I think that's about everything I can think of right now. Thank you for the opportunity.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. We'll move to our next presenter, from Indigenous Sport and Wellness Ontario. If you could please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes.

Mr. Marc Laliberté: Hello. My name is Marc Laliberté. I'm the president of Indigenous Sport and Wellness Ontario. I'm calling from Thunder Bay. I'd like to thank the Chair and the standing committee for giving us this opportunity to present on behalf of Indigenous Sport and Wellness Ontario, or ISWO as we call ourselves, and the Indigenous peoples and communities we represent. We are honoured to be part of the dialogue and appreciate the engagement.

As a bit of a background, ISWO is the designated provincial Indigenous sport body for Ontario, serving all Indigenous peoples and communities across the province, including First Nations, Métis and Inuit, on- and off-

reserve, rural and urban. Our organization develops opportunities for participation in sport and cultural activities that promote wellness and positive lifestyles for Indigenous peoples of Ontario.

Our organization started small, with two occasional staff, and has now evolved into a successful Indigenous-led body that has made a difference in the lives of thousands of youth.

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We now employ staff throughout Ontario and have proudly hosted multiple major games, resulting in—and I'm taking this line from the minister—a terrific double bottom line, with significant social and economic impact, and have developed sport and wellness programs for Indigenous people of all ages.

Over the past five years, ISWO's budget received from the ministry has gone from \$200,000 to just over \$1.9 million, illustrating the ongoing dedication of the ministry in supporting Indigenous youth and communities, and we'd like to acknowledge that support.

ISWO has progressed from an organization focused primarily on only-youth sport to an organization with core programs in sport, leadership and wellness for Indigenous people of all ages.

I won't go much into the successes that we've had in hosting many of our events, but in three short years, for the province of Ontario, our activities have generated over \$50 million in economic activity.

The impacts of COVID-19: It has had a tremendous impact on the entire nation as we know it and especially on our sport, tourism and culture industries here in Ontario. That has meant a delay in some major events, such as the 2020 North American Indigenous Games in Halifax, which we were preparing for, and an outright cancellation of some of our organization's own programs and events. I know that many organizations such as ours are in the same boat.

But in terms of dollars and cents, we've had an over half-a-million-dollar loss as a direct result of COVID-19. More significantly, our youth and communities are suffering. Many a youth looks forward to sports and our programs as a positive outlet, and now they don't have that.

Many of our communities don't have the resources to stay healthy and safe, and so we have redirected some our efforts in assisting with immediate needs and responding to community challenges.

We are also providing learning and leadership opportunities through our online leadership program to keep youth engaged during this difficult time while working to further enhance our ability to deliver more support and programming online. For example, we are working to have more Indigenous coaches certified during this time through online resources and finding creative ways to have our young athletes try out through online and alternative selection processes. This is the same for our athlete training and development program.

Recent events of COVID-19 have only strengthened our organization's commitment to enhancing our capability to deliver more opportunities through digital means.

We have recently created an online portal for our leadership course—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Marc Laliberté: —and are in the process of finalizing an Indigenous wellness app. That's where I think it's important to focus on new opportunities.

We do have some recommendations, two of them, which we'd like to put forward today, towards this goal. The first one is capitalizing on the potential for increasing Indigenous sport tourism in Ontario. The size of the Indigenous population in Ontario is approximately 400,000, compared to 1.4 million in Canada and over 5 million in the US. Indigenous communities are grossly underserved, and there's the potential, with a modest investment, to make Ontario the premier destination on Turtle Island for Indigenous sport tourism.

ISWO already has the 2021 and 2023 Masters Indigenous Games secured to take place in Ottawa, with funding and support committed from the city of Ottawa tourism. It is a major feature of their year of Indigenous tourism initiative for 2021. The events are open to Indigenous peoples from around the world. We're looking for opportunities to enhance this Masters Indigenous Games tour.

I'll go on to a second recommendation, which is the creation of new regulatory guidelines that will allow the delivery of sporting events in a COVID and post-COVID world. New regulatory guidelines would provide both attendees and venue operators with a measure of certainty and comfort that the delivery and attendance at public events is reasonably safe and, liability-wise, commercially viable. Without this measure of certainty, attracting large numbers of participants to any planned sporting event will be difficult, if not impossible.

We have prepared a draft of points to consider as part of these regulatory guidelines, which, of course, would have to be considered and reviewed with the ministry and local public health units, in consideration of existing legislation. The understanding that Ontario is a large province, with different incidences of COVID-19 and implications, would have to be taken into account. The full document has been provided by attachment, for reference.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Marc Laliberté: We understand that the road ahead will not be an easy one, but we are very encouraged by the support and engagement we have seen from the minister, the ministry and the entire provincial government. I think together we will be able to forge a path forward that will see us collaborate more closely and build an even stronger economy, with more social impact for all members of our society. Meegwetch and thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. Before we go to questions, I would just like to advise Mr. Laliberté from Indigenous Sport and Wellness Ontario that I understand you have your other colleagues joining throughout your call as well. If any question is directed to you and any of your colleagues would like to speak, please let me know and we'll unmute your colleague.

Mr. Marc Laliberté: Okay, thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): All right, so we'll start with independent members this time for questions. Who wants to go first? MPP Blais.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Mr. Laliberté for your presentation. I'm wondering if you could discuss with us the social and psychological impacts of the closures, and the inability of your organization to function properly as a result of the pandemic and the lasting effects you envision as a result.

Mr. Marc Laliberté: Yes, certainly. We had planned many multi-sport and cultural camps for our youth across Ontario. We have our population relatively evenly dispersed across all of Ontario, from the deep south, Walpole Island, all the way up to Big Trout Lake in northern Ontario. We provide camps in many remote communities as well as in urban settings and so on. We've had to cancel everything and postpone some of our other events, such as the Ontario Native Basketball Invitational and our entire Ontario Native Volleyball Invitational. We are uncertain of the future of those events for the short term. In the longer term, we are trying to let our youth know that we are going to be going ahead with these things because they really look forward to them.

We are very concerned about the mental health of some of these youth not being able to participate in those things that they love. We know that this is true for the general population as well, but our people are represented in some of the worst social determinants of health in this province. We are doing what we can to try to encourage them to stay active while we are not able to get together with them. It's very discouraging.

Mr. Stephen Blais: If there was one thing the provincial government could do to help your organization get back up and running once it's safe to do so, what would that be?

Failure of sound system.

Mr. Stephen Blais: I believe you're still on mute, Mr. Laliberté.

Mr. Marc Laliberté: Okay. I'll allow one of my staff to answer that question. Abi, if you are available, could you speak up?

Ms. Abidah Shirazi: Hi. Yes, Marc. Thank you. To answer the question, I think one of the most important things would be to provide some additional investment to create some more opportunities for additional camps. We run a number of camps and programs, but of course, Ontario is such a large province and the population of Indigenous youth is so large that we would like to serve more and be able to reach more remote communities.

As many of the speakers today announced and expressed, northern Ontario is a completely different environment. The transportation costs alone are tremendous. So being able to reach more youth I think will be important because many more youth are going to be vulnerable, considering the effect on mental health that the situation is creating.

Additionally, the proposed guidelines that we have suggested are a very important step. Even post-COVID, I think there is uncertainty about when this will come back,

if it comes back, especially for those communities in the north that are remote and don't have access to medical facilities and care.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Abidah Shirazi: That would be two excellent steps to help support the community.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Thank you very much, and I believe MPP Hunter has some questions.

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The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Hunter.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you. Thanks to all the presenters for sharing today. My question is for Mr. Laliberté. I really think that your perspective is one that we should hear from in this committee, so I'd like you to talk a little bit more about the impacts of this health crisis on the community. Please, go ahead.

Mr. Laliberté?

Mr. Marc Laliberté: Yes, thank you. I'm going to allow one of our staff, Dale Plett, who is also the president of the North American Indigenous Games, to answer that one.

Dale, are you available?

Ms. Dale Plett: Yes, I am. Can you just repeat the question? Sorry, I've been having issues with my Internet today. I apologize.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Yes. Actually the North American Indigenous Games was a source of great pride for us, being hosts and participants of that. I just want to hear the impact of the health crisis on the community.

Ms. Dale Plett: Thank you so much. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. Obviously, COVID has been awful for all of us, especially within Turtle Island. The decision to, obviously, postpone the North American Indigenous Games was not made lightly. We were following week to week the changes that were happening with COVID. It was really important to us—Marc sits at that table as well—as the NAIG council to be really careful in regard to how we communicated any decisions regarding the North American Indigenous Games. The North American Indigenous Games is just not only a games like the Canada Games but it's so much more—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Forty-five seconds.

Ms. Dale Plett: —in regard to a collective of kids coming together. A lot of kids don't get to see other brown kids, other Indians, other native kids from around Turtle Island, and so we were really concerned about the mental health of our youth. That is why we have postponed, not cancelled, with the hopes of having the games in 2021. We're still working with the government provincially and the feds in regard to the funding, but really needing assistance for Team Ontario as we move forward for that, because it does make a difference and it saves kids' lives.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. We'll move to the government side now, and I will start with MPP Smith.

Mr. Dave Smith: I'm going to start, Marc, with you, if you don't mind. Thank you very much for being on the advisory panel for us for amateur sports. I know that

Minister MacLeod greatly appreciated all the input that you put in on that for us.

Do you mind giving us your thoughts on how important it was that we had that Indigenous voice there at the outset so that we get it right the first time and we're not having to come back and make changes and retrofit something because we missed it? This way, hopefully, we're not missing something by having you at the table and having you give as much feedback as you do.

Mr. Marc Laliberté: Certainly. Yes, it was very important for our organization to represent the Indigenous voice for Ontario. We often get overlooked. We feel that we contribute greatly to the fabric of Ontario culture and sport, and those youth, especially in the north, need somebody to speak up on their behalf.

One example of where we had to advocate on behalf of Indigenous youth was when there was a possibility of lacrosse being removed for eligibility as a funded, carded athlete sport. We didn't feel that that was in the best interests of any athletes, let alone our own Indigenous athletes who look to that sport as a way out in many cases. So we did manage to have that removed.

We also mentioned to the committee members that our Far North communities, in particular, will not be opening up as quickly as the rest of the province. Due to the lack of safe, healthy water and medical availability to treat something like COVID, it was not going to happen quickly. While the rest of the province opens up, a lot of those communities will not. We felt that we had to show that we are probably going to be slower than the mainstream in returning to normal operations.

We also found that across the rest of Canada—we are part of a collective, I will mention—the other provinces, particularly in the West, are beginning to have their tryouts and selections. We, unfortunately, cannot do that for now.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you very much for that. I'm sure you're going to punt this one over to Dale. It's with respect to the North American Indigenous Games. This year they were scheduled to be in Halifax. My hypothetical expectation is that you'll be moving them to 2021. You award them about two years in advance, so the 2021 games will likely be moved to 2022, which opens up an opportunity, then, for potentially the 2023 North American Indigenous Games. Is it worthwhile for Ontario's ministry of very many things that Minister MacLeod represents—is it worthwhile for us to take a look at possibly putting in a bid to host the North American Indigenous Games for 2023? And if we were to do that, with no disrespect intended to the GTA area, should we be considering—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Dave Smith: —doing northern Ontario as opposed to having it centralized in, say, the GTA?

The reason I ask that question is that my own community hosted the world women's lacrosse championships this past year. Typically, they are in a larger centre, but having it in Peterborough was an excellent opportunity for us on the sport tourism side.

Mr. Marc Laliberté: First, I will refer that to Dale, but yes, it will be 2024 when the next one is decided. There are some—yes, I'll allow Dale to answer that.

Ms. Dale Plett: Thank you so much for the great questions. I think the numbers speak for themselves. If you were to look at the numbers that we've brought in for NAIG 2017, I believe it was \$47.5 million in regard to economic impact, so it's always a really great thing to put in a bid for the North American Indigenous Games.

In 2018, the FPT ministers ratified the decision for the new funding framework for the North American Indigenous Games, and so we are now on a new cycle. We don't see the postponement of the 2020 games impacting that as of right now in regard to the cycle of the games.

I think it's really important for people to understand the difference of the Canada games and the North American Indigenous Games. The sheer size alone—we had 5,250 athletes—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Dale Plett: —registered for NAIG 2020, and expect the same for further games. I think it would be great to host in northern Ontario if we have a venue that is able to hold that many. Ottawa was who we were hoping to host when we had put in the bid for 2020 because they have the infrastructure to support that. But absolutely, Ontario should be putting in bids for further games in the future.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. All right, it's 20 seconds, so we'll move to the opposition party now. MPP Shaw.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: My question is going to go to Indigenous Sports and Wellness Ontario, Mr. Laliberté. I'd just like to let you know that the NDP have three Indigenous MPPs; we have Sol Mamakwa, MPP Morrison and MPP Bourgouin, and they raise every day in the House the glaring inequities in Turtle Island. We hear about the lack of access to clean drinking water all the time.

This finance committee toured the northern region. We were in Sioux Lookout; we were in Thunder Bay. We saw with our own eyes the inadequate health services. We saw the lack of mental health supports, and particularly with a tragic youth suicide story that we were hearing. We know that in the north, there was already a huge disparity in terms of the services. And now with the pandemic, I can see that the services you provide are more vital than ever, especially for the youth in your community.

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I actually have two questions with that in mind. One is that I would like you to explain very specifically how the program that you provide in fact does help with mental health, well-being and a sense of hope for the youth in your community. And then if you just wanted to talk about—I've heard that there's an interesting partnership with yourself and Fresh Market Foods in your region. You can explain how that was required to provide services to fly-in communities. Those two areas would help us to better understand what it is you are dealing with in your communities on Turtle Island. Thank you very much.

Mr. Marc Laliberté: Thank you for the questions. For the first part: We provide a leadership program called Standing Bear, which is designed to address specifically mental health aspects of Indigenous youth as they move

into adulthood. We talk about things from cultural awareness and learning their own language and getting out on the land, land-based activities and such, as well as real-life skills on financial literacy and the like.

The program you're talking about with fresh food—one of our regional coordinators in the Kenora region noticed the food insecurity being heightened by COVID and took it upon herself, with our backing, to start providing potatoes to northern fly-in communities. It was something that was new to us, as well, but food security is part of wellness. Tania Cameron is her name—you probably are familiar with her—and she does tremendous work for us on that side.

I'm going to ask one of my fellow board members, who is on mute right now, to add a little bit. Christina, if you would, please?

Ms. Christina Ruddy: Hi. Thank you, Marc. My name is Christina Ruddy. I'm from the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan First Nation, about an hour and a half west of Ottawa. I sit as the treasurer of the board of directors for ISWO.

I just want to add to what Marc has said. Of course, food insecurity is something in the north that people live with every day. At this time, people are extremely generous and I'm grateful for Tania to take advantage of that and make it happen, and happy to support that initiative.

I want to touch a little bit on sports and the impact on Indigenous kids. It is so vital and important that our youth get involved, get the opportunity to leave their communities and visit other communities. One of the things that drew me to this organization, to become involved as a volunteer, is that sports save lives, and I thank Dale for introducing me to that statement when I first came on board. It is vitally important and truly does affect the mental well-being and emotional well-being of our youth.

I've recently gotten more involved in the Standing Bear program as a volunteer, and I know that it has an incredible impact on youth. They are missing these services right now. Being able to picture a bright future is a very important part of suicide prevention—that we need to focus on getting things moving again in a safe way and increasing our outreach online, which our communications team has been doing beautifully, to make sure that kids see that this too will end, and that our future may look different but it still exists.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you for that. Is there anyone else who wanted to comment on that from your organization? I would say that the idea of offering hope and sports saving lives is exactly the kind of thing that we need to support going forward, and I just want to reassure you that our caucus is—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: —deeply aware of the struggles in your community.

I guess with the minute we have left, if you wanted to comment on that, or even just comment on the fact that in order to open up safely, we're talking about people having PPE, we're talking about provisions that will be needed, but many of your communities don't even have clean

drinking water. Can you just explain to me a little bit about the struggles you may be having to open up even the events that you run?

Mr. Marc Laliberté: So many of our events are based on our youth being able to interact and get together. Like the rest of society, we cannot do that right now. It's hurting our youth. We see sport as a valuable tool in wellness, and it's also a piece in the reconciliation process, that we get out and we participate and integrate with the rest of society through sport. It helps us to become healthy. Sport is—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. We'll start the second round with the government side. I'll go to MPP Anand.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you, Chair, for giving me the opportunity. My question is to Janet Campbell. Chair, through you: It is very heartbreaking to see that a lot of small businesses, especially stores—whether it's food, whether it's clothes—may not even come back.

Janet, the question to you is: As we heard this morning, we lost another 64,000 jobs in Ontario. What do you think of the regional approach? We have a lot of legislators listening to you right now. What message do you want to give to the command table and to the Premier about the regional approach? Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Can you unmute yourself?

Ms. Janet Campbell: Sorry about that.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We can hear you.

Ms. Janet Campbell: Toronto is very different from, obviously, northern Ontario, especially in our region, and I think that regionality is really important to take into consideration, and the number of cases. In moving forward, as we lose—I've lost a few of my suppliers already as well, small artisanal producers that have already gone bankrupt. I think that we would be really well served if the government would promote a shop local program provincially. There's so much talent in our community and in the quality of the products that we're producing. It would be a real shot in the arm if the government would take that on and introduce a shop local program and support our small producers.

Thank you.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you, Janet.

Marc, the question to you would be, when we talk about Indigenous communities—and we have new Canadians in my riding, especially in Mississauga–Malton. This is a time when we're talking about “shop local,” and we're talking about staying close to home. Is there anything that we can do to bring these two communities together? Maybe given this opportunity—I won't call it an opportunity, but the forced opportunity to come closer to home—is there any program that you can suggest to us?

Mr. Marc Laliberté: One that comes to mind is what is called the Aboriginal Coaching Modules. It is a program that was provided in order to teach coaches how to deal with Indigenous youths, to understand the struggles and barriers that they have in their lives. It was mostly designed to be a counter to what we'd call racism.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Marc Laliberté: The new Canadian community faces many of the same barriers that our people do. There are some similarities. How we can come together—I would look forward to that on the topic of reconciliation, I would call it.

Mr. Deepak Anand: That's it for me, Chair. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We'll go to MPP Miller, Parry Sound–Muskoka.

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you. I have a question for Michel Watson. Michel, I was in the lodge business, not exactly similar to yours, for 30 years, and I certainly never faced the challenges that you described in your presentation. It certainly seems to be about survival this year.

I'm wondering what restrictions are in place currently that the government could lift, firstly, and then, secondly, what support governments of all levels can provide to help you be around for next year.

Ms. Michel LeFeuvre-Watson: I think the key from our perspective is that government needs to understand that people like myself need more window of opportunity to prepare to be able to open. It's not regulation-based; it's common-sense-based for when you are located in remote areas.

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We can't do things quickly. I don't have food suppliers in our local communities. They need to put more infrastructure in place to help people like ourselves to function, to hope to gain some sense of business over the course of the summer. The little community, for example, that we deal with, where I buy my groceries—they don't even have the opportunity to pick the groceries for me now. There is no staff. The CERB program, as wonderful as it is, in the north is really discouraging staff to go back to work. It's a wonderful thing and it has definitely—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Michel LeFeuvre-Watson: —put money in the hands of people who needed it, but now that they're getting it regularly, we're finding it extremely hard to find staff. They don't want to go back to work because they don't have to.

Another thing that would be huge for us infrastructure-wise would be to put cell service in place. We have sketchy, at best, cell service anywhere in the north. Travel the roads and discover that if you have a breakdown on the highway between Sault Ste. Marie and White River, there may be no cell service. There are no gas stations open. There are no hotels that are open. Very occasionally, you'll see a police officer roll by.

I think it's an infrastructure-based situation, that people need to be really aware that as much as things like that are existing in the south, it's not here in the north. It's a real issue for us up here, and we need to make some significant changes to make it easier for people like ourselves to actually do business—not just myself as a remote fly-in operator, but these people that are living in the small communities as well.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll move to the opposition side for their second round. I'll

start with MPP Miller, Hamilton East–Stoney Creek. Are you there, MPP Miller? Yes. Can you unmute yourself?

Mr. Paul Miller: Hello? You got me?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Yes.

Mr. Paul Miller: Okay, thank you. My question is to Marc. Good morning, Marc. As we all know, much of our Indigenous community in Ontario resides in northern, more remote areas of our province, areas where access to resources such as online and in-person job-sharing programs as well as support programs for retraining and reskilling are less available compared to the GTA or southern Ontario. There are various institutions, like the nine Indigenous education institutes, one of which, Six Nations Polytechnic in Ohsweken, I'm locally familiar with, that may be in a position to help bring job retraining resources to Indigenous communities, especially those who have lost their jobs in sports and tourism-related industries.

From your perspective, what role would you like the provincial government to take in providing access to job retraining resources for Indigenous communities? Do you think that the current state of funding and support for the nine Indigenous education institutes will be enough for them to adequately provide job retraining and reskilling to Indigenous workers, especially in those remote communities?

Mr. Marc Laliberté: Thank you for the question. In terms of the funding, I really don't know the answer to that. I don't know much they get or the other details around those education institutes.

One thing that was mentioned by the previous presenter is the lack of service in the north for basic broadband service. A lot of those communities, especially now, are limited in their ability to take online courses or do very much online because the whole community is at home using Netflix and so on. The infrastructure is lacking. That would be one area where I believe that the reach into the north could be increased and improved upon. I hope that answers—

Mr. Paul Miller: Marc, a follow-up—I've got a follow-up. Do you feel that the nine Indigenous institutes would be able to do retraining programs with support from the government, after COVID hopefully ends to a certain level? Do you feel that they're in a position to retrain Indigenous youth and people to get back into some different form of employment?

Mr. Marc Laliberté: I believe that it is an opportunity that should be presented. The nine you speak of: I assume one of them would be someone like Oshki-Pimache-O-Win here in Thunder Bay. Okay, yes, I'm aware of that organization. Any additional support for them, especially in these times—I know there are many, many people, even in my own family, who are out of work right now, and the prospects are not that great. The front-line workers and so on need support and additional training to get more workers into those fields. So in answer to that question, yes, I believe that there is more support needed from the government for those important institutions.

Mr. Paul Miller: Thank you, Marc.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll move to MPP Lindo—three minutes.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Thank you, Marc and your team, for everything you have added to this conversation. My questions are actually going to be directed to both Michel and Janet.

I have been really thinking about the purpose of this committee. The purpose of this committee is to think about economic recovery, to think about what you need for us to invest in as government so that you can thrive, because the understanding is, or should be, that what you bring to Ontario is so critically important that we cannot leave you behind.

I was taken by two different things as you both were speaking. First, with Michel, you had mentioned the loans—that you applied for and received the loans. We heard all day yesterday, and I can tell you, well before—I'm out in Kitchener Centre; I've been hearing this as well—folks are not bringing in any money, so the notion of loans is actually not helpful. I was wondering if you could spend a little bit of time speaking about the need for either forgivable loans, so that when things do start to pick up, you can feel confident in that, or the need for grants as opposed to loan programs.

Ms. Michel LeFevre-Watson: Obviously, grants are the best thing to do, because literally we have had zero income. There have been no dollars coming into our facility whatsoever. Even though we are now able to start to open up for Ontario residents, convincing Ontario residents to travel here now and stay at our facility during the COVID crisis is really going to be a challenge.

We took that loan because we already ordered these motors a year ago, when things were good. You can't anticipate that something like COVID is going to happen.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Michel LeFevre-Watson: So we took the loans out, and the reality is that we are now unsure, even in two years, of whether or not we will be able to pay back that loan—which, yes, 25% of it can be forgiven, but the other portion is still going to have to be paid. If I don't have the business in place over the next two seasons to do that, it's going to become a real issue for me.

Granting some portions as well as forgiving: Maybe a combination of the two should be dealt with. Honestly, it's something that really needs to be thrown at all of us and feedback gotten from all of us, because we are small mom-and-pop-type businesses. As I said earlier, it's my husband and myself that drive this business. We have wonderful people working with us, but it's my husband and myself that drive it.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Thank you. And for Janet, sort of starting from that point, the other piece of the question I had for you was the need to ensure that tourists feel safe coming out. I'm wondering if you have been hearing consistent messages from public health or concerns about the lack of consistency.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. Sorry to cut you off.

We'll move to independent members now. I'll start with MPP Schreiner.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I want to thank all three organizations and businesses for presenting today.

I'm going to start with Marc or any of the members of Indigenous Sport and Wellness Ontario. All of you have done a fantastic job of talking about the importance of sport for mental health and health, and in particular the sport camps. I'm curious, with camps being closed this summer, if there are financial implications to those closures that you'll not only experience this summer, but that could threaten the viability of the camps moving forward in future years if you don't receive support.

Mr. Marc Laliberté: Abi, would you answer that one for me, please?

Ms. Abidah Shirazi: Yes, of course, Marc. Absolutely.

Thank you for your question. One of the most important features of our programs, especially for youth, when it's not related to competitive sport, such as the North American Indigenous Games—so for our multi-sport camps—is that we offer them usually at no charge for Indigenous youth. We recognize the challenges and barriers that many youth face, especially those who may be in care. We don't want to create any additional barriers, so we offer them at no cost for youth and we try to reach as many youth as possible.

1200

Within our current funding structure, we're able to host 12 multi-sports camps per year, and that's two within each region of Ontario. We have six regions that we separated the province into. As you can imagine, while those camps are great and we're really grateful for that funding so we're able to do that, I think we need more. The ability to host more camps in more areas of the province would be fantastic, because we need to reach more kids.

Like I said earlier, the transportation costs to go to the north to set up a camp, to set up supplies, is tremendous. What we try to do is also work with the communities when we set up these camps. We go to each individual community, see what the kids want, see what the community needs. Each community is very different. There might be some communities experiencing trauma. There might be some communities who don't have clean drinking water. So when we go to a community, we really have to be flexible and see what the needs are.

This is going to definitely affect our season this summer; everything has been cancelled. Going forward, while an investment from the government is a really important one, we want to make sure that we balance that investment. So on the other hand, we're trying to create opportunities for revenue generation through our Masters events, through our Masters games, which have a huge economic impact for the province, and then we want to put that back into creating more opportunities for youth, without the financial barriers.

I hope that answered your question.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Yes, it does. Thank you. I'm going to shift to another person for a question, but really quickly, could you maybe submit, in a written submission,

what type of financial contribution government can make to expand what your camps can offer and the youth that you would support?

I just want to ask Janet Campbell, really quickly—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I'm a big fan of "shop local," so thanks for talking about that. I'm a local food entrepreneur myself, so I'm just wondering if you could talk a little bit about how culinary tourism could support both tourism operators but also local farmers.

Ms. Janet Campbell: Definitely. The shop local program, or culinary tourism, brings the keenest of the keen to us. I would love to do something like the Taste Trail that Prince Edward county has done extremely well in their area.

Like I say, there is so much talent that's just in our backyards that we need to shout it from the rooftops. Any kind of help with producing maps and that sort of thing, when things are back to the new normal, would be fantastic, yes.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Thank you for that. I'm going to share the rest of my time with MPP Hunter.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Hunter.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I wanted to say thank you so much to all of our presenters today for the work you are doing. Together, we're going to get through this. I just really want thank you all for your efforts.

In the time I have remaining, I do want to find out a little bit more about the broken links that are happening in transportation in the north that are affecting the reliability of food supplies and disrupting supply chains. If I could ask Marc to answer that first, and if we have any more time, we could move on to Janet.

Mr. Marc Laliberté: What little I know of it is that the costs to get healthy food to—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Marc Laliberté:—our remote northern communities is prohibitively high. In a lot of cases, they would have to rely on processed foods, which are just not that healthy. We took some steps to try to get some fresh vegetables, eggs and dairy products to the north, but we are learning as we go. So I'll leave it to my colleague to answer that.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Janet, do you want finish up with this question on transportation disrupting the supply chains?

Ms. Janet Campbell: Yes. We are getting some difficulties ordering in. A lot of our orders have back-ordered from our supplies for local cheeses as well. The border crossing with Quebec as well has been an influence.

The other thing I wanted to mention was that someone else mentioned access to high-speed Internet. Sorry if it's a bit off topic, but even though—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I apologize to cut you off. That concludes our time.

Thank you to all three presenters for appearing before the committee and for your presentation. Thank you so much.

Looking at the time on the clock, this committee stands in recess until 1 pm.

The committee recessed from 1205 to 1300.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome back. We're meeting for hearings on the tourism sector as part of the study of the recommendations relating to the Economic and Fiscal Update Act, 2020, and the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on certain sectors of the economy.

WATER'S EDGE FESTIVALS AND EVENTS

ONTARIO MOTOR COACH ASSOCIATION

UFCW ONTARIO PROVINCIAL COUNCIL

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We'll start from where we left off. I would like to call on our next presenter, from Water's Edge Festivals and Events. If you could please state your name for the record, you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Sorry, before you start, I would also like to recognize MPP Glover. If you could please confirm your attendance and if you're in Ontario.

Mr. Chris Glover: Yes, I'm here.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Are you in Ontario?

Mr. Chris Glover: I'm sorry?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Are you in Ontario?

Mr. Chris Glover: Yes.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Yes? Thank you. All right. Ms. Parrell, you can start.

Ms. Lea Parrell: Thank you so much. My name is Lea Parrell. I'm the co-producer of Water's Edge Festivals and Events. Many thanks for allowing me to address the Ontario finance and economic affairs committee today. I appreciate this opportunity.

I speak today on behalf of the tourism sector, specifically the festival and events industry. I believe we all acknowledge that tourism is one of the hardest-hit sectors of COVID-19. I represent an organization that produces events along Toronto's waterfront and waterfront communities throughout Ontario. Some of the major events we have produced include the annual Redpath Waterfront Festival, which is presented by Billy Bishop airport; Sugar Shack TO, which is also presented by Redpath Sugar; as well as pan-provincial events including Tall Ships 1812 Tour, the Ontario 150 Tour, and last summer's Tall Ships Challenge Ontario.

Our industry understands that there is going to be a new normal regarding tourism events, but the main challenge is that we don't know what that looks like yet. We assume there will be restrictions on the number of visitors allowed in a gathering for quite some time, as well as new health and safety regulations. Our network is conducting and participating in numerous webinars in order to continually be updated on the current status of our industry. During these meetings, we have been sharing our thoughts and

ideas as to how we collectively and collaboratively move forward.

We acknowledge that many events will not come through this crisis, and the ones that do will face extreme challenges. There have been numerous surveys and studies done. One in particular estimates there will be a 50% reduction in sponsorship fees for the next one to two years, as well as reduced experiential marketing activations, thus reducing the revenue for festival and events budgets.

The events that our company produces are free to the public, so we rely heavily on corporate sponsorship and government grants. On the other side of the budget, we are estimating that the new health and safety requirements will increase the expense portion of all event budgets. Therefore, with reduced revenue and increased expenses, both directly caused by COVID-19, the events that do return will need to significantly adjust their programming plans and most likely reduce large entertainment portions of their event, unless an increase in government financial support is available to this sector.

Another study, done by Enigma Research, showcases that people want to get back to festivals and events. They want to be smart about it and know that the event is taking the precautions necessary, but they want to get back out there. Enigma surveyed over 2,000 people throughout North America who were past event attendees. This study is very encouraging, as 94% of people have greatly missed attending live events, and 76% are extremely likely to return once large gatherings can resume.

As an industry, we have been encouraged to consider moving our events online. In some cases, this is working. But in our case, it isn't an option, as the mandate of our events is to bring people to the waterfront and explore parks and businesses they might not have before. A large percentage of festivals and events in the province are successful because of their in-person, interactive elements. Some events work in an online space, such as film festivals, concerts and cooking demos, but most festivals and events on the tourism side don't work in a virtual environment.

We must also consider the local businesses who will suffer due to the restrictions on mass gatherings. When an event takes place, regardless of where in the province, the local businesses always benefit from the increased crowds. Those businesses who are already suffering from—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Lea Parrell:—COVID-19 will no longer see the increase in their sales during events due to a significant restriction in the number of visitors allowed to attend.

One of the major local tourism businesses where we produce most of our events is the Canadian commercial passenger vessel industry. Their bookings and events are planned months in advance. Without knowing if they can have an event of 100 or 300 people by August, the season may well be over by the time large gatherings will be allowed. The current 24-hour notice for business openings just doesn't work for them.

At this time, I would like to acknowledge and thank the province for the support they have provided our industry

to date. Going forward, we are hoping the support for tourism and festivals and events will continue and expand.

While large tourism attendance and high economic impact numbers were the objectives of Ontario government grants previously, they must understand what the new requirements will be in order to be successful with future grants for public festivals and events. For the foreseeable future, we will not be able to bring large attractions to our events, such as the World's Largest Rubber Duck, which drew hundreds of thousands of people to Toronto's waterfront and throughout the province. It provided the largest economic impact of all time for the Redpath Waterfront Festival.

Going forward, we assume that the provincial government grant criteria will be revised and will focus on the alternative objectives: perhaps hyper-local tourism.

I can't even begin to express how valuable and important funding from the provincial government, through Celebrate Ontario, has been to our event specifically and all events throughout the province. Celebrate Ontario supports festivals and events that contribute to local economies and enrich the quality of life in the province which is defined by diversity of experiences, culture, heritage and people.

The organization I am representing today has received annual Celebrate grants and has been awarded three Blockbuster grants for pan-provincial events that we've produced. Without the support of Celebrate Ontario, these events, specifically the pan-provincial events, would never have happened.

In the immediate future, it appears that we will now have to focus on local tourism, and Celebrate Ontario grants will be even more important now to help festivals and events survive COVID-19 and restructure to fit in with the new norm.

When this pandemic first began, the feeling in the tourism and festivals and events industry was that we would be back to some kind of normal by September. There is now a shift in that focus and the feeling is that it will be more likely January or as far as spring 2021 before we see any kind of recovery.

Yesterday, Minister MacLeod indicated that she had been going to indicate on March 12 that the tourism sector had grown to be a \$36-billion industry. She is now expecting that it will take us to 2023 or 2024 to get back to that achievement.

I believe we collectively agree that arts and culture, whether it is an organization or a festival, is deemed to providing hope for our future, post-COVID. I'd like to thank the Ontario finance and economic affairs committee for giving me the opportunity to speak today, and I look forward to continuing to discuss the future of festivals and events in our great province.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much.

I will move to our next presenter, from the Ontario Motor Coach Association. If you could please state your name for the record. You will have seven minutes.

We can hear you now.

Mr. Doug Switzer: You can hear me? Okay.

I'm Doug Switzer. I'm the president of the Ontario Motor Coach Association. The Ontario Motor Coach Association is considerably more than just motor coach operators, although we certainly do represent the coach operators in Ontario. We also represent, really, the group travel industry. So our members include tour operators as well as attractions, destinations, hotels, restaurants. We are basically the association that represents the group travel—performed or otherwise—industry in Ontario.

Your committee is hearing from a wide variety of people in the tourism industry and one of the great things about our industry is how wide and diverse it is. Our members impact on virtually all segments of that, whether it be festivals and events or whether it be sporting events or theatres or casinos. Our tour operator members and our coach operators carry people to all of those things and help make that work.

Like everyone, we're obviously hurting. Like all segments of the tourism industry, we've been virtually shut down. In our case, it's particularly severe because we represent the two things we can't do: be in a group and travel. So the fact that we're in the group business makes it a little bit more poignant for us.

Not to be telling my tale of woe too strenuously, but for us this is actually the second hit. Most of the group travel industry is very involved in student travel. Student travel makes up a very large part of what we do. Because of the teachers' job action, we've been basically shut down since last fall. So we didn't go into lockdown in March; we've been struggling for quite a while. So a lot of our resources that people were using to get through the teachers' job action were already depleted by the time COVID came along.

Our businesses are hurting and we need economic support to reopen, like everybody else. But to be clear, we're not looking for a handout; we're looking for strategic investments to help prime the pump, to help us get back in the business of helping the rest of the tourism industry get back on its feet.

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What we're looking for, really, is two things. I have two asks that we're making of the government and of this committee. The first is marketing support for tour operators. The primary problem that a lot of tour operators have is that they have exhausted their resources; they have no money to get started up again once they're able to start up again. The first thing they need to do is attract customers, and in order to do that they need to revamp their marketing; they need to get back out and start marketing. They need some help with that.

Our proposal is that the ministry enable them to make an application for support for their marketing program. They submit a marketing plan, and if the ministry approves it, it funds up to 50% of that plan. Our ask is that that be capped at \$40,000 maximum. We're not looking for a bottomless pit of money, but if they submit an \$80,000 marketing plan, they're eligible for up to a 40% subsidy from the tourism marketing funds that the ministry

administers. We've figured out that there would probably be about 80 to 100 tour operators that would apply for this, so it's approximately a \$3-million to \$3.5-million ask in total to help with marketing for group tours.

The second is, a problem that the industry has really been struggling with is, how to get people to get on coaches. One of the challenges that we have is, obviously, with social distancing, you're not going to be able to fill a coach to a normal capacity of 55 people. You're going to have to have probably half that many on the coach, at least, to enable social distancing. Added to that, we've got a lot of additional costs related to COVID in terms of cleaning coaches every day, the social distancing, and probably increased labour costs—drivers are going to need to be paid more—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Doug Switzer: —to come back. But the 50% loading is the biggest issue. So, the question is, how can we enable tour operators, or other groups, to rent coaches to take people to events and theatres and whatever they're going to support when they can only put half as many people in the seats, charge half as many fares, yet the price is the same? Our suggestion, our request, is that the government look at providing a subsidy of between \$400 and \$450 a day to coach operators to help them reduce the cost of a coach.

We feel that we're going to have to probably reduce our prices by 25% or so because of market factors. There's going to be a lot of capacity in the system but not enough demand. We're going to be cutting our rates, that's for sure, but the problem is that there's only so low we can go. We have those fixed costs. We have to cover those. In order to get the price down to the point where a tour operator or a group, a school group, whatever, can afford to rent a coach to get moving again, we're looking for the government to help us subsidize that rate to get it down to a reasonable point where groups can start travelling again.

To put some context around that: In good times, we probably carry over half a million people a month who go to various tourism destinations on coaches. Obviously, as we start up again, that's not going to be the same kind of number, but we still think it's going to be probably—with help from the government, we could be moving about 180,000 to 190,000 people. That's sort of based on 500 coaches doing 15 trips a month, which is far below our capacity, but that's where we think it might get to. Even at half loads, that's 180,000 or 190,000 people that we can take to festivals, to theatres, to restaurants, fall colours trips, all of the myriad things that we connect with. That investment then—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Doug Switzer: —will probably add up to about \$12 million to \$15 million to the coach industry.

That's basically our ask. That's what we're looking to do. We're looking for strategic investments in our industry to help us help the rest of the industry get back on its feet. Thank you very much for the opportunity to address you, and I look forward to your questions.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll move to our next presenter, from UFCW Ontario Provincial Council. If you could please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Tim Deelstra: Hi. I'm Tim Deelstra. I'm a representative with UFCW, Locals 175 and 633, and I'm joined by my colleague Glacier.

Ms. Glacier Effs-Samuel: Hi. My name is Glacier Effs-Samuel. I'm the recorder and union representative for UFCW Local 1006A. UFCW Canada Ontario Provincial Council represents over 130,000 members from eight local unions in a variety of industries across the province of Ontario.

I'd like to thank the committee for making the time to hear from workers who are affected by the pandemic. Many of our members have been on the front lines during this pandemic, and we're proud of the exceptional job they have done to take care of Ontario families. Today, I'd like to inform the committee of the impact COVID-19 has had on our members in the restaurant and foodservice, airport, hotel and car rental sectors. The thousands of workers we represent in these sectors have experienced widespread layoffs and reductions in hours, which have devastated their livelihoods.

Within the hotel sector, 80% to 90% of our members have been laid off as hotel stays have collapsed, resulting in many hotels closing. Within the restaurant sector, 65% of our members have been laid off as locations shut down or run skeleton crews for takeout and delivery services. At Toronto Pearson airport, more than 90% of our members working in the foodservice sector have been laid off. Our members working in car rental agencies have seen business drop off by 80% to 90%. To illustrate the stark drop-off in business, our employers are currently renting 100 vehicles a week compared to 900 rentals per day prior to the pandemic.

I'm a union representative, which means my job is to assist the members in our workplace with their workplace issues. Every day I hear from members who are facing financial difficulty, wondering if their jobs will return. Workers are fearful to go back to work without robust systems and procedures in place to ensure their safety.

A lot of our workers, unfortunately, have two jobs. For some, they've been laid off of both jobs. Yes, they're collecting the benefit of CERB and so on, but it's not enough. I had one member who was laid off from the airport. She got a second job with Foodora to do food delivery; then Foodora closed down. The CERB money, the benefits the government gives, is not enough for a lot of people.

A lot of people worry if their jobs are ever going to come back. This is the only thing they've done. Some of our members in this sector have worked in hospitality and restaurant services for 20, 30 or 40 years. They don't even know how to do anything else. They're terrified that they may never be able to get back to where they were prior to the pandemic.

As the economy reopens, it is vital for the government to take concrete steps to ensure the physical, mental and

economic security of workers in these industries. Decision-makers must take into account the reality that it may take years for these sectors to return to their pre-pandemic levels, including profit, customer and employment levels. The reopening must be done by taking into account the health and safety of workers, restoring consumer confidence, and that retraining programs and opportunities are created for workers to transition into a post-pandemic economy.

We believe that the government has the opportunity to support and protect tourism workers on three fronts.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Glacier Effs-Samuel: Firstly, protecting the health and safety of workers: The provincial government must ensure increased and easy access to widespread, rapid, reliable and publicly delivered coronavirus testing. Efficient and timely contact tracing must be available to the province to help protect the health and safety of workers and the public by preventing the spread of COVID-19.

Establishment and implementation of government-required safety protocols for workers upon their return to ensure a long-lasting recovery is not derailed by a subsequent wave of the virus: This includes mandatory personal protective equipment for workers at restaurants, hotels and the airport as needed, including masks and enhanced infection controls, which could include physical distancing and frequent sanitation cleaning protocols.

Presumptive applications of WSIB coverage for those exposed to COVID-19 at work: This will ensure workers have confidence they won't lose their income if they contract COVID-19 on the job and won't rush back to work before they're healthy.

Provide 10 permanent sick days to workers so no worker has to choose between their health and their livelihood: This will also help flatten the curve, as workers will be less likely to come in sick and transmit the virus to co-workers and customers. Shamefully, the workers in this province are provided zero paid sick days in employment standards. Workers don't just get sick during a pandemic.

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The second recommendation is restoring consumer confidence to ensure a strong economic revival. Consumer confidence goes hand in hand with a strong economic recovery.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Glacier Effs-Samuel: Reducing the transmission of COVID-19, instituting strong health and safety protocols, and establishing widespread testing and timely contact tracing will help consumers gain confidence to participate in the economy broadly, and in tourism specifically. The Ontario government should develop conditional economic support programs for tourism industries, which have been negatively impacted, with assurances that these supports will help employers keep workers on the job; explore funding for tourism promotion programs to attract consumers to the hospitality and tourist sector; and lastly, recognize the long-lasting impact COVID-19 has on the tourism and hospitality sector. This sector will unlikely rebuild quickly. Create union-led programs to

help Ontario work to re-enter the economy: We are experts in worker training. We're the best to help—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. That concludes our time.

All right. We'll start the first round of questions with the official opposition. We'll start with MPP Glover, and then MPP Miller.

Mr. Chris Glover: Thank you, Glacier, Tim, Doug and Lea. Thank you all for coming. Your presentations provide us with some really valuable insights into the industry, into the impact on workers and the impact on the investors and the impact on the industry.

I want to talk about—actually, I'm going to direct my question to Lea. I'll ask a two-part question. I know there are 17 million visitors to the Toronto waterfront every year, and the Redpath Waterfront Festival is a part of that. The Honda Indy, Caribana, the tall ships: All these different festivals attract people. Do you know what the economic spinoff is of those festivals? I'm raising that question because you also mentioned that some festivals may not survive if they don't get the supports that they need.

That leads to my second question: What is it that the industry needs? We need the festivals to survive through the pandemic, and we need to know what you need in order to ramp back up when the pandemic is at a point where we can open up our festivals again.

Ms. Lea Parrell: Thank you so much for that. The economic impact of our specific festivals range between \$5 million and \$7.9 million. Obviously, the year that we had the world's largest rubber duck, it was way above that, but that was a unique situation. So it is very important.

There are two major issues I see in this industry, festival and events, going back into the business. One of the major issues is that we don't know what the rules and regulations are going to be. What will the new norm look like? When will we be informed of that? What we will eventually require is clear communication on what the new requirements and restrictions will entail. For example, what will the new city parks permit process look like? What will the capacity of the parks be, and how will we be expected to control the crowds? Will we now be required to fence an entire park, where previously we were not allowed to? What will the restrictions of producing an event on private property be? Will they be the same restrictions as in a city park?

Of course, we totally understand that the government is doing everything they can do to figure this out, but it truly makes planning an event—perhaps in the fall or even early next year—very difficult. So it's clear communication of what the new norm is going to look like and the rules and regulations so that we can figure out, as I said in my presentation, the increased expenses that we're going to have to have.

Another major concern is what the future government funding from all levels of government might look like. As I explained in my presentation, we greatly appreciate how all governments are currently trying to assist our sector. However, for us to get back to a \$36-billion economic

industry, we're going to need as much financial help from all levels of government as we can possibly get.

Mr. Chris Glover: Thank you very much. I'll defer to one of my colleagues.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Okay. MPP Miller?

Mr. Paul Miller: Hi, good afternoon. Hello, Tim and Glacier. My question is to the UFCW. I spoke to the representatives from the OFL—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Paul Miller: Sorry?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Paul Miller: I spoke to the representatives from the OFL regarding standardized protocols for occupational health and safety in workplaces as we reopen. The discussion focused primarily on who should be responsible for establishing best practices for those working in the tourism and hospitality, sports and arts areas.

After 30-plus years in the steel industry, with many years serving as a health and safety rep and union steward, I'm well aware of industry standards. In fact, when the government of Ontario began piloting the Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System, known as WHMIS, I was expected to enforce these standards to protect my co-workers.

Workers in heavy industry are used to being trained on hazardous materials and dangerous work and environments, while those in the tourism industry may not be as familiar with these processes. COVID-19 has changed the level of threat in the workplace, and I wonder what the UFCW would say to a proposal for a WHMIS-type approach to new safety protocols. A new standardized model by the Ministry of Labour, created with feedback from stakeholders like yourselves, could be a smart way to go forward. Do you agree?

Mr. Tim Deelstra: Thank you for the question, MPP Miller. As a union, we're solutions-focused. We want to see people do the best that they possibly can at all times. Particularly now, when we have this serious health risk with this pandemic going across, we would want to see something that's done in order to address those kinds of concerns.

We do believe that the government has a strong role to play here as we look at dealing with this situation on a go-forward basis. It seems to be changing every single day in terms of some of the advice we get from public health, so having some guidance from the government to employers that they and the employees and our union members can follow I think is important. Making sure it's standardized so everybody is working with the same rules I agree is important.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Tim Deelstra: And involving us as representatives of the workers and other worker groups in order to have input into what those standards should be and then how to implement them I also think is important.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Further questions? Can you unmute yourself? We can't hear you. Mr. Miller?

Mr. Paul Miller: Hello?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Yes, we can hear you.

Mr. Paul Miller: Thanks, Tim, for that response. I hope that the idea of expanding on the labour board, the ministry, for WHMIS would be a good approach. I think that was the leading program way back in the 1970s, and I think to introduce that as part of an existing legislation would certainly be beneficial. Do you agree?

Mr. Tim Deelstra: Yes, thank you. I agree that looking at any model is a good idea, and pre-existing models that have worked are also a good idea. Again—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We have to move to the independent members now. Who wants to go first? MPP Schreiner.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Thank you to all three groups who have presented. I want to start with a question to Glacier or Tim. You talked a lot about the importance of workplace safety. I absolutely agree that if we're going to have consumer confidence in reopening the economy—and I realize a lot of your members are laid off right now or not working because of the pandemic. But I'm wondering: For those who are still working, are their employers able to access proper PPE and other public health measures to keep them safe at work right now, or are they struggling with accessing those items?

Mr. Tim Deelstra: Yes, thank you for the question. We do represent a significant amount of workers in the province who have continued to work all the way through this. We represent the majority of the unionized grocery workers in the province, the meat-packing industry and a significant amount of workers in health care as well, between long-term care and retirement.

We have seen some challenges in terms of being able to access PPE. I think we've all heard about some of those challenges in the long-term-care sector and in retirement homes, and we have seen some of those challenges also in the meat-packing industry and the grocery industry.

We've very focused on trying to find some solutions for all of this. We've worked well with our employer groups to try to implement safety features to keep our members safe and also to keep the public safe where they may be accessing worksites like grocery stores. We're looking for any solution we can get.

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This is why we think doing some more pre-emptive COVID-19 testing in workplaces is very important. We would like to work with the government more closely on this. We understand that there are some programs that have been rolled out and there has been some pre-emptive testing that has started to go beyond long-term care into grocery, retail and other settings, but we would like to be more involved with the details on that so we could keep people safe.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: It's interesting that you say that. I was just meeting with Dr. Williams prior to coming back on to committee. I think an important part of workplace testing is to ensure that workers are actually involved in the planning process to ensure privacy protection, to

ensure that it's supported widely within the workplace, but also to ensure—the testing isn't effective if you don't have good workplace safety, because somebody could test fine and then go into the workplace.

I'm just curious if you've had a chance, with some of the employers, to work through some of those challenges. I think if we could do that with those industries that are open, it will help inform reopening for the tourism businesses that are closed right now.

Mr. Tim Deelstra: We have worked very closely with all our employer partners to put safety measures in place, to look at it. We have been watching very closely what has been going on in other jurisdictions in Canada, the United States and all over the world, to see what best practices have been rolled out as people have been working with this situation in advance of Canada and since.

So, yes, we work very closely on that, and we think that health and safety is a key measure. If we are going to reopen—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Tim Deelstra: I think we all know that this virus isn't going away any time soon. It's going to take years before there's a vaccine available. So if we are going to gradually reopen the economy now with the threat of this virus going, it's absolutely paramount for all of us—worker or non-worker, consumer or whomever—that we focus on health and safety, to keep people safe and secure, and that we do things like testing in order to understand where it goes. That should be done through the public system so we can have confidence in it and we can know that it's being dealt with appropriately and privately too.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate your focus on that. I hope that the government works with you on that, because I think it's going to be critically important.

I just want to ask Lea a quick question. Toronto closed the lakeshore down for people to cycle and walk on the weekends, trying to open up more public space. If we could figure out some ways to open more public space for people, could we physically distance and maybe reintroduce some waterfront events and festivals?

Ms. Lea Parrell: Thank you for the question.

Absolutely. We've actually been starting to think in that way. My personal company is a marketing company, and we're involved with an event that's going to take place in Bloor-Yorkville in August. Everybody might say, "You're out of your mind." However, it's going to be throughout the entire area, and we're promoting it as a social distancing floral trail. Beautiful floral mannequins are going to be spread throughout the entire Bloor-Yorkville area so that people, at their own time and their leisure, can walk from one to the other. So there will not be a mass gathering in a park.

What we are doing with regard to the waterfront is, we're looking towards next year—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Lea Parrell: —and saying, "How can we create a calendar of smaller events that aren't just in one park, so that they're spread out throughout the area?" The challenge with that is, we will have to work with the city, because we wouldn't be able to afford to have multiple

park permits. Is there a way in which that could be waived or released so that we could actually have an activation in one park and another activation in another park, so that people have to travel the two kilometres of the waterfront, as opposed to putting a massive amount of people in one park?

So, yes, that's what we're considering.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I really appreciate the creative use of space, and if we can reclaim more space for people to do some creative events like this, I'm all for it. I appreciate your creativity in that regard.

I think I'm probably out of time.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll go to the government side now. I'll start with MPP Smith.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you very much. I'm going to pose two questions to Lea first. The first one is, you said that you need more advance notice about things opening up. A quick comment on it: Just because we say that you can open doesn't mean that you have to open. You should take the decision on when it is safe for you to open.

From that, how much advance notice are you looking for?

Ms. Lea Parrell: To produce an actual event, the minimum time frame is three months, to be able to do it justice and all the logistics of the operations and the marketing. We're trying to reconfigure what the 10th anniversary of the Redpath Waterfront Festival might look like if we did something in the fall.

But I agree with you: We as an organization—specifically, Water's Edge Festivals and Events and the boards—have made a decision that we will not put an event on if we think that it is unsafe to do so. So, instead of an event, what might it look like? If online and virtual doesn't work for us, then is it an installation that's going to be on the waterfront for a month, so that it's not like you have to go down within a period of three days? We do something just to celebrate the 10th anniversary and to get people to come back to the waterfront but at the same time it's not a confined period of time that people have to come and see this. We're looking at doing that.

But large-scale events—we have the Tall Ships, and when we do the Tall Ships Challenge events that's a three-year process, getting ready for an event like that. Then, last year, with it being a pan-provincial event, where it was the Tall Ships Challenge Ontario, that was at least three years that we worked on that event.

It's very difficult to do an event in two weeks, but we have to be safe. We understand that, but as I said previously, we're trying to figure out how we can do things differently.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you. I'm going to take that as a compliment to me, because I did Hockey Day in Canada in 26 days. It was awarded on January 9 and we did it on February 3.

My next question for you, though, is, you said you wanted to know what the new norm is going to look like. This is your opportunity to have influence on what the new norm should be. I know that when Mr. Schreiner asked you a question about different events, you mentioned

having it span across two different park facilities. Are there other things, then, that you would recommend that we could put together as the new norm?

Ms. Lea Parrell: Yes, I think that's a very strong and important and safe direction to go—to spread out events. The challenge is that your expenses are increased because you have to have the infrastructure and multiple locations.

In an area like Bloor-Yorkville, there are no issues, because the infrastructure, the facilities, are all there. The sanitation for the buildings where the mannequins will be is all there. On the waterfront, it's not the same case. We have to put in the fencing and the porta-potties and the power. There are multiple things, so if we have to do that in multiple locations, you've just now dramatically increased your expenses.

We've got to figure out how we can do that and utilize the locations—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Lea Parrell:—and the venues that are already on the waterfront where we don't have to do that and also get some lenience with regard to park permits, so that, if we're trying to spread it out, we don't have to get five park permits from the city. That would be definitely a help as well.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you very much for that. I'm going to turn it over to my colleague MPP Crawford.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you very much, MPP and Chair, and again, thank you to all the folks who are representing today. We are listening intently to everyone and I'm definitely making a lot of notes on good ideas.

With that, I do have a question for Mr. Switzer: Our government has been very committed to getting the Ontario economy back on track, even prior to COVID. We have created almost 300,000 jobs in two years. Unfortunately, this pandemic has thrown a bit of a curveball in that, but we want to get back on track. We want to get back in business. We want to see everyone enjoying the festivals and creating jobs and getting Ontario back to where it should be.

I know you did raise two points in terms of two subsidies you'd like to see from the government, but I have two questions. Number one: We've had some people come on here and suggest a tax credit for travel, to get travel moving again, be it air travel, coach travel, train travel. Is that something you see as an option? That's number one.

Number two: Are there any other obstacles or, perhaps, pieces of red tape that cost the government nothing but may hinder your business and your industry that you think can help you?

1340

Mr. Doug Switzer: The idea of a travel credit certainly makes some sense. The question is: Which is easiest to administer and what's the best and most strategic way to inject money into the industry to get it going? But a travel credit certainly isn't something we'd be opposed to.

The second question about red tape: That's one of the questions I've asked my members a lot, and I've got to be honest, we don't have a lot of red tape issues. You start with your red tape issue, but I just want to echo something that was said earlier about how we all want some certainty

about what the new world looks like and what is safe and what is not safe. I think our biggest regulatory problem right now is trying to determine exactly what are the appropriate rules for travelling on a coach, for being in a public space. What does social distancing look like? Should masks be required? That sort of thing. But no, unfortunately, I don't have a free answer in terms of a regulatory fix that would help our problems.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Just on that, then, I'm just curious: What are your thoughts on masks? Do you think they should be mandatory for travellers? I know we just have a few seconds left. I'd like your perspective on that.

Mr. Doug Switzer: Very quickly, obviously we very much support the use of masks. I think one of the questions, and I think the government is dealing with it too, is the idea of a regional approach to this. So perhaps masks should be mandatory in Toronto but not necessarily in Thunder Bay—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off.

We'll move to the second round of questions now. I'll start with the independent members. Who wants to go first? MPP Blais.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Thank you, everyone, for your presentations this afternoon.

I think it was Glacier who mentioned—I believe it was Glacier; it was certainly one of the UFCW members who was discussing the lack of paid sick leave and the impact that that has had on the membership and the ability to keep employees. I'm wondering if you could expand upon that a little bit and discuss maybe some particular impacts that that's had.

Ms. Glacier Effs-Samuel: In some of our contracts, obviously, we do have language for sick days. But in terms of the ESA, we believe that for a lot of our workers, they can't afford to stay off sick. They can't afford to miss a day's pay or two days' pay. Unfortunately, because of that, some people will have symptoms and want to go into work because they can't afford it.

What we're saying is: Listen, we know people get sick—regardless of COVID, regardless of the pandemic. It's a natural part of the human existence. We think that that should be mandatory, 10 paid sick days, especially in light of what's going on right now, so that people don't have to worry about their paycheque and paying their rent or paying their light bill. If they're sick, they can stay home, get well, get better and they don't come into the workplace and infect their fellow co-workers. Right?

That's basically the idea. We've always advocated for this. Unions have always advocated for paid sick days. We just think that in light of everything that's happening now, it should be, honestly, a no-brainer.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Thank you. In terms of some of the aspects of returning to work, when we eventually get to that point, what kind of health and safety protocols do you think are most important to put in place to ensure that your members have the confidence to return to work and to do so safely?

Ms. Glacier Effs-Samuel: For some of the locations that are closed right now—I'll pick one. Let's just say the airport, for example. I think for that, what we're advocating is for mandatory testing—not just for people to get tested because they're sick. Everyone needs to be tested, and the tests need to be developed in a way that they can get results faster.

There are a lot of people who are asymptomatic. They're going into their workplaces, and they don't have any symptoms. They feel okay, but they're sick. So we're advocating for mandatory testing throughout, because we feel that would help. At least if people know they're ill, they can stay home. If there are paid sick days involved, they don't have to worry about their income and they won't risk getting the public, their co-workers and anyone else infected.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Is the lack of testing or a gap in this kind of requirement, do you think that will lead to more people choosing not to return to work because they don't feel safe? How do you think that will roll out?

Ms. Glacier Effs-Samuel: Yes, I think that definitely makes people a lot more hesitant to want to return to work, especially in this sector, because they are dealing with the public on such a vast scale. Not knowing if the person beside you has it or not, not knowing if the customer who comes into your restaurant has it or not does make people apprehensive, and their anxieties are heightened about going back to work.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Glacier Effs-Samuel: A lot of people don't want to go back because they also have underlying health conditions and pre-existing conditions, and are worried that they're going to get somehow infected, because who knows if the person beside them is sick or not? So yes, it does play a big part.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Thank you. I appreciate that. I'm wondering what kind of feedback you receive from your members about the types of public health information that they're receiving and whether they feel it's valuable and consistent, and how the dissemination of that kind of information can be improved.

Ms. Glacier Effs-Samuel: People watch the news and they get the public health information, and I think most people are receiving it. I just think that for the members, our members, they want to see the testing ramped up. We all know that Ontario, along with Quebec, has the highest amount, the highest counts in the country, and Ontario has never been able to get to where they need to get to in terms of testing levels. The goal was to have 20,000 tests done a day. That has never happened.

I think people are aware of what they need to do health-wise: the physical distancing, wearing the mask, washing your hands. They understand that, but the testing is not being done enough. The results are showing that people are not being tested. We're not sure what the complete reason is, but I think that if we find some way to get more and more people tested faster, quicker, easier, then that will ease our members.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Thank you very much. And Mr. Deelstra, if you have anything to add, please go ahead.

Mr. Tim Deelstra: Just to expand on that point, too, about our members getting information: One of the things that we would like to have more of from the government is more consultations about guidelines for workplace reopenings. There have been a number of guidelines that have been issued, and not too many unions or work organizations have had any input into those guidelines. We certainly think that's important, as the people who have a direct relationship with our members and deal with the employer on their behalf. Having more input into that would be very valuable. It would go a long way to making sure people know what they should know in order to be safe in the workplace.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Wonderful. Thank you very much.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. We'll move to the government side next, and I'll start with MPP Rasheed.

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Thank you so much, Chair, and thank you to all of the presenters this afternoon. My question is to Doug. Yesterday I asked a similar question to one of the airline organizations that presented. My question to them was what precautionary measures they were taking. Now, in this case, it's what your organization or the companies who are running the coaches will be taking in order to make your guests feel safe and know that you, as an organization, are providing them the best service possible, especially during COVID and post-COVID.

Mr. Doug Switzer: Thank you very much for the question. It's a great question, because I was asking for economic support. We fully appreciate that it doesn't matter whether we get any help from the government or not; if people don't feel comfortable, they're not going to travel, so we really appreciate that we have to make people feel comfortable being on a coach.

We have published a standard. Our time is limited, so I'll just kind of touch on the highlights. We're cleaning the buses, disinfecting them on a daily basis. We're encouraging the use of face masks. We are providing protection for the drivers so that they feel safe operating on the coaches, and providing social distancing. Basically, that means half-loads, so that people are spread out within the coach. They're not sitting next to each other. In essence, those are the key cornerstones: daily disinfecting and practising good social distancing.

1350

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Awesome. Just before I go to my colleague MPP Skelly for her question, I know MPP Crawford asked you a question and I completely missed it. Do you want to finish his question?

Mr. Doug Switzer: Sorry, which question was that?

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Okay. I guess we can just move to MPP Skelly.

Mr. Doug Switzer: Thank you for the opportunity, though.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): All right. We'll go to MPP Skelly next.

Ms. Donna Skelly: My question is the union members. We were talking about I think it was Glacier, and you mentioned talking about tests. One of our biggest problems right now is getting people to go out and get tested, and that's why the Premier has been working with larger organizations, hoping that they'll test their workers, encouraging all sectors to get their employees tested. Have you asked the union members to get tested? Because, as you said, we're trying to meet a minimum threshold and we really have to encourage people in large groups to take advantage of this testing.

Mr. Tim Deelstra: Yes. Thank you for the question. We are certainly encouraging our members to take part in the testing. We do think that it is a key thing to keeping them healthy and safe, and we're starting to see that approach work in the long-term-care industry. I know that the ministry has put out guidelines for this month that all employees are to be tested at least twice.

That kind of framework should be expanded to other industries as well so that there's some very clear guidance for all parties about how testing can work and where it can happen. We certainly also think that having it come to the workplace as much as possible is the best way to do that; that's where the majority of employees are. It's a better system to do that. We saw an example of that in Quebec, for instance, where one of our sister locals there had an outbreak at a Cargill plant, and then Quebec public health came to the plant to offer public testing for all of the workers who were there. That's a model that we think would be very good for the province to explore.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Have you reached out, Tim, to any of the—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Donna Skelly: —public health departments to see if you could coordinate a mobile unit to test your members?

Mr. Tim Deelstra: We've had dialogue with some of the public health units. We've also tried having dialogue with various ministries, as I understand multiple ministries regulate different sectors of the workplaces in Ontario. I will say that I don't think that we've had a lot of success in connecting with these things. We hear a lot that connections are being made directly with the employer.

Again, as a group whose job it is to represent the interest of employees, we think we're a very valuable stakeholder, and we would very much like to speak to the government about this and work to find practical solutions to provide security for people.

Ms. Donna Skelly: I think this is something that we should be able to work together towards. Mr. Chair, how much time do we have left?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Two minutes—a minute and a half, actually.

Ms. Donna Skelly: To Lea and Doug: Perhaps you could just answer this really quickly. We've heard concerns from union member representatives suggesting that their own members are concerned about working. Do you feel confident that your sectors can provide the necessary safety measures to ensure that people can come back to work and work safely? Either one of you can jump in. Lea,

do you want to try? Or Doug? You'll have to unmute yourselves.

Ms. Lea Parrell: I think we have to. There is no other option. We have to make sure that—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Lea Parrell:—our employees are going to be safe coming back to be able to produce these events, but also the attendees that come to the event. There's no option. We have to do that. I think, yes, you're right: Absolutely, we have to do that. We have to feel comfortable, and if we're not comfortable, then we don't do it.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Any further comments, MPP Skelly?

Ms. Donna Skelly: Yes. Doug, I just wondered if you could maybe comment as well. You'll have to unmute yourself.

Mr. Doug Switzer: Absolutely. One of the challenges that we have is, of course, not only encouraging people to get back on the buses, but we need our drivers and our employees to come back to work, and they're not going to do that unless they feel safe. As Lea said, we have to do it. It's not a question of, "Can you?"; we have to.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off. We are out of time now.

Before I go to the opposition for their time, I recognize MPP Gates. If you could please confirm your attendance and what part of Ontario you are calling from.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'm calling from Niagara Falls.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you, sir.

We'll start with MPP Lindo from the opposition.

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): I apologize. Mr. Vanthof is here as well.

Mr. Vanthof, please confirm your attendance and what part of Ontario you're calling from.

Mr. John Vanthof: I am calling from Temiskaming Shores, Ontario.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll go to MPP Lindo.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: My question is for Doug.

Doug, I was very taken by your discussion about strategic investments, and in particular about support for marketing.

I want you to join me in a little bit of an optimistic experiment. Let us imagine that mandatory testing is in place and that the government, with all of these hearings, from a number of people, understands that in order for us to stimulate the economy we have to make sure that locals and tourists feel safe to participate in all of these types of tourist events and get into the coaches and all of that stuff. What I was hearing yesterday from the chamber of commerce, and also when we were talking to David Peacock—he brought this up as well—they said that businesses are still struggling with liquidity. Once the government makes a plan of how they're going to tell people it's safe to come out, there are still questions about whether or not people will feel safe coming out, and so part of your marketing strategy has to now include that, and that's where David Peacock was telling us that we need to invest in digital excellence. I'm wondering if, with that as the backdrop,

you can talk to all of us on this committee about why that marketing investment is so critically important to stimulate the economy.

Mr. Doug Switzer: Absolutely. As I said, without the marketing, we can't convince people to go back to traveling. I think people are going to want to go. Part of the marketing pitch, for sure, that we've talked about is not just "Let's go see Niagara Falls"—but part of the re-vamping of their marketing strategy has to be, "You can do this safely. Here are all the protocols that we're following." I think half of the marketing efforts will be promoting all of the things that not only we are doing—because, remember, we're a connector to everything. So we need to be able to convince people that the hotels are following protocols, that the restaurants are following protocols, that parents can feel safe letting their kids go on a school trip because of all the things we're doing. I suspect that half of the marketing money will go just to that one point—that it's okay to take a trip this fall, get on a bus, go to Muskoka or Niagara Falls or Kingston or wherever, because it's safe to do so.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Over to MPP Shaw.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Shaw.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: My question is directed to the UFCW representatives. My question would be twofold.

I think that in this province we need to understand a little bit more about your members. We see that this pandemic is impacting workers differently. Women, racialized communities, part-time workers, and front-line service workers are being harder hit by this than some of the other workers in the province—so if you could, one, maybe describe a little bit of your membership.

The second part is—and take as much time as you want to answer this—MPP Skelly brought up the idea that your workers need to go get tested. Absolutely, I think that we need to make sure, as everyone said, that workers feel safe before they can come back to work. But what I heard Mr. Deelstra describe was a situation where there's no clear messaging as to: Is the testing available? Who is doing the testing? I think we've seen that in long-term-care centres we've just got testing to where it should be. We haven't started in congregate living. So we're a long way off—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Sandy Shaw:—your members need to go. Can you please describe for us your success in trying to get your members tested?

Mr. Tim Deelstra: Thank you for the questions.

I can comment on the testing situation. Again, we have a very large membership in this province, who have been working all the way through the entire pandemic. When you look at grocery retail, industrial food processing, and particularly meat processing, and then also the long-term-care and retirement industry, we've had people who have been on the front lines of this situation all the way through. I think it was fairly clear quickly that in long-term care, as outbreaks started happening, testing was a good idea. We were, I will say, slightly frustrated that it seemed to take longer than we would have liked in order to see a regime of testing show up for that.

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I will say that we have similar frustrations when it comes to our other settings, particularly where you have large groups of workers, like at industrial meat plants, who end up in fairly close proximity. We have worked very well with the employer groups to put safety measures in place as much as possible throughout these facilities, but we do think that a regime of testing is something that has to happen in order to do that.

In the cases of where the public is going to access, both in grocery retail now and then, hopefully, for those in the tourism industry as we reopen things, you also need this in order to provide some consumer confidence as well, that people know that they can go and access these things and limit their opportunities to be infected.

I'm encouraged by some of the comments I've heard, and I appreciate MPP Skelly's comments as well. We will definitely continue to try to reach out to the government, and we would like some support in doing that so that we can be as clear as possible to keep as many Ontarians as safe as possible all the way around.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Tim Deelstra: Perhaps Glacier can speak to our membership.

Ms. Glacier Effs-Samuel: Yes. I wouldn't say the majority, but a lot of our members who work in the restaurant and hospitality sector, demographically speaking, are women, and are the ones being affected by the layoffs and by what's happening right now. We have a lot of single mothers as well. We don't want this group, who already don't necessarily get paid large incomes, to get even more marginalized in terms of society, right? A lot of the women who do work in these sectors—this is what they've done all their life. Some are immigrants from other countries, and from coming into Canada, this is the type of work they've worked in for 10, 20 or 30 years. They don't know how to do anything else. They've never worked in any other industry. So it's very important for us to figure out—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off. That concludes our time.

Thank you to all three presenters for your time and your presentation. Thank you so much.

Before we move along to our next presenter, I would also like to recognize MPP Oosterhoff, if you could please confirm your attendance and what part of Ontario you're calling from.

Can you unmute yourself?

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Thank you. Yes, I'm here, and I'm calling from Niagara West—Smithville, today.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you.

MR. DAN BUTKOVICH
NATURE AND OUTDOOR TOURISM
ONTARIO
FALLSVIEW GROUP

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We'll move to our next presenter, Dan Butkovich. If you could please state

your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Dan Butkovich: Honourable Chairperson and honourable members of the committee, my name is Dan Butkovich. I, along with my wife and kids, own and operate the Dwight Riverside Inn in Dwight Ontario, a business incorporated in the province of Ontario. While I've been selected to present as an individual, it is not possible to describe the impact that the pandemic has had on me without including the details about how my business has also been impacted.

As a small, family-run tourism business, we have been decimated by the pandemic. Ninety-eight per cent of our advance reservations were cancelled as a result of local and international governments announcing restrictions on travel and social distancing. These reservations have not returned. To date, we have not qualified for any government business assistance programs and are relying on our individual CERB payments to keep food on our table and our business open.

While we are both an employer as well as employees, we are currently part of a large group of Ontarians being left out in the cold. Other than how we choose to pay ourselves—we pay non-recurring dividends at the end of the year—we pay into the same provincial tax pool as every other business.

According to the Invest in Ontario website statistics from 2016, the latest on offer, tourism spending was valued at \$34 billion. There were 190,000 tourism-related businesses in operation in Ontario, employing 390,000 people, making it the 12th-largest employer in the province at that time. Tourism contributes more than \$5 billion annually in tax revenues for the provincial government, meaning that the total economic contribution of tourism is larger than agriculture, forestry and mining combined.

It is of great concern to me that one of the province's main economic generators is still being restricted while industries which may have more employees but are of lesser immediate value and have a greater potential to spread infection are being opened up.

It is our preference to be part of the economic recovery of the province rather than to ask for grants or other assistance. But until our only remaining customer, the population of Ontario, is allowed to travel, we will continue to suffer. I would encourage the government of Ontario to allow its population to travel freely within the province and to encourage those in urban centres, where population densities make it impossible for many to enjoy any form of nature, to get out of the cities and head north.

With 12 rooms and 12 acres of property, there's more than enough room on our—and lots of other—properties in our area of Muskoka to handle large crowds and ensure that social distancing is maintained and that our population is kept safe. With proper education and continued messaging around how to stay safe, there is no reason why Ontario's tourism sector cannot be allowed to open, or at the very least allowed to open in areas where transmission is low.

Now, as an individual, of course, the economic impact has been great. But if our businesses are allowed to operate

as normally as possible, we should be able to make it through. We don't want to think about what would happen if the province was forced to lock down again. That would be the death knell for many, many, many businesses, including my own.

Our six-year-old daughter is out of grade 1 and currently has only two 30-minute sessions a week with her teacher. These are fun sessions only, which are good to have but do not allow for her proper development or for the continuation of her education. I am requesting for the government of Ontario to ensure that our kids are given the tools to succeed, no matter what the circumstances. Funding for those without connectivity at home is essential. Many of my daughter's peers have no computers at home, let alone connections to the Internet. This needs solving.

We would also ask that the government do more for the communities where transmission is not an issue. I am speaking about allowing for day camps and summer programs to be allowed to continue. This is extremely important in rural settings, where often both parents work and there are limited daycare programs on offer, outside of school programs.

Finally, we are also being overwhelmed by increases to our insurance policies and banking. Even though with restricted travel and social distancing the risk of using our insurance has been greatly reduced, our premiums went up by 10% this year, and we were given no other option other than to accept this increase or do away with the insurance with that company. This is not a possibility for us, as the four or five companies I've contacted are not accepting any new business clients at this point. We would ask that the government do more to ensure that insurance companies are doing more to help Ontarians and are not profiting from this catastrophe, the way that the banks have shown to have done. We are still confused about how something like COVID is not covered under our impact-to-business coverage, for which we pay premiums.

While there is a lot more that I could share and a lot more information that would be pertinent to this, I do appreciate that my time is limited. I appreciate the committee's time in allowing me to speak today.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. We'll move to our next presenter, from Nature and Outdoor Tourism Ontario. If you could please state your name for the record, you will have seven minutes.

Ms. Laurie Marcil: Hi. My name is Laurie Marcil. I'm the executive director of Nature and Outdoor Tourism Toronto, lovingly known as NOTO.

NOTO represents the resource-based tourism industry. The industry is made up of over 1,300 lodges, resorts, campgrounds, cottage rentals and outpost camps across Ontario, with over 60% of these businesses located in northern Ontario.

These businesses cater to avid anglers and hunters as well as other outdoor enthusiasts and vacationers. In northern Ontario, these seasonal businesses and their guests contribute over \$400 million in GDP annually—

quite a contribution for seasonal businesses to generate over a four-to-five-month operating season.

1410

As you have heard so far in presentations made before you, the impacts to tourism are severe. The impacts to the resource-based tourism sector are devastating. With the 2020 marketing season cut short and no means to generate revenues, seasonal tourism businesses are being stretched to cover fixed costs like mortgages, commercial aircraft, property and liability insurance, equipment leases and crown resource fees, and to maintain staff and simply stay afloat. The uncertainty of whether they will have spring, summer or fall seasons has made it near impossible to plan or pivot for these small businesses.

Cancellations from US guests beginning with those booked for the spring bear hunt have been numerous, and tourism operators are finding it challenging to negotiate postponing trips versus cancelling and providing refunds. In early surveys, bear outfitters reported that if the US borders remain closed and a spring hunt was not able to take place, they would lose, collectively, \$7 million. The spring bear hunt season is May 1 to June 15, and these losses are now an unfortunate reality.

A second recent study through NOTO revealed that resource-based tourism businesses will lose \$300 million if May and June operating months are not able to take place. Those numbers reflect the inability to keep their US guests, so this number will remain close even with a reopening to a domestic market.

As you move from northeast to northwest in Ontario, the percentage of US guests grows from 50% to 100%. For many operators in the northwest particularly, it will be challenging for them to pivot their marketing and business models to target the domestic market. They will need support to do this. Some 15% to 20% of businesses in this sector are owned by Americans, who are still unable to enter Canada. These businesses contribute significantly to our economy and employ many Canadians each year. They are being put at a significant disadvantage and are feeling as though they are being discriminated against. Help from the provincial government to advocate the importance of their re-entry is critical.

The financial burden due to COVID on the resource-based tourism industry is truly devastating. Many small businesses in this sector are not eligible for the financial support offered by the federal government, as Dan has mentioned. They are forced to seek additional loans, which leaves their ability to recover from COVID on shaky ground.

This critical industry to Ontario's economy needs government financial assistance regardless of whether we open these businesses today or not. So much financial damage has already been done and many small businesses are facing serious damage and liquidity issues.

Over 60% of these businesses have indicated they may face permanent closure without support. It has been made abundantly clear that deferrals and loans are not the answer. We must help these dedicated small business owners to remain financially viable over the coming

months and year to ensure that they are here to help our economy recover.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Laurie Marcil: We know that, immediately, northern Ontario as a vacation destination will be top of mind for many as travel resumes in the province. However, the industry will still face numerous challenges. The added cost to implement enhanced health and safety protocols will force businesses to reduce services like providing all-inclusive packages, but will still require more staff. It may require facilities to open at half capacity, whether the demand is there from the domestic market or not.

While we are pleased that the opportunity to host vacationers within the domestic market is now available, their trips will not fill the massive gap that is left by the US market. The price points for domestic travel are half that of non-resident travellers.

Some immediate relief that the province can offer to support the tourism sector are:

—through the MENDM, the Ministry of Energy, Northern Development and Mines, NOHFC programs that provide much-needed assistance to cover fixed costs, marketing, enhanced protocols as a result of COVID, modifications to business, infrastructure changes, enhancements to services etc., all in the form of grants or interest-free loans, with longer repayment options;

—through the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, waiving crown resource fees like land use permits, bear management areas and baitfish licences for 2020; modifying regulations around hunting and fishing opportunities to allow extended seasons for 2020; extending licence-free fishing for the whole month of July to encourage domestic experiences; a moratorium on tourism allocation reductions for moose and bear outfitters, allowing non-resident hunting allocations for 2020 to be used to offer these opportunities up to resident hunters; and,

—through the Ministry of Finance, develop a tax credit to small businesses to help the high cost of reopening and recovery from COVID.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Laurie Marcil: Through the Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries, support the existing tourism infrastructure—the RTOs and DMOs—and bring in support for sector organizations that provide additional support for tourism businesses across the province. Another consideration is the reinstatement of a resource-based tourism licence that would be administered through a sector organization that would ensure a running inventory of the actual number, in scope and contribution, of this sector. Government would then have an enhanced knowledge of the sector and have better opportunities to collaborate and consult on policy development that would support economic growth for the province and the industry.

The communities in the north and throughout the province need this sector of the tourism industry to survive and to help rebuild our economy, but we will need to work together to make that happen.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Our next presenter is Fallsview Group.

If you could please state your name for the record. You have seven minutes.

Mr. Anthony Menechella: Hi, my name is Anthony Menechella; I'm the vice-president of Fallsview Group. I'll be sharing my screen to have a brief presentation, and I'll be presenting on how the impact that COVID-19 has affected the tourism industry within Niagara Falls.

Fallsview Group is a family-owned and -operated hospitality company. We operate solely within Niagara Falls, and our portfolio includes five hotels and 12 restaurants, totalling 1,800 hotel rooms. The impact that COVID has had on our revenue, as you can see from the previous two months, April and May—our revenue in comparison to 2019 is down \$15 million. Assuming a 9% occupancy rate and a \$113 ADR, we believe that over the next 12 months rolling our revenue is going to be down 93%, from \$131 million down to \$9.3 million. We believe that that 9% occupancy rate is still optimistic for our market.

Moving on, COVID has also impacted our employment, obviously. We've had to lay off 95% of our workforce. We've moved from upwards of 1,200 employees down to just 75 employees. COVID has also impacted our developments. We were under construction on a new 1,100-room hotel development in downtown Niagara Falls. Due to the decreased projection in future cash flows, we couldn't finance the equity portion of the project. As well, our financing fell through due to the market conditions. It is said that this project was projected to generate up to 1,500 new jobs within Niagara Falls, which is a very detrimental hit.

This is a point I want to reiterate: Basically, hospitality being a high-leverage industry, Fallsview Group has accumulated \$283 million in long-term debt over the years. With no money coming in, we've calculated our burn rate to be around \$3 million, with \$2.1 million of that coming from long-term debt obligations. Over the next 12 months, that totals a \$24-million loss.

Now I want to run through, briefly, the effectiveness of current government programs. On a provincial level, we've benefited from the deferred property tax, which has helped decrease our burn rate. On the federal level, we have engaged in the wage subsidy program. This has been relatively ineffective because, as you've seen, we've laid off 95% of our workforce. We've also benefited from the CEBA program. We were able to obtain \$360,000 from this program, which is very miniscule in comparison to our \$2.1-million monthly debt obligation. Therefore, we're still burning at a tremendous rate. Of the programs that the federal government has utilized to lend money to service debt, we've engaged in the co-lending program. We believe that this has been ineffective because we have not been able to obtain any funds from this program due to the vast amount of regulation that it has. As well, we haven't received an official quote, but the interest rate on the co-lending program seems to be upwards of 6% to 6.5%, which is very ineffective for our industry.

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I just want to keep it brief. Basically, our recommendation says: Through the Ontario Loan Act, the Ministry of Finance can borrow up to \$32.1 billion from the Consolidated Revenue Fund.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Anthony Menechella: What we would recommend is that a portion of this fund be distributed to local financial institutions at a very low interest rate, maybe 1% to 2%. The Ministry of Finance could then put specific mandates on what sectors and what regions these funds can be loaned to, and then these financial institutions, with new government funds, can loan these amounts out at low interest rates, maybe 2% to 3%, to securitize the interest rate. This would ensure that businesses such as tourism basically are sustained through COVID-19.

From our standpoint, we aren't looking at safety programs or marketing plans from the government to help us get back into business. What we really need is financing. We need it at low interest rates, minimum five-year term lengths, and we need it to be easily accessible, with no regulations. Doing so, offering this to local financial institutions, we believe would be the most beneficial way of allowing the tourism industry to finance their debt.

That is all. I'd like to thank you for your time and allowing me to present this.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll go to questions now, and I'll start with the government side. MPP Oosterhoff.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Thank you very much. It's very appreciated. I really think we heard from a huge variety of different sectors that are represented here today and people from, obviously, across the province, but you've been bringing a similar message.

I represent the riding of Niagara West, a beautiful riding, and I know that my colleague from a little farther down in Niagara, Wayne Gates, is here as well. We can testify to the importance of the tourism sector, not just in our area but really across the province. I think that we all know that it's an enormous economic driver. The minister for tourism, culture and sport always speaks about the significant double bottom line: of course, the cultural aspects, but I believe it's \$76 billion in economic activity that has come forward as a result of this, traditionally.

I want to begin by thanking you for the work you've done over the years and ask you what you're hearing from other colleagues as well. First of all, I think there are some really good tangible suggestions there that I want to take back, and perhaps I could ask if Laurie, for example—Laurie, do you have an idea of what other jurisdictions are doing specifically around some of these sorts of needs? Because I think there is a huge potential for us to also work with some of the other actions that are being taken. I agree with much of what you mentioned, but I'm just wondering if you've been able to have conversations within your sector.

Then perhaps the others would like to address that as well, if there are other things that you're thinking, that this provincial government or that state government has done

this and this, and that would be something beneficial. So I'm wondering if you could speak to that.

Ms. Laurie Marcil: Certainly. As an organization, we have actually looked at beyond Ontario. We have looked at the other provincial organizations that are equivalent and how they have been helping out their sector. We have seen them come forward with waiving of crown resource fees to help the outdoor tourism sector.

I think all of us across each sector of tourism are looking for something beyond loans. I think we're all looking for a way forward that is not going to increase the debt, that is going to help us manage that debt, opportunities for growth, opportunities for covering some of the additional costs that are going to come in now due to COVID.

I think across all sectors of tourism and other industries, the debt piece and the deferrals, they're not going to truly help us get through this. We definitely need to get some other kinds of assistance going, as we've mentioned.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Thank you. I don't know if any of the other presenters wanted to speak to that at all? Dan, I think?

Mr. Dan Butkovich: I'll probably copy a lot of what Laurie had to say with regard to not servicing any more debt, not pushing the problem further down the road. We need people, though, to rent our rooms. We need people to walk the trails. We need people to fish the lakes and hunt the lands. We need people.

Barring the ability to fill our rooms and sell those programs, it really leaves few options other than to look for short-term solutions that are going to allow us to survive till what looks like a vaccine. Once people are allowed to travel, then I would say that 90% of our issues are going to start to go away. It won't happen overnight, but at least I'll be able to see my bank account rise again and understand that I have three months of mortgage payments now to get me through the lean months.

Like I said earlier in my presentation, if there's a second wave or another lockdown, I think many of the presenters today aren't going to be able to come back and present on behalf of their industries because they won't exist anymore.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: That's a powerful statement.

Did the Fallsview Group want to jump in?

Mr. Anthony Menechella: Yes, I can speak to that a bit. I agree with the final point that Dan just made. Our current plan of action, obviously, is not sustainable. However, we don't necessarily agree with the idea of increasing the confidence in consumers to get our occupancy rates up. We believe that our occupancy rates aren't going to rise until there's a vaccine or COVID-19 eventually blows over.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Anthony Menechella: So we just want to maintain and sustain until that point in time—we believe that this is through long-term financing at low interest rates—to ensure our survivability.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: You touched on it there, actually, but I'm going to return to a question—I've been having

a conversation with local businesses around tourism. Which would be the most effective, out of payroll relief, promotional assistance or direct assistance—again, recognizing that there are long-term and short-term components to this, and recognizing that there are different challenges in that piece. Government can't fix everything. We don't have a magic wand, unfortunately; I wish we did. Of those three, where would you see the biggest bang for your buck?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Before I move to the opposition, I would like to recognize MPP Sabawy. Please confirm your attendance and what part of Ontario you're calling from.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: This is MPP Sheref Sabawy from Mississauga—Erin Mills.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Also, I'd like to confirm the attendance of MPP Gélinas.

M^{me} France Gélinas: This is France Gélinas, MPP for beautiful Nickel Belt.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Are you calling from Ontario?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Yes, I am calling from my riding. I'm in Nickel Belt right now.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll move to the opposition side now. MPP Gates.

Mr. Wayne Gates: First of all, I'm going to question the Fallsview Group.

I want to thank the Menechella family for everything they do for our community as a major employer.

As you know, we've lost close to 40,000 jobs in Niagara tourism, which is important. On your financial ask—we also want to make sure they include credit unions with that, because I know a lot of the local families use credit unions in Niagara.

Business owners in Niagara Falls are telling me that a big expense for a closed business is their ongoing property taxes. Municipalities are probably not in a financial position to halt the payment of property taxes. Do you think there is a role for the province to play here, and do you think it would be helpful for the tourist operators and owners?

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Mr. Carmen Menechella: You're asking this to whom?

Mr. Wayne Gates: To the Fallsview Group.

Mr. Carmen Menechella: Okay. Anthony, I'll answer this one.

Yes, there would be. In Niagara Falls in general, we're looking at \$6 billion of revenue not coming in this year. That's how big it is. The casino is closed. As you know, Niagara Parks—half of their attractions are closed. You can't get on a boat ride to go to the Falls, and the bridge to the US is closed. Everything that we can have to postpone for when the vaccine finally comes or when the solution to corona is finally here—everything works.

Asking us to pay property taxes or asking us to pay mortgage payments when there are zero customers coming in, no tourism, no overseas airplanes—Niagara Falls is like a 15,000-room cruise ship that's parked right now. It's

just waiting for the tourists to come back. So, really, just lending money—what you said about the credit unions: If Meridian Credit Union could be given a big nest egg to lend out, I think that 90% of the Niagara region tourism sector would be covered by that.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I've got another question. Are you okay? Can you hear me okay?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Yes.

Mr. Wayne Gates: What are the biggest pieces missing right now from this government that would help our industry in Niagara? Again, it's to the Fallsview Group.

Mr. Carmen Menechella: Well, it's loans, loans, loans. Give the money to Meridian and let Meridian give it to their membership. I would give the money to the Bank of Montreal, and let the Bank of Montreal lend it to the hotels, the casinos, the theatres and the restaurants. We all need financing, and the financing has to be easily accessible. You can't have all the red tape with it.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Beyond hotels, you also have restaurants and entertainment. Could you speak a bit on how you see a safe future for those aspects of your business? We have heard of the idea of expanding patios into streets. Any ideas on what could be done to ensure a safe return of tourists into Niagara—and is it a good idea to have different ideas?

Mr. Carmen Menechella: We're not doctors, so we don't know, but the hotel rooms are all empty. That's who feeds all the restaurants. There are no more Americans coming; they're not even allowed over. Of the 15,000 hotel rooms, you're looking at maybe 500 of them rented and a few locals that are in the area.

It doesn't matter what we do in Niagara; there are no customers to treat. Whereas in Toronto, the restaurants can open and they can get all the Torontonians. The people in Toronto aren't coming to Niagara because they're scared and they've been told to stay home. People are going to stay home and be safe, and rightfully so, until this all blows over.

Mr. Wayne Gates: As some of my colleagues on this call may know, the Fallsview Group employs—just yourselves—thousands of people in Niagara. My question to your family is: Given how many employees you oversee, are you worried that your employees are suffering hardship, like yourself, due to the lack of work and the lack of government support? This is really geared to the government support. What can the government do to help you guys? I've heard about the loans, low interest rates, making sure credit unions can do—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Wayne Gates: What do you need to help your company?

Mr. Carmen Menechella: The employees—the \$2,000 a month has to continue. That will get them over until it's time to come back. On top of that, they're allowed to work another \$500 or \$1,000 a month, and so we rotate through. But the employees that have underlying conditions, that are overweight: For them, they have to stay home and be safe and just don't spend any money.

The government wage subsidy, with us, and the government direct to them—I think it's a great policy so far. I think the workers have done the best they can in this situation.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Yes, they have.

How do you expect the change in international travel to affect your business, and what does that change mean for your employees? Will there be cuts or layoffs, or is there a downturn on international travel? And should we be concentrating on domestic tourism over the next six to nine months to try to get as many people from the province of Ontario to come to Niagara? Should there be incentives to entice people to come to Niagara, whether that be a \$500 or \$1,000 voucher to use in the tourist sector, to come and stay in the hotels, which are—certainly, we need people to stay in the Falls.

Mr. Carmen Menechella: All of that type of stuff works; it's all nice. The only thing with a tourist place is that if people are scared they're going to die, they don't go to places with big crowds. With the casino—it's built for 50,000 people a day. Niagara Parks are built for 80,000 people a day. So yes, if we want to trickle them in and do, I don't know, 3,000 people a day, maybe that will work. But really, I think we just have to wait out the vaccine.

I just want to put out that when SARS happened in the Toronto area and down in southern Ontario, when it was over, Niagara region, Niagara tourism, had the biggest year ever—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Carmen Menechella: —and that's what's going to happen with this corona: Once it's over, it will be the biggest ever. So I kind of think: Save all your money now for when the cure comes.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I do agree with you that people are going to come to Niagara Falls. As we've known over the last few weeks, even when we're telling them not to come and nothing is open, they're going to come. So I agree with you: Niagara Falls is Niagara Falls. When we get a vaccine, they're going to come to Niagara Falls. They're going to stay in hotels. They're going to do everything they did before.

My question to you, because I've only got a few seconds left: Is there something that you want to say directly to the government other than what you've already said that can help sustain tourism in Niagara Falls in the short term?

Mr. Carmen Menechella: Just make sure they get rid of the red tape on the loans. Make sure the casino and all of the hotels and all of the restaurants can borrow money that the government's supposed to put out there—loans, loans, loans.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I wrote that down: “loans, loans, loans,” so I'll make sure. Thanks.

Mr. Carmen Menechella: Okay.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll move to the independent members now. Who will start first? MPP Blais.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Thank you to all of the groups for your presentations. I'll start with the members from the Fallsview Group, and you can decide who should answer.

I know you've said that you think the best approach, or the only approach that will work for you, at least, is to wait until there's a vaccine and try to get through it to that point. Are you that convinced that domestic tourism can't make up at least for some of the shortfall if regional openings are allowed to happen?

Mr. Carmen Menechella: We could get some business doing that, but you can never get to where you're at 60%, 70%, 80% occupancy, only because, just like what happened to us with SARS—people were scared to go travel at that time. They can always do travel a year later or six months later. So people are safe first; no one wants to go somewhere where it's dangerous or where there is a disease, for tourism. I would relate us to a cruise ship: It's hard to get someone—all of us—to go on a cruise ship right now, until this coronavirus is done.

So yes, we can do some tourism. We can get the ones that maybe get it cheaper now to buy it. But for the casino to open and do 50,000 people a day—no way. But maybe the casino doing 3,000 people a day and our hotels are running at 15% or 20% occupancy—that could happen, so at least we make something.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Okay. You've said repeatedly, and I think the message was clear, to cut red tape. But I guess I'd like some clarity from you on what specifically that means. What element of the loan program, or what element of red tape, exists that's causing you problems right now?

Mr. Carmen Menechella: The government put out that companies can access \$6-million loans, yet we haven't found a banking institution that will do it yet. The banks require all kinds of red tape: They require a security. They require different things that our existing loans don't allow for sometimes—or, I think, all the time. And the credit unions are not really part of the solution currently; it's more the big banks, and the big banks don't really bank with the tourism sector in Niagara Falls. So for us, it's the credit unions that are the real players, and they don't have the money to put out there.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I don't have any more questions. I'm not sure if MPP Schreiner does.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Any further questions? Okay. Thank you.

We'll go to the second round. I'll start with the opposition this time. MPP Vanthof, are you there? MPP Vanthof, can you unmute yourself?

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes. I've just got a couple of questions, and then I'd like to switch to MPP Gélinas.

I'd like to start with NOTO. You brought up an interesting—it's not going to be a one-size-fits-all. What's going to help Fallsview—and they have been very clear about what they need—might not help some of the independent tourism operators in northern Ontario and might not help Dan.

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Some things that the government could do right away that might not seem big—waive crown fees. Those are

fees that, currently, the Ontario government charges operators. Could you elaborate on that?

Ms. Laurie Marcil: Right now, all of our outpost camps across the north have to get a land use permit in order to have their outpost camp on crown land. They pay an annual fee for that. Our bear outfitters, in order to take resident hunters, have to have a bear management area. They have to pay annual fees for that. Also, if you are a baitfish harvester, you have to have licences to do that on crown land. All of these fees are annual fees.

Look at our bear outfitters right now. We don't know whether they're going to be able—and these are non-resident allocations. They've already not been able to have their spring bear hunt. We're not sure whether the border will be open to allow them to have their fall bear hunt. The total, between bear management area fees and land use permit fees, is around \$1.2 million. It's not a huge number for government, but it is certainly impacting these businesses. Someone could pay \$40,000 a year in LUP fees.

So that is a very quick and easy one that I think should be achievable by government and would be important, considering they can't actually do those services on the land base right now.

Mr. John Vanthof: I believe, Dan, you brought up the issue regarding insurance. I was talking to a lodge operator yesterday, Ray Sapiano from Marten River Lodge, who is not going to open this year because his clientele is American. So none of his equipment—none of his ATVs, none of his boats—is moving this summer, yet his insurance is going up. It's incredibly frustrating. I think the government needs to do some elbowing, because that's just not on.

Everybody was happy that some changes were made today. We can do some camping. But for a lot of lodge operators and a lot of businesses, their season—and that's the same as Fallsview—is done. It's not time to do a happy dance because a few people are going to do a little bit better.

Can you comment on that—maybe Dan first?

Mr. Dan Butkovich: My insurer came to me and let me know that my rates are going up, that I don't have a choice, that they don't have any relief, that they don't have any offer to push some of the premiums further down the road for us. There was nothing offered to us whatsoever except “take it or leave it.” I went shopping around—online, bricks and mortar—to different insurers and I was basically told that the underwriters are not taking on any new business policies at all at this moment. This was the same response I got from each one. So now I'm forced to go back to the company that I was very upset with for raising my rates in the first place, and I have to go with my tail between my legs and say, “Please insure me.”

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Two minutes.

Mr. Dan Butkovich: With our current occupancy rates, that insurance might look like somewhere of—20% of my overall net revenue for the year is going to go to insurance, because my occupancy isn't changing with the increase to my insurance.

So it's something that we could definitely use some relief from, and I would be surprised if every company in tourism isn't facing the same issue.

Mr. John Vanthof: France, do you have a question?

M^{me} France Gélinas: My question is also for NOTO. I get the same as John: Many of my outfitters—just the land use permit, just the bare management—and the bait harvesting? They will pay more to the government than they will be taking in this year, because, if their business comes from the States, nobody is coming. Zero income, and yet—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

M^{me} France Gélinas: —you still have to pay fees to the government? I hear that all the time.

Another one that I hear is that more and more of their business has switched to online. So now, they will take e-transfers so that you don't have to pay and be in front. But the Internet connection—how do you politically correctly say “sucks”?—in my riding is just horrible. So they are switching to Bell rocket stick because in Foleyet and Ivanhoe we have a brand new tower. But the little rocket stick? A thousand dollars a month to be able to gain Internet access that allows them to be able to renew their TSSA so that they can continue to sell propane so that they can continue to take cash online.

Is it just Nickel Belt that is—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off. We'll have to move to independent members now. MPP Schreiner.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Thanks. MPP Gélinas was doing such a great job with that question that maybe I'll continue with it and just say that I know the government has reannounced once again \$150 million for rural broadband, but I don't know if that's actually going to be enough, particularly as I think about the costs across the north. I'm just curious as to how vital reliable, affordable broadband is to your businesses being able to stay open. I guess that would probably be for Dan and Laurie.

Mr. Dan Butkovich: Okay, I see I'm unmuted, so I'll go first. I can tell you about the frustration I have that there is fibre optic cable 500 metres away from my property. It runs into the township offices and no farther. They have no intention of moving it farther. Every time we call Bell or speak to an operator here, they say it's not even on the radar.

We aren't as affected as I think some may be farther north. We have a whopping 50 Mbps, if that means anything to anybody on here, which is pretty good to check email and make onward travel arrangements, which is what we tell our guests. We remind them that they're not up here for the Internet, but that is a benefit that we offer them.

From a business standpoint, the Internet isn't affecting us, I think, as much as it does other people, other than it would help me reduce other costs. If I had reliable fibre or higher-speed Internet, I could reduce some other costs.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Laurie, did you want to add anything?

Ms. Laurie Marcil: For sure, it is very shoddy right across the north. Look at all the services and business supports that are only available online now. A lot of applications—even the Ontario government and the federal government are asking you to do applications online, and it's becoming increasingly difficult. All of our fishing and hunting licences—everything is being moved online, and these operators don't have that ability. Even to communicate with their guests and to allow good communication out from their resorts for guests—it's increasingly challenging.

I've been with NOTO for 30 years, and when I started at NOTO a lot of our operators were using radio phones. Some of them still try to, but Bell told them a number of years ago that they're not supporting those anymore, so if anything happens, you're out of luck.

People have been consciously seeking sat phones and different kinds of systems, and through this whole COVID, having these kinds of meetings, we've seen across the province with my other colleagues, it's a little hard to hold meetings like this for most parts of northern Ontario. So it's critical to business; it's critical to livelihoods right across the north.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Thank you for that. I think I'll direct my next question to Laurie, since maybe you'll still be unmuted.

I know MPP Gates asked the gentleman from the Fallsview Group about this, but I wanted to ask you, Laurie and Dan, because you rely so much on US tourism—and obviously we can't control when the border is going to be open again. So pivoting to domestic is almost like an imperative at this point. I'm just wondering if some sort of tax credit for domestic travel, stay, whatever—do you think that would be one way to attract people from Ontario to come to your facilities in the north?

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Ms. Laurie Marcil: It certainly could be. It wouldn't hurt; that's for sure. The difficulty we have in translating or moving, pivoting, shifting to a domestic market is the price point: What will a Canadian pay versus what an American will pay, and what levels of service do they want?

Our American guests really appreciate what we have, for the most part, and are so anxious to get up here. We're going to need some help on marketing. We're going to need some help getting our Destination Ontario, Destination Northern Ontario, all of the DMOs—a lot of them have already been working on this and are working feverishly to promote domestic travel. But I think that there will definitely be—I mean, even if we can have domestic travel right now, it may be at a limited capacity because we've still got to put all the protocols in place. We're still learning all of this. And staffing—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): A minute and a half.

Ms. Laurie Marcil: —is another issue.

I think there are some things that come with that domestic travel, but I think that incentives, like I mentioned, with the free fishing for the month of July—those kinds of

things that are incentives provided by government to have people travel within Canada and within Ontario are going to be critical.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Yes. Dan, in my limited time, do you want to answer that one as well?

Mr. Dan Butkovich: Sure. I'll try to be quick. I think Laurie hit a lot of the points perfectly there.

Travel credits will help, but until people are encouraged to go out, not encouraged to stay home or encouraged to visit their park around the corner but encouraged to get out and get to a provincial park, get to these outfitters, get to these places that are suffering, nothing is going to help, in my opinion, more than that. Of course, if you can write an open cheque to all of us, that will get us through, but I don't think anybody you've talked to today really is standing with their hand out looking for that.

We all want to be a part of this economic recovery. We know it's coming by and from and for Ontarians. So we need Ontarians to be confident to leave their homes—the urban Ontarians, even if we say that, to leave their homes and be encouraged to travel to these places. That's what's going to make all of the difference in the world, and part of that, of course, is encouraging them to travel responsibly and safely.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: If I have time, I'm going to just—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. You're out of time.

Before I move to the government side for their second round, I would like to do an attendance check. MPP Mantha, if you could please confirm your attendance and what part of Ontario you're calling from.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Yes, I am here, and I'm calling from Algoma-Manitoulin.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. All right. I'll go back to MPP Oosterhoff.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Thank you. My question is around—there's been a lot of downsides, obviously, to COVID, and we recognize the health, the fiscal and the economic and social impacts of this disease, but there's also been changes in various sectors that have been pushed to digitization, that have been pushed to innovate in many ways, and perhaps there's some good things that come out of that aspect of it.

I recognize that tourism is unique because people are going for experiences, obviously. People are going to go for that five-senses-all-engaged process. But I'm just wondering if you could speak to perhaps—if there are regulations or government procedures in place that could be streamlined or that are archaic that you feel hold back your ability to innovate in the provision of your service. If not, that's completely understandable.

Like I said, I don't think it's for every single sector, but there are some sectors where we've seen things come out that show where we can move to be more nimble and adaptive and responsive to those industries, and I'm just wondering if you have any suggestions for us around regulatory burden or processes in place. You spoke

extensively, Dan, about insurance, and I think there's a very strange paradox there, that rates are rising when people aren't on the road. I know that's something that is very concerning and that we are looking into.

But I'm wondering if maybe all three of you have—again, you all have slightly different areas within the sector, but could you speak to that or what you're hearing from your colleagues in the sector?

Mr. Dan Butkovich: I see I've been unmuted first. We're certainly trying to make use of all of the technology upgrades and things that are on offer. Our local community has been good at doing that. I don't think that that's the be-all, end-all for us, so I'll say that it's helpful, but it's not top of the list; it's somewhere middle to lower for me.

And now I'll defer to my other colleagues.

Ms. Laurie Marcil: It's not maybe necessarily along the lines of technology, but it is about some of the red tape that we've been challenged with, new regulations that have come in over the last little while that have made things difficult for an already-struggling sector, which is septic system regulations. Making sure that they can actually practically be applied or implemented in the north—we've got septic systems that have been operating fully functional, everything's fine, for decades and have shown no adverse impacts, and now we have a requirement to have a certificate of approval. In order to get that certificate of approval, you've basically got to dig up the septic system. Do you know what happens when you dig up a septic system? It breaks.

It's those kinds of things, where the application in rural areas, maybe, and municipalities is fine, but as soon as you take that into our northern communities—I mean, you can't fly in a backhoe. You can't get to some of those areas. It's just not practical. People have worked for generations to figure out how we do this safely, and they've figured it out, but now we've got new regulations.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Laurie Marcil: Things like the gas tax rebate: That's also something that has been plaguing our industry. It's an opportunity where you can get the road tax back if you are using the bulk fuel that is brought into your destination for your business purposes. Our fly-in operations are able to do that quite easily now, but the drive-to locations—the paperwork associated with trying to get your rebate is just about near impossible. Those kinds of things are ones that we've been dealing with and have been plaguing our sector particularly for years.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Thank you. Did Fallsview want to speak about that at all?

Mr. Carmen Menechella: If I could: If you guys could do one thing for us in Niagara right now, how about a testing site, the COVID test, the drive-through? We don't have—ours is archaic, because it's based on six months ago, probably, which maybe now is archaic. If we could have a new one—as our residents and as all our staff can get tested and all come back negative, it makes a world of difference to making it comfortable for a person to want to come. If tourists come to Niagara because they know they can get a test here, maybe some will show up. We should

have more testing sites, and lots of them because—but drive-through ones where it makes it simple—all of a sudden there's a reason to feel safe as you travel. I think it will work up north too. As we know people are getting tested and they're negative, all of us are happy to host them and hang around with them.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Yes, I put a big star beside that. That's a valid point, something that—

Mr. Carmen Menechella: Niagara doesn't have one right now.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Right. We'll definitely try and get more testing.

I guess part of my question is around accessing government services too. I take that point about the need for approval in your septic system. I'm questioning, even engaging with ServiceOntario—I know it's something all of us hear, about how ServiceOntario right now has extremely long lineups. We've moved over 40 different services online—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff:—so that people can access that. We're trying to minimize the amount of in-person interaction that people need to have with us or with ServiceOntario systems. But are there more things where you think, “Hmm, why isn't that online? Why do I have to go with a piece of paper to do all that?” I think we're going to see this speed up that process, and so any ideas that you might have would be good, if there is a way that that can make your life a little easier, on the business side or even on the personal side.

I know that's not the cash-flow issue, but we heard that very loud and clear, so I just wanted to maybe go into a couple of other areas, if someone had something.

Mr. Carmen Menechella: On the government issues in Niagara, I don't know what else to comment on. There are all kinds of different things that we have to do, even for our franchises, for restaurant franchises and hotel franchises.

On the government things right now, it's just that all of this is new to us, so we're working as we go. I guess testing is the key—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off. That concludes our time for your presentation. Thank you so much for your time.

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ALGOMA KINNIWABI
TRAVEL ASSOCIATION
NIAGARA FALLS TOURISM
MS. BETTY MCGIE

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): All right. Moving along to our next presenter, I would like to call upon Betty McGie. If you could please state your name for the record, you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): She's not here yet so we'll start with the second one, Algoma Kinniwabi

Travel Association. If you could please state your name for the record, you will have seven minutes. Mr. Graves? Can you unmute yourself?

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Yes, we can hear you now.

Mr. Mark Graves: Okay, perfect. It's Mark Graves. I'm the chair of the Algoma Kinniwabi Travel Association.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Please go ahead. You may start.

Mr. Mark Graves: Am I doing my presentation? I thought I was told I was second.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Yes, the first presenter is not here yet, so you can start.

Mr. Mark Graves: Oh, okay. Thank you.

Thanks for having me. Good afternoon. My name is Mark Graves. I'm the chair for the Algoma Kinniwabi Travel Association. We're a non-profit destination marketing association that represents about 85% of fixed-roof accommodations in the Algoma district, covering an area of about 28,000 square miles.

As an association, we've been working hard on trying to understand the effects of COVID. With some recent surveys and data, we had 87 responses from our membership, resulting in results of revenue losses to date exceeding \$6.7 million. If we calculate that out, we're looking at losses that could exceed \$21 million over the next few months. The hit is devastating to the economy, especially for northern Ontario, where our ebbs and flows are usually very steady. We don't have these big changes.

Many of the operators in northern Ontario have a very limited window of opportunity, in some cases less than six months, to make their annual salaries, wages and income that they need to operate, and have the seed they need for starting up next year's season. In a lot of cases, that seed is critical. Now, with the fishing outfitters and things that have already lost over half of their prime fishing season, being May, June and a little bit into July, there's a huge suffering going on within the tourism industry in northern Ontario, and especially Algoma.

I myself am an operator. We own a campground, and I understand that we're going to be able to open short-term accommodations as of tomorrow, but our resources and knowledge of what we can and can't do are very limited. I think that as the chair of a board, I have a little more access and information than the average person and, even myself, I'm not sure what to do and what not to do. We don't want to be responsible for spread; at the same time, we don't know what to tell our members, and even what to do ourselves.

A large number of our membership is American-owned. With the border being closed, these people can't even visit their properties now and check on their properties and see how they made it through the winter, let alone get things cleaned up, organized and ready to operate if, at the eleventh hour, they're given the go-ahead to open and go.

Having these properties working in such a manner and opening at such a—it doesn't seem late in the year, but to an operator it could mean the difference of not covering operating costs and start-up costs, moving forward. So there's definitely a need for support.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes left.

Mr. Mark Graves: The short-term rentals: It's great that those are opening, but they're really not helping the attractions and guides and fishing and nature and outdoor—all those things that are still unable to do business, that bring the people into the short-term rentals. Without clear clarification of what can operate and what can't operate and how they can work together, that creates problems.

The effects of COVID-19 are very stressful right now for everybody. The unknown is amazing. At the same time, we have no idea how extreme this is going to be. It's going to take at least a year to understand the full effects it's having on us

Operators in northern Ontario, and especially Algoma, have been inundated with additional expenses over the last few years: water system upgrades, septic system upgrades, and TSSA for fuel dispensing. Now with the MTO adding five-year mandated advertising for signs, we have to lay out money for five years for a sign position at once rather than a year at a time. All these costs are escalating, and they're not helping the outfitter raise their rates. They're all background costs that don't help the outfitter upgrade their property, in the sense of making the guest experience better. If the guest experience isn't better, it's hard to raise rates to offset these costs. This has been going on for years. With COVID-19, we've just added a significant layer of costs, with cleaning costs—room-cleaning time has quadrupled. To run these operations and be diligent and prevent spread has a massive cost.

The Algoma Kinniwabi really, really wants to support our membership and get the funding that we need to support our members, to make sure that they're here to survive for the coming years—not just next year, but into the future. A lot of the mom-and-pop operators have fallen through the cracks. My own outfitting company doesn't qualify for anything.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. Your time is up now.

We'll go to our second presenter, from Niagara Falls Tourism. Please state your name for the record, and you have seven minutes.

Ms. Janice Thomson: Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and committee members. My name is Janice Thomson. I am president and CEO of Niagara Falls Tourism, the destination marketing organization responsible for promoting Canada's number one leisure destination. Thank you for the opportunity to address you this afternoon.

Before I go into the impacts on our industry, I would like to extend our sincere gratitude to the MPPs, civil servants, front-line workers and hospital staff who have been providing extraordinary service to the residents of Ontario during this public health crisis. Above all else, we

know we need to be cognizant of the critical nature of this health emergency and the terrible impacts it has had on the lives of so many people. Recognizing your multiple levels of responsibility for the health of residents and the economy, we are grateful for today's opportunity to share with you the impacts that COVID-19 is having on our community.

Niagara Falls is a city of 88,000 people, with infrastructure to support the visitation of 14 million visitors every year. Widely recognized as Canada's tourism icon, the city is, at its core, a destination committed to delivering outstanding hospitality and memorable experiences for visitors. It is a destination that has been built by committed, creative investors—people who have invested themselves in the industry over decades. It is a resilient group accustomed to dealing with the ravages of changing conditions, financial markets, weather patterns, international events such as 9/11, and now, following after SARS, the pandemic of COVID-19. I don't have to say that there has never been anything like this. This requires special attention.

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This is also a destination where no business stands alone. It is a collection of hotels offering full amenities, to casinos, live entertainment facilities, a major convention centre and hundreds of individual attractions, restaurants, golf courses, retail shops and the world-renowned, 56-kilometre Niagara Parks property, owned by the province of Ontario.

We promote this destination as a package. The people who visit expect that they can choose activities that suit their interest on that particular visit, whether they're here in Niagara Falls for a business conference, a family getaway or a couple's celebration. Having pieces—just pieces—of our destination open and the balance shuttered and closed gives a poor message to potential visitors and does not give those who are open any chance to make the best of their situation either. If attractions and restaurants are closed, it is indeed a hard sell to open the doors for visitation.

The city of Niagara Falls is about vibrancy and energy. We need to share that positive energy with people who have been denied the chance to travel for several months. We need to restart the engine of our economy, the engine that generates tax revenues for the province of Ontario to fund education, health care and social services.

As I said at the beginning, we recognize that public health guidelines are essential and we know that is what will help manage us into a successful future in tourism. Rich in infrastructure to host visitors, Niagara Falls is in the best possible position to recover once the pandemic has passed.

But financial losses are mounting at an incredible rate. Overall revenues in the destination are down by 95%.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Janice Thomson: Direct financial assistance is required for operators, who at this point have only about 10 weeks to secure any revenues at all for this year. While

patient, our business owners cannot afford to lose one more day being closed to visitors.

For the past three months, they have been working individually and collectively on plans to receive visitors in the safest ways possible. Our destination has collaborated on a campaign to be released as soon as we're able to invite visitors. "Safe to play" is more than three words strung together; it reflects investments of millions of dollars to meet new safety guidelines and is an ironclad commitment to apply all mandated guidelines for public safety throughout the destination.

It seems ironic that the business operators who have traditionally been the most compliant with legislative requirements may well be the last ones to open. Restaurant and bar owners are very familiar with the weighty responsibility of ensuring safe food and alcohol handling. They are familiar with spot check inspections and accountability for the health and safety of patrons.

Likewise, those who operate attractions are accustomed to stringent requirements by other agencies, such as Transport Canada, TSSA and others. Our attractions, such as Hornblower Cruises, SkyWheel, Clifton Hill, Zipline to the Falls, Bird Kingdom, Marineland, the water parks: All of these organizations, and others, have entertained millions of people from around the world over many years. They are all well accustomed to efficiently managing long lines of ticket buyers and managing passenger traffic flow within their attractions. They're the ones now who have taken the recommendations from the medical officer of health and further improved the measures already in place at their organizations.

Our destination is highly sought-after by visitors; however, we know that we will have to undertake a massive marketing campaign to stimulate travel for the balance of this year, giving our businesses some opportunity to re-establish their operations in new, altered ways—we know they will be limited—and to allow them as well to engage their employees. Our message will be strongly focused on safety. This has always been seen as a safe, reliable destination, and our operators are committed to maintaining that reputation.

Those who work in the Niagara tourism industry, numbering over 40,000, are expert in what they do and are anxious to return to work. With over 95% of the staff on temporary layoff or facing job losses, anxiety is elevated. Please hear our plea and assist Niagara Falls's quest to once again step onto the world stage as a leader in tourism.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. All right, so we'll move to our next presenter, Betty McGie. If you could please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes.

Ms. Betty McGie: Can you hear me fine?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Yes, we can hear.

Ms. Betty McGie: Okay. I want to thank you for allowing me to make a presentation today. My name is Betty McGie, and I am the owner and operator of Watson's Algoma Vacations, which is a fly-in hunting and fishing resort based out of the town of Wawa, Ontario. We've had the privilege of being in this business for the past 74 years.

Pine Portage Lodge was started by my father in 1946 after he returned from serving in the RCAF in the Second World War as a fighter pilot. He was a true northerner, born in a log cabin in the railroad town of Oba, which is 20 miles downriver from our lodge location.

My grandparents immigrated to Canada from England after the First World War and settled in northern Ontario in 1919. I was born into this industry, and I've spent my entire life working for the resource-based tourism industry here in the north, for our family businesses of course, but also in numerous other capacities, representing the needs and issues that face our industry.

I've always believed that there are three resource industries that support the northern Ontario economy: mining, forestry and resource-based tourism. Sadly, the RBT industry has always been the loser when it comes to policies and planning, even though we are the most sustainable of the industries here in the north.

Like my father before me, we have seen the destruction and demise of our natural resources under the guise of progress. Remoteness is a value unto itself. In today's world, the peace and tranquility of our wilderness will become even more valuable. Ensuring the sustainability of all our natural resources must be a priority of the provincial government and should not be exploited for the short-term gain of a few.

We also own and operate a charter float plane service based out of the town of Wawa, which services our lodge and other remote businesses in the area. We have operated Watson's Skyways since 1986. We have a business office located in the town of Wawa and employ five full-time staff year-round and an additional 15-plus staff at the lodge during our operating season, which normally starts at the beginning of the fishing season in mid-May until the latter part of October and the moose hunt. Our lodge can accommodate 95 guests, mainly on the American plan with meals and the balance in our housekeeping cottages. During the 110 to 120 days of our operating season, we generate the income necessary to operate the balance of the year, as do most resort-based tourism outfitters.

The quality of our lodge accommodations, food and guest services is our main attraction in our remote location, but we are fortunate to have very good fisheries due to the restricted access that has been maintained through all the years of our operation. We practise conservation of our fisheries as well as our hunting of moose and bear. Over the many years of our operation, our reputation has maintained a business repeat clientele of better than 70%, of which 95-plus per cent are from the US.

The current situation in the US and the closure of the borders has basically caused 100% loss of income to our businesses. Ontario residents are not going to fill this gap, especially on short notice. Most of our reservations are booked six months to a year in advance.

The months of May and June each season represent 45% to 50% of our gross income. The financial support provided by the federal government, although appreciated, provides little if any support to us or the many other RBT

operators. Personally, our business faced a loss in May of approximately \$280,000 for this season, and this loss will come to more than three quarters of a million by the end of June. Our two businesses collected more than \$300,000 in HST last year alone—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Betty McGie:—and with more than 1,200 operators in the north, I'm sure we have an impact on the tax coffers.

One day's notice to be allowed to open for business is not even realistic, especially when we were not prepared because the Premier had just extended the state of emergency for the province. We cannot just turn a switch on remote locations and open our doors. Normal operations take one to two weeks in any season to open. Our staff come from various parts of the country, and right now, my key staff are coming out of Newfoundland. With Air Canada not even flying to Sault Ste. Marie, I can't get them here.

1520

Although we've been following all the announcements, we still don't know the protocols that are going to be required for the guests that we can bring in. Normal operations would have passengers arriving on the plane at the lodge and occupying the same cottages as the guests that are vacating. Of course, cleaning procedures are going to have to be determined. Our current payroll cost represents 30% of our operating cost. With zero income for May and June now, we're not even sure how many staff we will bring down, at the reduced number of guests we may be able to accommodate.

Our two turbine engines we put into our aircraft this past winter, at a cost of \$1.1 million, is a loan that we had anticipated doing, but we did not anticipate the COVID virus. More government loans will not address the immediate needs of our company and the majority of RBT operators. In the 1980s, the provincial government provided funding through the Northern Ontario Development Corp., in partnership with FedNor, which proved to be a great impetus for our industry. I know that defaults on the funding were minimal, but the benefits were maximized. This was a combination of loans and grants.

There is opportunity again to have the provincial government show their support for the resource-based tourism industry today, but it must be immediate.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Betty McGie: If not, we're going to lose a percentage of our resource-based industry. Marketing dollars, although useful, are only one line on a business plan, and will not address the immediate losses our businesses are facing. Sadly, marketing has always been the Ministry of Tourism's Band-Aid for our industry's needs. Some dollars currently available because of this new world situation directed to the individual operators with new guidelines will serve our purposes, not some marketing idea.

Because of the loss of employment to our seasonal employees, consideration will have to be given to them as well when our operating season is shortened and they may not qualify for the current EI requirements. More loans are

not what businesses need today, but something has to be there to ensure we can continue to operate and employ the people we do every year. Fortunately, we have a good relationship with our financial institution, which happens to be a credit union; but we can't deal with more loans. Because of the nature of the—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. Sorry to cut you off. We'll have to go to questions now. I'll start with independent members this time. MPP Hunter.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Thanks, everyone, for your great presentations. I'm wondering if I could—I have questions for each of you, but I want to start with Betty.

When you talk about new guidelines, I just want you to expand on why that is important and how it's going to reinforce confidence both for your employees and your customers in coming to utilize the resource-based tourism sector.

Is Betty's mike on?

Ms. Betty McGie: Yes. Can you hear me?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Yes.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Yes, we can hear you now.

Ms. Betty McGie: When you talk about the new guidelines, are you talking about protocols for the businesses?

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Yes. In the face of COVID, I'm assuming there's going to be a new normal. Things are not going to operate the way they had last year. Do you have new guidelines for your industry? Are you confident in that? Are you looking for the government to provide that? I'm just trying to get a sense of your preparedness, basically.

Ms. Betty McGie: I have two businesses. Of course, my air service is under the guidance of Transport Canada. We are getting some information on what's going to be required, but it's very difficult and we're not sure if we're going to be able to be financially viable based on what they may determine to be our guidelines.

From the lodge perspective, I know there's supposed to be a protocol set out [*inaudible*] we don't even know what it is they're going to require yet. Cleaning and masks and sanitizing: That is common. But we don't know how many guests we're going to be allowed to accommodate. The majority of my business is American plan, which means we feed them in the dining room. I don't think we'll be able to operate our dining room, so I'm not sure [*inaudible*] the bush and don't feed them. I mean, there are going to be a lot of things that have to be considered.

Regardless, the fact that our fixed costs don't change, whether I have 10 guests or 50 guests—it's going to be very difficult to determine if we can operate. Right now, I've already cancelled all of June because I knew the border wasn't going to be open [*inaudible*]. So June is gone, and I don't know what I'm going to have to do to even accommodate July guests yet. Until I see what the protocol that has been determined looks like, I can't even decide what I have to do.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I'm going to go right to Janice. In terms of your members—talk to me a little bit about how you see this working. You were saying that marketing

actually helps you, in your instance. Is it domestic visitors that you're going to first target because of the situation with the border? I'm assuming that international is a big piece of what you do. Talk to me about the gradual nature in which you're going to bring visitors back.

Ms. Janice Thomson: I appreciate the question.

Our marketing campaign is currently set up so that phase 1 would be within a four-hour drive within the province of Ontario. That can only be our first approach. Phase 2 would then branch out to a seven-hour drive—again, we're still looking at Ontario, into Quebec. Phase 3 would be when the border is open. We don't have a start date for any one of those phases. Obviously, we can't put that date in ink until we know when we are open as a destination. But we do have a marketing campaign all ready to go.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Certainly, that's something I've been hearing through these hearings—that targeting that domestic market first is something that's important.

Can you tell me if you're plugged into the international attractions guidelines and standards? Is that something your association is sharing with your members?

Ms. Janice Thomson: Absolutely. In fact, our members are sharing it with us as well, because all the different associations that they belong to are collecting the best practices from around the world and feeding them back to us. All of that material is what has formed the basis of our Safe Stay campaign. All of our members are signing on to the pledge that, yes, they will be committed to fulfilling those guidelines. But obviously, the first thing we need to do is to ensure the sustainability of the businesses themselves, and we're hearing that from everyone—about grants, forgivable loans.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Tell me about your sense of not just this summer, but into the winter—you also have a season there—and into next year. Are you optimistic about this part of Ontario adapting and continuing to offer all of the things that you normally do?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Janice Thomson: It's my belief that our destination is very resilient, very strong. As I said, it has weathered other challenges in the past—certainly, nothing this severe. We are not just a summer business any longer. We have become a year-round business. For example, we have our Winter Festival of Lights. I can't imagine anything that's more appropriate for social distancing than something where you can get in a car with your family, see the lights, check into your hotel, spend time here. So we do have some optimism that if we can just get through this piece now—the key thing is that we need to get reopened. We need to open our facilities. Even now, when people call and say, “We want to come and visit. We want to stay. What can we do now?”, you have to say, “Well, the restaurants aren't open, other than takeout.” These are unusual times.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I've heard that consistency is important. The Toronto Zoo can do their drive-through safari, but African Lion Safari can't. We need more consistency among the attractions.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We'll have to move to the government side now. I'll start with MPP Sabawy.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you very much for giving us some idea about the challenges that you are facing. As the parliamentary assistant for the Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries, I have some questions I'd like to pose to you.

As we don't know when the border will be open and when people will be crossing the border from the US or from other countries, is there any initiative you have been thinking of or the industry has been thinking of or the industry has been thinking of about marketing locally, like getting the attention of Canadians or Ontarians, or actually even outside of Ontario, to be your target market and address the shortage we have, to local tourism not from outside Canada? And if the government can help you with some aspects of this global marketing program, to discover Ontario or know your province, or something like that initiative?

1530

Ms. Janice Thomson: MPP Sabawy, again, thank you for that question. Certainly, here in Niagara Falls, we are looking at a campaign that's going to be about rediscovering Niagara Falls, encouraging people who have long-time family memories of being here in the past to visit again, see the new Niagara Falls, come back and rekindle those memories. We're appealing to families in one section of it, couples in another, and then adventurers in the third component. That third component ties into the number of trails we have here: the hiking trails, the biking trails, the nature views, just the basic beauty and the wide, open green spaces that we feel we'll be able to portray in an interesting way.

Working with Destination Canada, we're also talking about their campaign, which is encouraging all Canadians to discover their entire country during this coming year, for all of us to travel just within Canada.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Can you unmute yourself?

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you very much for your answer, and I would like to pass the questions to my colleague Sam, to ask another question.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Oosterhoff.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Thank you, MPP Sabawy, and thank you, Janice, for being on this call today. It's really important to hear from your voices, of course, and I spoke about this earlier: The Niagara region has an enormous amount of tourism in its area. Of course Janice would know about that, as well as others. I'd like to note, actually, that we saw some very sobering job numbers come out today specific to the Niagara region, with some of the highest unemployment rates in the province. Clearly, we have been impacted devastatingly by COVID and the secondary impacts, the fiscal and social impacts, of that.

I asked earlier, to some other presenters, with regard to some of the options that they brought forward: One of the pieces that I've kind of put the various suggestions into is around promotional assistance and health—you know,

PPE assistance, that side of things—the direct cash support, if you want to call it that; grants and subsidies; and payroll support, so making it easier to—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I'm wondering if you could speak to which of those you feel would be most effective, the best bang for your buck, when it comes to supporting your industry. Any of you can respond to that, perhaps.

Ms. Janice Thomson: MPP Oosterhoff, thank you for that question. I would say what you described as the direct path to financing, to grants and loans for our business members, that would be the overall number one choice, if that was what we could have. We do have other sources for marketing funds.

The second choice, then, would be PPE for all of the businesses. We've already seen people invest millions of dollars by now in putting up the new Plexiglas and the new controls in their areas. There's a lot of investment being put out there, so if the government can find a way to assist there. But, as I say, the number one choice would be the direct paths to having financing made easier through the banks.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Thank you. Do any others have a comment on that? Betty?

Ms. Betty McGie: Yes. I think the fact that the north has not been recognized basically at all yet, and resource-based tourism especially, and that remote locations—our costs are going to be even higher than the average, because everything we need to provide is going to have to be flown in. There are multiple businesses that are going to have to be doing this. Not only do we have to access the supplies in the north, which aren't readily available, but we're going to have extra costs just to fly them to our location so that we can utilize them.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Betty McGie: There are going to be exceptional costs here. Again, like I said, once we know the protocols, then we've got to implement them. The costs of getting those things are going to be multiplied, because for my purposes, one flight of an airplane costs me \$1,600 with nothing on board. If I've got to use these planes to fly supplies, the costs are going to be enormous.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Yes, it's a different world, that's for sure, up there.

Mark? Sorry, I thought Mark had his hand up.

Mr. Mark Graves: Yes, I do. Sorry; my mike was muted.

For Algoma Kinniwabi, looking at our members, some 70% of our members receive their customers from the US and the majority of their funding, and a lot of US-based ownership, even. We need a direct line of funds for our members that allows us to channel money in the ways of loans and forgivable loans, or a portion forgivable, to help carry them through.

Not knowing, as Sam mentioned, when the border is going to open, the devastation is unparalleled. We just need to know that there is some money out there to help these people carry through, because already, the majority of their prime season is going to be gone before decisions

are made. Once decisions are made, it takes time to implement. Once that implementation is in, the season—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off. We'll have to move to the opposition side now for their time. I will start with MPP Mantha.

Mr. Michael Mantha: My question is going to be to Betty, but I just want leave off on what Mark just said: that the need for direct funding is what is going to be required.

My question to Betty: Betty, we know that it's not going to be a tax deferral or tax credits that are going to see you through this. You've lost—and I've spoken to many of the northern community businesses, such as yours, who have indicated they've lost well over 40% to about 50% of their annual income just in this short period of time.

You alluded earlier, in your previous comments, in regard to direct funding that was provided to you through programs and through other ministries at one time. Can you elaborate on what those programs were and how successful they were in helping you?

Ms. Betty McGie: Well, the programs existed back in the 1980s. As I said, our business has been around for 74 years, so we've been a long time. They were programs that were through the Ministry of Northern Development, I guess, because they were called NODC programming. They provided funds and grants.

When I was involved in building our main lodge, which I did in those years, I had a combination of funds from NODC and MNR, and the bridge had to be my own personal fund. But then once I completed the project, which was a fair sum of money at the time, then a good portion of it was forgivable once I completed all the criteria that was required. [*Inaudible*] which, of course, created employment for the local area, because it was construction. There are opportunities like that now.

Many of the outfitters can't be operating unless we can finance the cost ourselves, and the majority of people cannot. I'm talking about boats, motors and even beds in their cabins. With these new COVID protocols, we don't know what we're going to be required to have to be duplicating and increasing. Whether it's three times the number of sheets and towels and stuff that you normally have because you can't utilize the other ones—we have no idea what the protocol is. I can't send my laundry out to have it done when I'm flying.

There are programs that were available in the 1980s, and I know that the default on them was very minimal, but the uptake on it was tremendous to the industry because it was supported by the government, and so you weren't depending on financial institutions for the funds. Back in the 1980s, it was done.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Thanks, Betty.

Chair, I'll pass it over to my colleague Wayne Gates.

1540

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Can you unmute yourself, please?

Mr. Wayne Gates: There you go. Can you hear me okay?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Yes.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Thank you. My question is going to be to Niagara Falls Tourism. I just want to say to Janice: Hi, how are you? We did have a presenter before, and I want to say that it has been clear what the tourism sector needs in Niagara Falls: it's loans, loans and loans, and to make sure that the credit unions can participate in the distribution of the loans.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Wayne Gates: For the people who don't know, they've lost \$6 billion—that's with a B—so far. So they need lots of help.

My question to Janice is: Given the amount of jobs created by tourism in Niagara, which is around 40,000, how vital is it that this government create a made-in-Niagara tourist support plan to get our sector up and running again?

Ms. Janice Thomson: Thank you for that question, MPP Gates. I would say it's absolutely critical to do that, to have a made-in-Niagara solution, particularly, as I said in my presentation, because this is a community of 88,000 people with infrastructure to welcome 14 million people. This is not a regular community; this is not like any other community in the province of Ontario. When you think that 40,000 people are employed in tourism, clearly that's all we're about, really. Tourism is what we're all about, and we have been severely impacted.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Thanks, Janice.

Also, I asked this to the last group: Business owners in Niagara Falls are telling me that a big expense for closed businesses are the ongoing property taxes. Municipalities are not in a financial position to halt the payment of property taxes. Do you think there is a role for the province to play here and do you think it would be helpful for tourist operators?

Ms. Janice Thomson: Yes, thank you for that question. I believe that's being pursued through the city of Niagara Falls. I believe that they would like to. They've offered some abeyance for the taxpayers and I believe they've asked for an extension to that. If that requires backing by the province, then yes, that would certainly be a terrific avenue.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Thanks, Janice. I know you've heard this and I've heard this—and you've really heard it in Niagara-on-the-Lake as well, your hometown—from many small and medium-sized restaurant owners in Niagara about how crushing their rent payments are without any support for the business coming in.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Wayne Gates: How beneficial would it be for you in Niagara Falls, tourism operators, to have commercial rent relief?

Ms. Janice Thomson: There are commercial rent relief programs in place already; perhaps they just need different parameters to make them more easily accessible to all operators.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Some of that's true, except where the landlords are not participating. The small and medium-sized businesses are really struggling if the landlords don't participate, and will end up losing their businesses in

Niagara Falls and Niagara-on-the-Lake. I think that's the thing.

I'm sure I'm going to get more time here. Can I get another kick? The big question around Niagara Falls too is the safety of the workers, and in particular around—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. You'll get a chance in the second round.

We'll move to the government side again. MPP Oosterhoff? Are you there?

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): All right. We'll start with MPP Piccini, then.

Mr. David Piccini: Thank you very much for your presentation today. I really appreciate all of you taking the time.

My question, and this is for anyone, just vis-à-vis the tourism sector—I come from similar, albeit east of Toronto. I'm just wondering: If you could make three tangible recommendations for the restaurant sector, what would those be?

Ms. Janice Thomson: I can start it, then. For the tangible [*inaudible*] be having the information right now, to very quickly go out to the restaurants and let them know what their spacing is going to be. Give them some help and some guidance immediately on that.

Continue the flexibility that the government has already extended regarding alcohol service—being able to include alcohol in the takeout service. I would ask that that continue on as well.

And find support for training the staff, some kind of programs that would allow for training. Previously even to COVID, we had a shortage of staff in the restaurant industry, so something that would drive more training, more interns perhaps in that area, and support for the training.

Mr. David Piccini: Janice, on the alcohol service, do you mean extending it beyond COVID-19?

Ms. Janice Thomson: Yes, I do. I think it has been very well received in the communities. People like it. In this area, which is wine country, it's very helpful to the local wineries, breweries, distillers, because they're able to sell their own product directly through the restaurant outlets. It seems to have created good partnerships and some camaraderie—once again, this idea that we're all in this together, that we all have to find solutions together. It has created some amazing synergies, and I'd love to see it continue past COVID-19.

Mr. David Piccini: I'll turn things over to my colleague MPP Khanjin.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Khanjin.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I have a question—and all of you feel free to weigh in—on the patios idea. Here in Barrie, my riding, the local municipality passed a motion to allow for patios to open. What are your thoughts on that for the restaurant sector—for patios, and maybe expanding that to parks, parking lots, wherever we can have outdoor, safe socialization?

Janice, do you want to tackle that first?

Ms. Janice Thomson: During this time of recovery, this intense period, it would be helpful to the businesses to

allow them to expand patios, but I think in the longer term we need to maintain the control that has always been there. Those who have invested in what I would call proper patios with the railings and the fencing shouldn't be penalized for having made investments and built these wonderful patios. If we just see them springing up everywhere—I wouldn't like to see a loss of control that way. But certainly, if this is going to help people pick up the lost space that they're losing within their facility, if they're getting cut but we don't know yet what the ratio is going to be—do they lose 30% of their seating; do they lose 50%? If this can happen, and as long as each municipality manages it carefully, I think it is a good idea.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Any other comments?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Mark Graves: I agree with Janice. At the same time, consistency and standards across the board and getting the standards out to the restaurant owners, or any owners for that matter—a lot of the things are multi-purpose and they go across the board.

I'll give you an example. A chip stand opened up in our district, and the Algoma Public Health unit shut down their patio, their picnic tables. They said they couldn't have them and made them take them away, and yet there's a park literally across the road where everybody went over and sat at the picnic tables.

Public washrooms can't be opened at campgrounds, but public washrooms are open in malls where they have access to stores through outside doors. You can use portapotties, but you can't use a multi-use washroom.

There's an inconsistency in rules, and the business owners don't know what to do or how to move—the lack of direction. Everybody is afraid because they're saying there are massive charges if you don't comply, but nobody knows what to comply with.

So as much as anything, getting the rules out and having them standardized across districts or the province is critical to—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Mark Graves: —companies knowing what to do.

Ms. Betty McGie: My situation is different. Again, I represent a lot of resource-based tourism in the north. I feed the guests who fly into my lodge. They can't go to a restaurant down the street and sit on their patio. I don't know what the situation is going to be for me to accommodate these guests, because I have one dining room—I don't have an outside patio, unless I put them out on the lawn. It's going to be very difficult when we don't know what the situation is going to be. If we bring these guests in, we have to feed them. We're an American plan lodge. So what am I supposed to do?

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: David Piccini has a comment.

Mr. David Piccini: Betty, just quickly, yes or no: Given the contact-tracing ability of your guests coming in, would you propose serving them, maintaining health and safety standards, as you always do?

1550

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you.

Ms. Betty McGie: Well, to some degree—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. The time is up.

We'll have to move to the opposition side now. MPP Shaw.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: My question is for Betty. Betty, I just would like to let you know that I'm here at Queen's Park in the committee room. I'm here with MPP Stan Cho and a lot of dedicated Legislature staff. I just want to let you know that your story about your resort that your father came back to from World War II—he was a fighter pilot—here, we all remarked on what an incredible story that is. I just wanted to let you know that, that we were all moved by that.

The other thing that I wanted to say—it's not even necessarily a question—is that if there is any person or business or family that this province could learn from, it would be yours. Yours is a story of resilience and survival, and it's incredible.

And so I'm going to ask you two things: I would like to know your father's name and, very, very quickly, a little bit of his story; and you've already made some really clear suggestions for us, but I just want to say that if there's anything that you want to share about your survival as a business, please go ahead.

Ms. Betty McGie: My father's name was Richard Arthur Watson—Dick for short. Like I said, he was born in a log cabin in Oba. My grandparents immigrated here in 1919. He was a fighter pilot for the RCAF for four years during World War II. He was shot down three times and lived to tell the story. He started our lodge when he was 23 years old, with one cabin.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Betty, thank you.

Ms. Betty McGie: I can talk for hours about resource-based tourism, and I can't do it in seven minutes.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Well, you know what? I think we would all, at another time, appreciate to hear all of your story. I think when we're reopened here at Queen's Park, I'm sure we would like to welcome you here to the gallery and we can share your story with all of the MPPs here at Queen's Park, including—look, MPP Piccini is giving me a thumbs up. That doesn't happen very often, I just have to say.

With that, I think I'm going to pass this over to MPP Gates and thank you once again, to all of you, for your stories. You all have something to share, and we're learning here today. Thank you.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Thank you. I'm going to go back to Niagara Falls Tourism with Janice and let you answer the question around PPE and making sure that workers and tourists are safe when they come to Niagara Falls.

Ms. Janice Thomson: [*Inaudible*] PPE indeed. The members, the business operators, have made full commitments to making sure that our staff, all staff, are fully protected. That's key: They have to feel safe coming to work before we can get any of this off the ground, and the visitors have to feel safe coming here. That will tie into the campaign that we're pulling together now, on Safe to Play, Safe Stay. But the cost of implementing the PPE is extensive. That's where we would request some assistance for

the businesses, if possible. But they are indeed committed to making sure that we have it.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Thanks again for your answer.

Would you support the idea of the province offering a tax credit designed to offer a tax break for people who travel within Ontario and come into Niagara Falls? And just to give you a heads-up: I asked that question with Niagara Parks, and they liked the idea as well, so I'll let you answer that, giving you a heads-up about the parks.

Ms. Janice Thomson: This would be an individual tax credit—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Janice Thomson: —if you went to visit Niagara Falls?

Mr. Wayne Gates: Yes.

Ms. Janice Thomson: And is that provincial? That's something that you would take through the provincial government, then?

Mr. Wayne Gates: Yes.

Ms. Janice Thomson: I guess I would say that Niagara Falls Tourism would support any initiative that helps direct visitors to stay in our hotel rooms and keep our area vibrant and busy and thriving and get us back on our feet.

One of the things we could use immediately would be a community liaison officer from the province—someone who would come here and say, “Okay. My job is to help you get open,” and actually be standing here with us in the destination.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Thanks, Janice. I'll ask you a question, because this is a conversation I've had with the mayor of Niagara-on-the-Lake and a conversation with Mayor Diodati, around closing down some of the streets in Niagara Falls to allow some of the restaurant owners and the patios to expand into the streets. I'll use Clifton Hill as an example. I'll use Queen Street, which you're familiar with, in Niagara-on-the-Lake. Obviously, social distancing is important. Have you had any conversation around that, or do you think it's a good idea to take a serious look at that?

Ms. Janice Thomson: I would say that's something that's entirely up to the BIAs—the different business improvement areas—who have made the long-term investments in their areas. They're the ones that, between the business owners in their areas, have an understanding of how they're best going to manage the flow of visitors, so that is something I would need to go back to the BIAs and see what their feelings were on that.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Okay, I appreciate that. As you know, the tourism industry is home to large tourist attractions and small ones. Focusing on smaller operations, do you think there is enough government support to help keep our small-size tourist operators in business without taking on massive debt?

Ms. Janice Thomson: I would say that the assistance in the payroll has been helpful for the small operators; so has the \$40,000 loan—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Janice Thomson: —with \$10,000 not being repayable. That has appealed more and worked more for

the smaller operators. In our case here in Niagara Falls, I believe it's more the large operators that are looking for the fluidity. They need some cash flow; they have larger debt loads because they're all in the middle of expansions and growth, both of which are good for our community and good for the tourism industry. That's my observation.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Janice, it kind of goes back to what the last presenter said and how I started my presentation: It's all about loans, loans and loans—

Ms. Janice Thomson: Yes.

Mr. Wayne Gates: —[*inaudible*] credit unions, because a lot of people don't understand that Niagara Falls is a family-run town—city, frankly. Most of it is owned by families in Niagara Falls, and a lot of them use the credit unions and that's why it's important to have them. They have done an incredible job in promoting our city, providing employment—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Sorry. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Sorry to cut you off. We'll have to move to the independent members now, and I'll start with MPP Hunter.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you, Chair, and thank you to all of our presenters today. I want to say, Betty, your story was truly remarkable. I know that you said you were a true northerner with an incredible story of how your family arrived. I really also liked the way you talk about the visitors to your lodge—you know, you're out in the bush and you've got to feed them, and it's just the reality of the situation—really great.

I do want to ask Mark a question around—as well, I want you to talk about your customers and the percentage that you see coming domestically, coming from the US, or other—international. I do have some questions around that, and so if you could just start there with me, please.

Mr. Mark Graves: Sure. Thank you, MPP Hunter. About 70% of our members' customers come from the US. A small percentage, I'm guessing at about 5%, would probably be overseas or outside of that area. The rest would be Canadian, and probably a good chunk of Ontario tourism coming up north for stuff. Our members are certainly feeling the impact of the border closure, and again, the unknown of not knowing what to do, and having protocols in place for if and when things do open up, just to create the certainty that the operators are looking for to say, "If we have time, we can plan."

Lately, everything has been at the eleventh hour. We find out today that tonight at midnight, short-term rentals can open. But there's no real direction. We haven't been able to get anything out to our members as to what they need to do to be prepared, so we're all scrambling now, saying, "Okay, well, we can open, but we're really not ready because we didn't know what to do and when to be ready for."

A lot of small operators haven't sent in water samples and got their water systems running because they didn't know that they could be prepared to open, or that there was a chance of opening, and all of those are costs that everybody is trying to alleviate spending money until

there's a known. Then, at the eleventh hour, we're told we can open but then we're afraid: "Well, if we open, who are we opening to?"

1600

I can tell you that our experience right now is that we've lost 100% of our family reunions and weddings for the year for our resort. The calls we're getting are all from people from downtown Toronto who want to get out of Toronto and come up north for a few days or a weekend or a week. That's great, but we don't have the protocols, and there's a fear that our health care systems up here can't handle it if [*inaudible*]—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Mark Graves: —moves up.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: In terms of the water samples and testing, is there any delay in that? I did hear that from another presenter yesterday. Can you talk about that, Mark—if you're anticipating that, whether it's because of more limited air travel or other types of deliveries?

Mr. Mark Graves: Water sampling is done through private labs for any businesses. Water sampling for personal—in northern Ontario, if you want to own a home with a well, you can send a water sample in weekly to the lab and have it tested for free. But if you're a business, it has to go to a private lab. Those private labs are not located on every corner, and there are specific protocols for taking the sample, sending it in, shipping it and all of those things. It can take a week to 10 days to get a sample in and tested and the results back. So if we're told today that we can open, we can't technically allow drinking water for up to two weeks.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I think it was Betty who talked about that, as well. The lead time and proper guidance and being specific is important.

Mark, you also talked about the increase in costs—four times the cost for cleaning. How are your members going to cope? The expectation is that we're not going to get back to full operations for a little while, yet your costs are going to go up right away.

Mr. Mark Graves: Our members run on thin margins to begin with, and trying to make enough money through the season to carry them through the winter and have what they need to open up next spring—cleaning costs and time both in manpower and product are escalating. It used to take 15 or 20 minutes to clean an average room; now you could be two hours.

And there's a lot of controversy online about proper cleaning protocols. We bought a fogging unit for our cottages, and just in the last two days we found out that they're saying that the only way to do soft surfaces is to wash them. If you have to take bedspreads and throw them in the wash every time, you're multiplying your costs immensely. You're going to have to buy bedspreads, because they don't dry; you can't throw them in a dryer. So you may need three or four changes, as Betty alluded to. Again, not knowing proper protocols—and certainly, we're not blaming the government for this. We're learning more about COVID-19 every day—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I'm sorry to cut you off.

That concludes our time. Thank you to all three presenters for your time and your presentation.

Before I move on to our next presenter, I would like to let the members know that one of the presenters, Computer Animation Studios of Ontario, has cancelled, if you want to cross it off your agenda.

SHAW FESTIVAL

MUSIC AFRICA OF CANADA INC.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): I'll now call upon Shaw Festival. Please state your name for the record, and you'll have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Tim Jennings: I'm Tim Jennings. I'm the executive director and CEO of the Shaw Festival.

Good afternoon. I'd like to thank the committee for the opportunity to present to you today on the impact of COVID-19 on the Shaw Festival, on live performing arts in Ontario and on regional tourism.

I want to commend the committee for working across party lines to consider and recommend the fiscal and economic policies that will shape our joint future through these difficult times.

The Shaw Festival is located in Niagara-on-the-Lake, a small town of 16,000 people and the original capital of Upper Canada.

The reason I speak on behalf of tourism today, rather than arts and culture, is that the Shaw Festival is the largest generator of economic impact of any independent arts-and-culture charity in rural Ontario, and one of the largest in North America. The annual impact of the Shaw Festival on Niagara and Ontario tourism is in excess of \$220 million per annum. Thousands of Niagara-area jobs are reliant on us for their existence.

We are the greater Niagara region's largest cultural charity and one of its 20 largest employers, with a workforce of up to 600 artists and arts professionals, primarily highly skilled unionized workers. We produce 750 performances of 12 to 14 concurrently running productions in a rotating repertory, meaning each actor is performing in two plays at a time and understudying a third or more. Uniquely, we have, to date, been able to maintain almost all of our employees and artists on our payroll despite a complete lack of summer sales.

We offer more than 2,000 additional audience engagement and community outreach activities and classes each season, to a combined total audience of 325,000 people from early April through the end of December, and we are supported by the Shaw Guild, a group of 350 volunteers who help us in everything from gardening to ticket-taking to helping with our education work.

Our patrons come and stay in the area for long periods, often anchoring extended annual vacations around a multi-performance theatre experience. Last year we had well over 1,000 individuals attend more than 15 performances

of each of our 13 plays, with dozens more attending upwards of 30 to 40 performances, meaning they saw every show in our season three or more times over multi-week stays in the area. They stay in hotels, lease short-term housing, eat in the restaurants, buy wine from dozens of the amazing local vineyards, shop on the main street, and buy locally grown produce from local farmers to take on picnics to the area parks and attractions while they explore the beauty that is Niagara.

The year 2019 was the highest gross revenue year in our history, with an income of over \$34 million. Seventy per cent of our revenue comes from sales in tickets and other earned revenue sources; only 6% comes from all government sources, including provincial and federal arts councils. We must raise the additional \$9 million in annual charitable donations from our philanthropic supporters. US and international patrons account for 35% of our sales and donations, and the rest arrive from across every district of Ontario and Canada. We are in fact the epitome of an arts tourism destination.

According to Statistics Canada, the live performing arts industry in Ontario generates over \$2.5 billion in direct annual income and leverages more than \$12 billion in additional economic impact. Over 60,000 Ontarians work in our industry—the equivalent of a mid-size town. At a combined \$14.5 billion, the performing arts impact is in parallel to the utilities industry and exceeds the agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting industries combined; and mining, quarrying and oil and gas extraction; and is one that, unusually, is driven by the charitable sector, being the majority of Ontario's theatre and performing arts organizations.

For theatres in rural Ontario, this impact is primarily tourism, with the largest of these being the Shaw and Stratford festivals, but there are dozens of others that are all core areas of their local economies. More than 55% of Ontarians attend plays or musicals every year, with live performing arts attendance—that being plays, concerts, dances etc.—outstripping in-person attendance at sporting events.

We know from Destination Canada and others that the average Ontario arts and culture tourist spends twice as much per trip as does a typical tourist. These factors combine to show a vibrant ecology and economy that has been completely devastated by COVID-19, and will continue to devastate our industry as long as mass gatherings are deemed unsafe. We were among the first businesses ordered closed, and we may well be among the last to be allowed back to our work.

Importantly, actors, designers, directors, choreographers, musicians and many others are part of Ontario's significant gig economy and mostly work as independent contractors, which means that the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy was initially unable to be used by most performing arts institutions to immediately help the very people who are the reason audiences come to see us. While my own company has been able to pivot and find ways to offer alternative employment to the 80 artists that we have and use to support this—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Two minutes.

Mr. Tim Jennings:—this has not been an option available to most Ontario artists and institutions, who are now struggling for their very survival. Cash flow is needed to make these resources available—this, after decades of being the primary tourism draw to their towns and delivering billions of dollars in combined taxes over decades.

My request to the committee would be as follows, that Bill 186 be amended to allow the following:

- flexibility for EI qualification for seasonal workers and temporary support of independent artists. Seasonal workers are all independent artists and would be unable to meet required numbers of hours or contributions for EI over this summer. We require flexibility;

- provincial contribution to the federal Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy so that it can be scaled and continued for longer, well into the recovery phase;

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Tim Jennings:—a strong and well-executed plan from the province to ensure that we have access to advanced testing and contact tracing;

- to increase the charitable donation tax credit from 11.16% to 20%. This will incentivize Ontarians to make more and larger gifts to charities and put Ontario in line with other provinces. Ontario has the lowest donation tax credit rate of any province. For example, Quebec, 24%; Alberta, 21%. The federal rate is 29%.

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- direct financial aids and grants for live performance and tourism businesses that require infrastructure upgrades and PPE to be in compliance with all new health and safety protocols to keep workers and patrons safe—especially important for mass gathering sites;

- additional funding for the Ontario Arts Council and the Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries is needed immediately and through the 2021 and 2022 recovery periods;

- grants to performing arts facilities and tourism businesses to complete capital infrastructure projects;

- government-guaranteed small business loans for the tourism and hospitality sector for the recovery stages—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off. Your time has come up now.

We'll move to our next presenter, from Music Africa of Canada Inc. If you could please state your name for the record. You have seven minutes.

Mr. Peter Toh: My name is Peter Toh. I'm the executive and artistic director of Music Africa of Canada Inc. We are the organizers of the annual African festival in Toronto. It's called Afrofest. It happens every year in July in ward 19, Woodbine Park, Toronto. This is a two-day festival. It brings together about 120,000 people—local, national and international visitors—partaking in the consumption of various elements of African culture.

We've operated for 32 years. We started off at Queen's Park and in 2012 we had to move to Woodbine Park because we outgrew the Queen's Park venue.

Being the largest free African festival in North America, visiting Afrofest to most tourists is considered a

pilgrimage, an opportunity for visitors from all over the country and beyond to network and enjoy the music and cultural representations the event has got to offer. The good thing about the event is that it is free.

Most of our tourists come from the United States. We did a survey last year and we asked visitors where they came from. Some 42% of them indicated that they either have a friend or family that has to travel about 40 kilometres to come to the event. Also, last year we had a partnership with Ethiopian Airlines to give discounted tickets to encourage travellers coming from Africa to attend the event, and about 760 individuals came from Africa just to attend Afrofest. Now, this may be considered a small number. However, considering that the price per ticket is about \$2,000 and considering that the visitors are coming from Africa to us, that is pretty significant.

At Afrofest, we also give the audience an opportunity to present their individual cultures.

If I have to do a revenue breakdown of where we get our money from, 38% comes from municipal, provincial and federal grants; 35% from vendors; 15% from corporate sponsorship; 10% from subsidiary events; and 2% from donations. With COVID-19, the main impact will result in a reduction of annual revenue. Sponsorship revenue is going to drop.

The interesting thing with our event is that all of our sponsorship doesn't come from Canadian organizations or Canadian corporations. Corporate sponsorship is from foreign organizations. So if there is no travel, then for instance one of our sponsors like Ethiopian Airlines cannot support us. Also, World Remit is one of our main sponsors. They also cannot sponsor us because of the reduction in their own business.

We also have lost revenue from subsidiary events. During the Afrofest period we do events in Toronto, in Ajax, in Hamilton, in Ottawa and sometimes as far as Halifax. We use this revenue to continue to grow our event but unfortunately, without the ability to present any events, we are not able to raise revenue. The interesting thing with the events that we organize is, most of them are attended by tourists because, when they get to town, they have more time on their hands; they want to do more. So they are the ones who patronize our events.

As I mentioned, 10% of our revenue comes from the events we organize—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Peter Toh: Okay. This year, we expect to see 60% of our total revenue, and this is as a direct result of a reduction in tourism. I cannot say that if we are not allowed to operate fully at 100%, everything is going to come back to normal, because we depend on small businesses and smaller entrepreneurs and the networking that these people have created locally and internationally to attract people to the event. So, without that, even though this year our revenue has reduced by 60%—and we may say, "Okay. Next year we're going to present an event." I'm unsure that we'll be able to meet our revenue targets for next year, which means that we will not be able to present the same type of event next year. And the local

African economy is going to suffer because they use our event as a platform to present products to the African community.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We'll start the questions now. The opposition party: MPP Shaw.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: My question is for Tim with the Shaw Festival. I have to say, part of the reason I'm going first is because I liked your slogan, which is "The Shaw Must Go On." I couldn't agree with you more in that regard.

As a family, we have been going to the Shaw Festival—as a young girl, I remember going to Niagara-on-the-Lake in the 1960s, early 1970s, and it was really just a rural town. There was hardly anything there. There was the Shaw Festival, and there was maybe one restaurant or so. It was very, very rural. I've seen, with some sort of pride, it growing. I was looking forward to seeing Sherlock Holmes this year. I'm sure we'll still get to see that.

I'm going to give you some more time. We've been hearing time and time again from witnesses who are saying that deferred taxes are great and funds for marketing are great but that what they need is actual, direct cash to manage their cash flow. They're looking for liquidity. You talked about direct grants, you talked about increasing the Ontario Arts Council, you talked about grants for capital infrastructure, and then you basically ran out of time when you got to the point of talking about government loans. Can you talk a little bit about the direct infusion of capital that your organization needs?

Mr. Tim Jennings: My organization is actually not the major reason I'm here to speak today. I'm speaking on behalf of tourism across rural Ontario. We have a big voice and we want to use it to help.

That said, all arts-and-culture organizations, especially theatres, at this point are going to need the help of things like small business loans for tourism and hospitality. We are part of an ecology, and as a charity, we see that as an important thing—that we are more than the sum of our parts. So while we are a \$35-million business, the impact we have is important to the town and the region at a level I can't begin to underwrite. What we're looking for is help for the whole tourism ecology, so that when we're ready to come back up and help, they're also still there.

As you say, we've spent 50 years developing a fantastic destination point, and for it to be ruined over an 18-month period is ridiculous. That \$220 million we generate is millions and millions of dollars in taxes every year, and if we need to invest \$5 million or \$10 million into the town or \$1 billion into the entire economy, I think that's very important to do in the next 18 months. I offer that to you as a suggestion for small business loans to the hospitality sector through this period. For tourism, I would suggest direct emergency funding to Destination Ontario and the regional DMOs to help market these things across the province, across Canada and ultimately into the United States and beyond, as we're ready to bring people back.

I think there's a huge incentive opportunity for the whole charitable sector through that increase in the donation tax credit rate, and it's something that we're not

talking about nearly enough—that Ontario was far behind every other province on this issue. I think it could help not just arts-and-culture charities, certainly, but hospitals—it could help front-line workers. This is something I think the government can do, even on a short-term basis, that could be very helpful.

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Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you for that. I have to confess that my trip to Niagara-on-the-Lake is about the Shaw, but it's about Greaves jam as well. I have to get my marmalade as soon as they're open.

With that, I'm going to pass it over to MPP Lindo to finish our questioning. Thank you very much to all the presenters.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Lindo: Three minutes left.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Thank you very, very much, Chair. My question is for you, Peter. Thank you so much for joining us today and talking about the significance of Afrofest. It's interesting, because yesterday through the course of the hearings, we were talking a lot about that web that a lot of these kinds of festivals rely on to thrive, so what they give back to the economy. We're thinking about economic recovery and why it's so important for us to invest in solutions that don't have us lose these kinds of moments, where there's cultural retention and, most importantly, as you were saying, how our local economy helps to support the voice of our African community members. When I think of Afrofest, the amount of artisans that are presenting their wares, talking about what cultural retention looks like and providing a sense of pride, given what is happening in our current climate, in the midst of the pandemic—we're talking about the need to go back to our roots etc. and the loss of something like Afrofest, I cannot express how important it is that you tell us exactly what it is that you need to thrive.

I know I've heard that we need direct funding as opposed to loans. I'm wondering if you can speak about that. There has also been a lot of talk about the need for PPE in the future. As somebody who is working with independent artists, there might be things that you're hearing from independent artists—like what kinds of gaps there are in the program funding. With all of that, I'm sending it over to you.

Mr. Peter Toh: Thank you very much. I'll start with your last point, with support that the artists get. I don't know how best we can solve this—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Peter Toh: I don't know how best we can solve this specific issue, because most of our artists are self-employed and they depend on organizations like Afrofest to provide them with opportunities to perform. If we do not present events, then artists don't get paid. Most of them now will have to come to the government, and I'm not sure that they will have the support that they need to survive from the government. If the government can institute some programs so that independent artists, if their gigs disappear, are still able to support themselves, that would be helpful.

Then for an organization like Music Africa, we provide an opportunity for local entrepreneurs. For an entrepreneur to start a business, if there's opportunity within the African community, most of them test their product at Afrofest. Most of them look for their first clients at Afrofest. Most of them depend on the networks that they build at Afrofest to grow their event. The niche—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off.

We'll have to move to the independent members now for their time. MPP Hunter—or MPP Schreiner, sorry.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Thanks to both presenters. Peter, I'm going to let you finish answering that question, because I think supporting artisans and particularly new entrepreneurs is really important and the multiplier effect of what Afrofest and other festivals like this provide for businesses, small entrepreneurs is really important. Can you maybe just talk a bit more about how you're supporting artisans and entrepreneurs?

Mr. Peter Toh: Okay. Thank you very much. For this year, even though we're not having an event at the park, what we're doing is we are presenting Afrofest online. We have decided that instead of bringing a two-day event, we're going to do a 10-day event: two hours every day. So we're hiring the artists that would have performed at the park, but bringing them to perform from the comfort of their homes. Hopefully, that is going to make a difference for them. We're going to try as much as possible to build a buzz around these artists.

On the flip side, we're also creating a platform so that people who see these artists, people who listen to these artists can donate to the artist directly, if they so choose or if they appreciate what they see.

One of my greatest concerns is, yes, this year we will navigate through the issues that we face, but what happens next year when the government finally opens, when the government says, "Okay, you guys are good to go"? How are we going to survive? Mainly because we are already experiencing a drop in revenue right now.

The artists and the artisans and some of the entrepreneurs are not going to be able to survive through their business this year. We're not going to have as many vendors as we had last year because most of them may go out of business or they may need time to recover. These are the effects that are long-term that, I'm afraid, I don't have an answer to, and I'm hoping that you guys maybe do.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Thanks, Peter. I'll just have you know that when you were speaking there, Tim started clapping virtually. So I'm going to direct this question to him and then ask you to maybe follow up.

I've talked to a number of artists—it has been a double whammy. Their ability to perform has been cancelled, and then the supplemental income that oftentimes happens through the hospitality industry—they've lost that too. So it's a double whammy. CERB is going to expire soon, and so I'm just wondering if we need some sort of income supplement program, especially for artists, just to help

them survive through this, because it has been a disproportionate impact.

Tim, do you want to start with that, and then, Peter, I'll let you follow up?

Mr. Tim Jennings: Yes, 100%, I completely agree with you. I think the opportunities to either open up something through the employment insurance program or some other investment process that would allow the province to underwrite, especially people impacted like this in the tourism and the entertainment industries, would be very, very helpful.

There are larger organizations like ourselves who can find ways to pivot and make access to things like CEWS, but as Peter rightly said, most independent artists don't have a sheltering body that they can work with that way, and so we need programs that are going to be able to help all of those independent artists who aren't caught by organizations like myself.

Mr. Peter Toh: If I may add to that, within the African community—I can say this personally and out of my own personal experience—most of the African artists that I know have a hard time getting grants from the government. And so when the government says they're going to give grants, they usually go through, say, the Toronto Arts Council—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Peter Toh: —or they go through Heritage Canada or the Canada Council for the Arts, and say, "Okay. If you've been a previous recipient, then we're going to give you money." However, some of these are artists within our community who have never received these grants, and so there is no way for them to get the support they need even though they're artists. So I don't know if there's a way to support the artists who have not received grants previously from the government and who desperately need them.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Further questions? MPP Schreiner?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: How much time do I have?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Two minutes.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Oh, good. I have more time than I thought. Great. Okay.

Peter, I was wondering, if you receive some direct funding to support Afrofest, could you then leverage that into a multiplier to support artists and artisans to help keep their business alive? I'm just thinking of it as like a good investment for us that has multiple benefits. Can you maybe elaborate on my question here?

Mr. Peter Toh: Yes, please. That would definitely be helpful. The reason I say this is because, right now, for Afrofest online, we're hiring about 40 artists and we're just paying them the minimum, just so that at least they've got something. If we have more, we will be able to do more.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Great. Thank you.

Tim, I just want to close with you and the idea of increasing the charitable tax credit. Can you maybe explain how that would benefit the tourism industry, I guess, in general and artists in particular?

Mr. Tim Jennings: Yes. So effectively, what would happen with—for instance, right now we have an artist support fund that’s going on. It’s underwriting housing for artists—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute—

Mr. Tim Jennings: —who aren’t working currently. It’s underwriting the top-up of the CEWS to make sure that they have a living wage. We’re underwriting—most of our folks are at full salary at the moment, and so those sorts of things compel people to make decisions to give more to charity. Comparatively speaking, Canada is behind places like the US in charitable giving on a per person basis. So part of the largest cultural economy, the largest charitable economy, in Canada is in Ontario, and yet we have the lowest rate of incentive to try to get people to donate to these charitable functions.

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Certainly, in tourism, any of the DMOs or places that are non-profits that can take money that support other organizations would be able to make use of this, as would any of the services that a lot of our tourism people are relying on right now. Things like access to health care etc. are expensive, and we need more money going into them from the charities sector.

So I want it to help us, but I also want it to help the whole—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We’ll move to the government side now. I’ll start with MPP Sabawy.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you very much for this very informative submission.

I’m interested to hear from you, Tim: Is there any opportunity, maybe with some funding from the government, to build some virtual platforms? You are, as I can see here, the chief executive officer of Computer Animation Studios—no? Maybe I’m mistaken.

Mr. Tim Jennings: I’m the CEO of the Shaw Festival, which is a theatre festival in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Okay. I will ask the second question because that would be more suitable.

Do you think festivals are going to go back to the vibe we used to have in different areas of Ontario—under the different banners, different cultures? Even if we opened that for the public, do you see that coming back, with the shadow of COVID-19—people will be reluctant to go out freely to festivals like that. In your opinion, what can we as a government do to encourage, when the message so far from the medical chief officer is to try to avoid crowds and to distance and all kinds of advice—we look to you to think about more virtualization, a transformation of the facilities, to make sure that we can continue doing what we do every year, on every occasion, going forward, until God knows when we will be back to normal. Is there any way we can work together to create a virtual framework of some sort so that those artists can join those facilities and get income, ongoing, through virtualization, until things change?

Mr. Tim Jennings: There are a couple of questions you’re asking that I can address.

I work in the live performance industry, and the virtual work we’re doing—and we are doing a lot of it; I have AV artists currently working at creating digital content—isn’t theatre; it’s things to engage with our patrons while we’re waiting to get back to our stages. We’re looking at outdoor opportunities. We’re looking at distancing within our theatre spaces. We’re trying to create opportunities that will allow artists to work successfully together.

We have some advantages in my space, because I have 80 ensemble members, many of whom are married or live in communal housing, so they’re able to work together differently than, perhaps, urban artists are.

However, I will say that the digitization of our art form is not—it’s bad television, to be honest. It’s not going to make money in a way that would support artists like music might. Music can much more easily move to that form and potentially create a new economy that way.

We’re in a position where live stage performance can’t even happen—nor can film, at the moment—rehearsals aren’t allowed to happen, so creating new digital content is limited to solo or very small groups of people who are currently socially isolating together.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Tim Jennings: It’s a tricky space.

I think the important thing at the moment is to create real parameters around physical distancing and smaller events—that could perhaps be large numbers of people moving through small venues, small areas, in some kind of a miracle play, where you go from pageant wagon to pageant wagon, so that you’re seeing many things in short bits. That may be something we can do outdoors or in small theatre settings.

The Berliner Ensemble has created a very interesting system of social distancing in Germany for allowing them to get people back in the room within their theatre; however, they are 86% supported by government in this. Of their €25-million budget, €21 million comes from the city of Berlin. So it’s something that can be solved with money and investment and research and development of these new ideas, absolutely. And I think we’re going to need that. We’re going to need lots of different organizations like Peter’s and mine to try different kinds of things so that we can open the doors to how we get back to a thriving economy. But the economy we’re trying to talk about here is tourism, and that isn’t online; that’s in person. So we have to find ways to do that.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you very much for your answer. Again, I just would like to leave a sentence there because—before I move to the next question with my colleague—we need to start thinking out of the box because life before COVID-19 is not going to be like life after COVID. So I think we need to work together on [*inaudible*]—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Sheref, are you there?

All right, I think your device is breaking down. We’ll move to MPP Crawford for the one minute we have.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thanks, Chair. Perhaps if we don’t have time now, we can finish up in the supplementary questions. I want to thank both speakers for coming

in—both great festivals. The Shaw Festival, I've been to many times. Afrofest, I have not, but I look forward to going there. I've been to Africa, but I haven't been to Afrofest. I didn't know much about it.

With that, I wanted to ask Peter about Afrofest, just in terms of how long it has been around—what kind of support have you had in the past from the government? How has your festival grown over the number of years? What kind of economic impact do you have in the community? Finally, what would you like from the government going forward? We may not be able to finish that all now, but perhaps you can get started.

Mr. Peter Toh: Okay—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Sorry to cut you off. We'll come back in the second round for this.

We'll now have to move to the independent members. Who's going to start first? MPP Hunter.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you so much for both your presentations.

I do want to ask Tim—you had a list you were going through in terms of things in your opening presentation that you wanted to see from the government. I did take note of the flexibility for EI extended to artists and seasonal workers and also the incentive for donations and tax credits. We should definitely look at jurisdictional comparisons to other areas in Canada, in particular, at a time when I do think that those who have the ability do want to help their charitable organizations, particularly in the arts sector. Do you have further things you wanted to advise? I want to just give you the opportunity to do that. Tim is trying to—there we go.

Mr. Tim Jennings: Thank you. Yes. I think the biggest thing that could happen, really, is to give additional funding to the Ontario Arts Council—the Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries—so that they can help us with things like supporting the DMOs for marketing, so that they can help things like facility and tourism business capital infrastructure programs, so they can help with the operating grants and project grants that are going to be necessary and so they can fund research and development of activities to try to generate, as we were just discussing, real opportunities. I agree with Peter that there needs to be some funding available for new and emerging artists in this moment or we're going to lose them. There needs to be the opportunity for new voices to be heard, especially in these moments of crisis. So I think it's extremely important that that ministry and that organization be funded in ways that can help generate amplification.

Every dollar invested into the arts and culture industry or tourism generates more money for the rest of us. Nobody comes to see a play at the Shaw Festival without going and getting dinner, staying in a hotel, buying a drink. No one goes to Afrofest without the idea of buying artisan wares and seeing artists. There are multipliers there that are very important to the economy, and they're quite large. So that is how I would do that—to give the money to the organizational spaces that know best how to amplify those

areas. Programs like Celebrate Ontario are fantastic that way. There are all sorts of great things happening.

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The ICIP, the infrastructure program that was put together with the federal government, is something that I think could be very helpful in a bunch of the facility infrastructure work that's coming up. An extension and improvement of that fund could be excellent for the whole province. So thank you.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you. I wish you all the best in NOTL.

Mr. Tim Jennings: Thank you. I appreciate that. We hope to see you soon.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Yes, for sure.

Peter, I was at Afrofest last summer. I bought some clothing items from the vendors that were there and enjoyed—I think it was freestyle drumming where I was. It was just a really great vibe.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I'm just wondering about—and first of all, I will fully support your recommendation that your artists be recognized in the grant review process and that you're not facing rules where you're automatically not considered, because that doesn't make sense. So I'll just make sure that we move that forward as well, in terms of advice to the government.

You talked about how your festival is very much connected with international artists as well as those who are being—you're exposing Ontario or exposing Canada in this way. I'm just wondering what your thoughts are, given the fact that the world itself has really shifted and a lot of what we've been talking about over the last two days with tourism operators and festivals and attractions is that they're going to have to reintroduce themselves first to a domestic market. We heard from the Niagara Falls association that said that they're doing it in phases and starting with four hours and seven hours, which only includes the Quebec border, before they even think about further afield. Are you looking at that kind of scaling as well, in the realities of COVID-19, so that we can make sure that Afrofest weathers this and continues to do its work?

Mr. Peter Toh: Yes. Thank you very much. The interesting thing is, considering that we have existed for so long, for 32 years, most other organizations outside of Canada, most African art organizations—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Peter Toh: —look to us for guidance. Whatever we do, they communicate with us, and so when we're looking at presenting events, we're not only doing it for Toronto; we're trying to build audiences for African artists outside Toronto. Right now, we're working with some artists in Ghana, we're working with some artists in the States, and we're also working with some artists in the UK and trying to build those connections. We understand that after COVID-19, if we have our artists well marketed in these areas, that gives opportunities for them and also gives opportunities for people who are outside to see what

we are doing here and have the incentive to come here to experience it on a larger scale.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I just want to use my last few seconds to say that both organizations continue to thrive and prosper, and the contributions you're making to the arts communities are invaluable. I just want to thank you for always supporting local artists and international artists. Thank you so very much.

Mr. Peter Toh: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We'll go back to the government side. MPP Crawford.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: I'll just follow up and remind Peter of the questions that we didn't get around to: How long has Afrofest been around? How has it grown? What kind of economic impact has it in the community and the GTA? And also, what has been the history of the Ontario government with this festival in the past? How do you see us playing a role in the future, and where do you see the festival going in the future?

I'll let you respond. Thank you.

Mr. Peter Toh: Okay, thank you very much. We've been around for 32 years. In 2012, we were encouraged to leave our venue of Woodbine Park, and the reason was because we outgrew Woodbine Park. Last year, we had an audience of about 138,000 over the course of two days, and the event continues to grow every single year.

With respect to the government support that we receive, it has been great so far. We receive support from the Toronto Arts Council, the Ontario Arts Council, Heritage Canada and also the Canada Council for the Arts. Where I would say there can be more done for artists: with FACTOR. The reason I'm saying this is because most of the time, African artists need individual support—not through festivals, but African artists need support from the government. When artists need support, most of them go to FACTOR, and unfortunately, based on what I've heard, the support is not usually there the way I would have liked to see it. So if that could happen, I would greatly appreciate it.

Where do I see the festival going in the future? Last year, we did an event in Africa. We're also trying to do an event in the States. The reason why we're trying to do other events is so that when we decide to do something, or when we do something in Toronto, it's only going to get bigger. We understand that building markets outside of Canada will encourage more people to come to Canada to experience it. In Canada, we have the opportunity to present an event free of charge. We don't have that same opportunity outside. So the more we can market ourselves outside and show people outside what the African scene here in Toronto is, then I think the more we can invite people in. I think it goes the same for other smaller cultural organizations that can benefit from exposing themselves to international markets.

Did I miss one of your questions?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Any further questions, MPP Crawford or MPP Khanjin?

Mr. Stephen Crawford: That's good. I'll pass it over to my colleague.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We'll go to MPP Khanjin.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Thank you. Tim, like many of my colleagues, my fiancé and I often frequent Shaw, and we go to St. Jacobs market, have COWS ice cream and the whole bit. Certainly, there's a huge economy there, and it's all the experience.

My question to all of you is: When you're thinking about that experience in terms of how you—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: —get back to people coming, should we open up patios? Should we open outdoor spaces? Should we do a Shakespeare in the Park like they have in Toronto? How do you operate in this new norm so you can still bring patrons to your venues?

Mr. Tim Jennings: Yes, I think all of those things. The opportunity to experiment is what I think people need at this point, and the opportunity to try things carefully. Government guidance on that will be necessary—certainly public health guidance on that will be extremely necessary—and the infrastructure to be able to get equipment to make sure that we are safe, whether that's testing equipment or cleaning equipment, or whatever it is. I know we're looking at all of that.

We're also looking at options to do things in non-traditional ways: working outdoors, as you say, rather than in our theatres, or in our smaller theatres in ways that allow us to do 100-person performances rather than 500-person performances. These are the things that will need to be tried, and they're going to need to be supported. That's why I say, not just us, but all the theatres, all the performing arts organizations and all the festivals are going to need to try different things and we're going to need the tourism folks around us to also do that.

If I can do a play and have a two-hour intermission where people can leave and go to the main street and have ice cream at COWS and get their dinner in a way that makes sense and then come back—because we've then cleaned the venue again so they can come back and see act II—maybe that's a new way of approaching theatre. I can have a two-hour intermission and start the show early and end at the same time; things like that may be the way to try stuff. But we need time and money to be able to do that, and we need to be ready as soon as we can be to start that economy back up. It's very important to the people around us.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Thank you. Peter, do you want to comment on how you could do your festival outside and what kind of guidelines you'd need?

Mr. Peter Toh: Yes. I'm going to agree with Tim, that if we have to do anything outside—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Peter Toh: —we'd appreciate some government guidance, and also testing equipment. The last thing that I would like to see happen is an organization like us take the risk of doing something outside and they hear that some of our patrons are at risk because we've decided to do something outside. I would rather wait and get all the

information that I can get, the guidance I can get from the government, before we decide to do anything outside.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Piccini, if you want to add something in about 30 seconds.

Interruption.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): All right. We'll move to the opposition party now for their second round. I'll start with MPP Gates.

1650

Mr. Wayne Gates: Hi, how are you? I'm going to direct my questions to Tim. Tim, thank you for being here. A few weeks ago, I received a very moving letter from artists and workers from the Shaw, outlining what will happen if the government does not step in and save the Shaw. Can you explain to this committee what we would lose in terms of employment and cultural heritage if the Shaw is not supported?

Mr. Tim Jennings: Very nice to see you, too, Minister.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Not yet.

Mr. Tim Jennings: The Shaw is, as I say, the cornerstone of Niagara. We're responsible for 9% of the tourism economy of the largest tourism region of Ontario, and so we are very important to the ecology, the economy and, I would say, from the point of view of the culture and history of Canada. We're one of the two large theatre festivals in the country. We employ 600 people at the height of the season, 400 most of the year, 80 actors in our ensembles, and we run from April to December, so there's a massive cultural infrastructure related to us.

We are ultimately a destination for artists, artisans and art workers. People come to us. We're one of the five largest theatre companies in North America, and certainly one of the five largest charitable producers on the continent. There are very few rotating repertory ensemble companies left at all in the world; in fact, only five in the English world. So we are a unique and a very important part, I think, of the Canadian ecology.

The people who are writing you—and I agree with them 100% on this that we need support. But we need support not just for us, because the actors and artists who come to us come through other organizations. They don't start at the Shaw; they get to the Shaw. And so we need the whole ecology to thrive and to be supported through this period.

We would love to be supported, obviously, directly by the government to be able to support those people we have on staff, but we want all artists supported through this period, and we want all tourism supported through this period, because we need that. It's such a huge part of our economy, and for the 18 months that it takes, hopefully, to get all of that back in shape—and I hope that's how long it takes, or maybe less—it's a small investment against a huge future. So I would say: Don't forget that for decades these organizations have been supporting their towns, and now they need your support in order to get through this period so that they're there, as Peter rightly said, at the end of this. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. MPP Gates, can you unmute yourself?

Mr. Wayne Gates: Oh, you put me on mute. Okay. Sorry.

We know that you've done an excellent job of keeping—and this is really, really important for a lot of workplaces, not just the Shaw—many unionized employees on with assistance from the federal government, obviously with the wage subsidy program. Above all, what can the government of Ontario do today to save the Shaw and protect the Shaw workers from financial ruin, but—to your answer on the previous question—also right across the province of Ontario, whether it's Stratford or all of the other places that we need to take care of?

Mr. Tim Jennings: I think the biggest thing you can really do is to help pressure the federal government, and invest yourselves, in the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy and the CERB to try to continue those things, or EI, or whatever makes the most sense from the government's point of view.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Tim Jennings: But the wage subsidy right now—we were able to take these artists, who are all independent artists, and create a summer jobs program that gave them all employment, and therefore I was able to get all of them onto the wage subsidy. But that kind of investment was only possible because I had access to cash flow that a lot of other theatre companies do not, and so it's extremely important to try to find these ways, and to know we have them for the long term so that we can get through this.

If the charitable sector in arts and culture or artists could be supported through CEWS, CERB or EI in ways that allow us to top that up and make use of them so that they're available to us as we are able to figure these things out, we'll be able to get through this. If that doesn't happen, I'm not sure what will happen. We may not.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Lindo.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: My question is for Peter. I just wanted to pick up on something. We've heard from the Canadian Black Chamber of Commerce—they've written to the government and to the opposition—and also from the Black Business and Professional Association, that Black entrepreneurs often have a history of not being able to be successful with grants. They're denied grants around the arts, especially, and it's hard to access capital because of the history of racism. So they're calling for a set-aside fund, like an emergency fund, for Black artists. Is that something that you think would be helpful in the situation you find yourself in with Afrofest and the folks you know?

Mr. Peter Toh: Most definitely. I will just give a small example of that point. I was in the process of applying for a grant, so I called the government to give me some guidance, and I was told—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Peter Toh: —they had given a similar grant to an organization to help minority communities. The question I asked the program officer was, "We hire the highest number of African artists in Canada, so if there's a grant to support minority artists, why is it that we are not aware of it?"

I think that, personally, applying for grants—usually, yes, the money is given, but it is just too little for us to survive and for us to support the artists we would like to support. So it's not a matter of, "Yes, you've applied for the grant, and this is a small amount of money that's available to you"—but is it enough to sustain an organization like Music Africa? Last year alone, we had over 120 individuals who applied to perform at Afrofest; we hired 260 artists to perform—and it is a small festival. Most of these artists come to us because they have no other place to go.

I know that there is this opportunity that we can create for these artists, and if they can get more support, then we'd greatly appreciate it.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): That concludes our time. Thank you to both of the presenters for your time and presentations.

CANADA'S ACCREDITED ZOOS AND AQUARIUMS

DEERHURST RESORT

LINDSAY AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Moving along to our next presenter: Canada's Accredited Zoos and Aquariums. Please state your name for the record.

Mr. Jim Facette: Good afternoon. My name is Jim Facette. I'm executive director and CEO of Canada's Accredited Zoos and Aquariums.

Mr. Chairman and committee members, thank you for the opportunity today. These are difficult times, and we're all feeling some form of pain. I can only imagine the challenges faced by those making what amounts to life-and-death decisions. We wish only the best for everyone. We are all in this together.

I'm here before you today representing Canada's 30 accredited zoos and aquariums, 11 of which are located here in my home province of Ontario. Many may not know that zoos and aquariums can be accredited. Our accreditation program draws from resources from around the world. Accredited zoos and aquariums adhere to the highest standards of animal care and operational processes.

As you well know, normal operations are closed. Yes, beginning next week, up to three accredited members of CAZA will offer drive-through safari experiences. However, this is not the same as being fully opened.

Seven of our members are private operators; four have some form of attachment to either the government of Ontario or a municipality. Collectively, at peak season, they will employ over 3,000 people, earning more than \$80 million in labour income. Over three million visitors will visit an accredited zoo or aquarium, many of whom come from out of town. In the case of the Toronto Zoo, 47% of their 1.2 million visitors are from outside the GTA. At the Riverview Park and Zoo, 80% of the 250,000 visitors each year come from outside the city and county of Peterborough. This alone has a \$1-million direct economic impact. With a population of only 5,400 in

Cochrane, the polar bear habitat has an estimated economic impact of \$2.3 million alone. African Lion Safari in Cambridge has an annual economic impact of \$50 million. The economic impact of our 11 Ontario accredited zoos and aquariums easily surpasses \$200 million.

1700

The COVID-19 pandemic has shut off the revenue tap. Our members understand the severity of this virus, its ease of transmission and the importance of getting it right the first time. A relapse would be devastating. That is why, on May 1, we at CAZA convened our first industry-wide reopening meeting, the purpose of which was to gather data, share best practices and learn what each other was doing to develop reopening plans. All 30 of our members were represented, and at that time we knew that Assiniboine zoo in Winnipeg would open on May 13. They were given the green light from the Manitoba health authority to open earlier. However, they needed time to refine their plan. They knew they needed to get it right. On the May long weekend, they welcomed 7,000 visitors over the course of three days—a true success.

What does reopening look like? How have our members adapted to the new reality of business in a pandemic? What is the visitor experience like? It has been three and a half weeks since Assiniboine zoo opened in Winnipeg, two since the Calgary Zoo opened and almost three since the Toronto Zoo was able to get approval for a drive-through experience. Vancouver and Kamloops have also opened this week. What we know is that our industry preparations have met, and in some cases exceeded, health officials' expectations.

More of our accredited zoos and aquariums are making use of online time ticketing. You arrive, for example, during a scheduled period.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Jim Facette: Calgary will ask you what your health condition is both online and upon your arrival. When you walk into the facility, you will walk following directional signage. Additional signage will stress the need for physical distancing. The wearing of masks is promoted. Washroom doors may be taken off, and staff may limit the number of persons in the washrooms. Hand sanitizer stations are positioned throughout the facility. You may encounter ambassadors whose main job is to ensure everyone respects health protocols. Restaurants may be closed. Areas where normally large gatherings might take place will be sectioned off, and additional fencing may be used. You will likely see greater use of personal protective equipment by staff, and continuous deep cleaning in areas of higher traffic and possible touch points. At Ripley's Aquarium, their plan has many of these concepts: reduced volume, online ticketing, health questions, social distancing and one-way markings.

Each facility in Canada that has opened or will open has benefited from our committee. The information-sharing is in everyone's best interests. From it, we have developed a document that contains essential elements of each plan and provided that to this government. The physical space is unique; the desire to open and open right is consistent with

each one of our accredited members. Our members know the need to earn government and health authority trust. We also know it's just as important to earn the public's trust. That is why, since early May, we have shared member reopening plans with the ministry. Just this week, we shared the Ripley's Aquarium plan and drafted an aquarium plan reopening protocol for the BC government, prepared by our member the Vancouver Aquarium. I myself have participated in numerous meeting opportunities to communicate that it's safe. Ontario accredited zoos are ready.

What our 11 accredited zoos and aquariums in Ontario need is the green light from the provincial government that they can open. Give us a date from which our members will take their time, like Assiniboine did, and perfect their plans before they open. We can do it right, smart and with all the necessary health tools.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you and look forward to the questions later on.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. We'll move to the next presenter, from Deerhurst Resort. If you could please state your name for the record, you will have seven minutes.

Mr. Jesse Hamilton: Jesse Hamilton, Deerhurst Resort.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): You may start.

Mr. Jesse Hamilton: Thank you to the committee for your efforts and your time today. I'm the general manager of Deerhurst Resort, also the chair of the Huntsville Municipal Accommodation Tax Association, vice-chair of the ORHMA and a newly appointed board member of Destination Ontario. Deerhurst Resort is one of the longest-standing resort properties in the province of Ontario, established in 1896.

Deerhurst closed on March 16 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Within 14 days, we had laid off 300 employees; 70% of those employees are minimum wage earners who also rely on gratuities. Most of them remain laid off from work today.

The tourism industry, specifically resorts, hotels and restaurants, employs more people in our region than any other industry. In a rural area like ours, there are no immediate alternatives for employment. I'll speak more specifically on the cash flow challenges the resort is facing momentarily, but more important to me today is to share how this pandemic is impacting the heart of our industry, which is our people.

In addition to the employees we have laid off, we would normally hire 200 more for the summer season. The chance of that happening this year is likely zero. As our economy is reopening, the opportunities to bring our team back to work are growing, but even if business levels allow us to bring everyone back to work this summer, the amount of work available will be drastically reduced for the rest of the year. This will mean substantially lesser income for employees and more layoffs.

We have been able to utilize the federal wage subsidy, but operating over three months with zero revenue, we are not able to top up payroll beyond the 75% that the subsidy

covers. Our front-line employees are left choosing between staying at home or returning to work with less money in the bank. This system, although helpful, is not suited for the majority of employers and employees in our industry. I realize it is a federal solution, but it is impacting an extraordinary number of Ontarians. There are many things that keep me up at night right now, and this is the loudest of them.

Resorts, hotels and restaurants are faced with liquidity and cash flow issues that threaten to keep our doors closed well beyond the time it will take to find a vaccine. A historic resort like Deerhurst is no different. We forecast that our revenues this year will drop by 58% and our profits will drop by 80%. To improve this bottom line, we cannot maintain the levels of employment that we have in the past.

Approximately 50% of our business comes from conferences, conventions and social gatherings, all of which have been cancelled well beyond this summer and will continue to do so. Until we know that these events can continue safely and that our client confidence returns, this automatically puts us behind by 50%. This is not simply a pivot in a business plan; this has led to contract disputes and negotiations that threaten the goodwill between our industry and our clients. It is sure to result in a longer road to recovery than is being anticipated.

This financial burden triples when you include refunds for leisure guests and operating costs during resort closure, as well as a sizable investment in COVID-19-related readiness, supplies and infrastructure. We are into tens of thousands of dollars at Deerhurst already to prepare. At the same time, our margins are drastically shrinking with the added cost of operating our businesses safely.

We are learning, and we can prepare differently should we ever face this challenge again, but we need more than just short-term deferrals at the provincial level. The fact is that Deerhurst Resort is facing a cash flow problem unlike anything it has ever experienced in over 124 years, and we still do not have a final plan on how we'll find our way out of it. Given the size of our business and how long we've been around, this may shock you, but if it does, consider what it means for businesses that are equally important to our industry but do not have the staying power that we do. Right now, our financial burdens are simply being moved into the future. It is estimated that a full recovery will take well over two years. The assistance we receive from the provincial government should last beyond this timeline.

Two questions for you to consider, I hope: Have you considered how you can help offset the operating and opening costs for our industry, given the investment that we need to make in COVID-19 readiness? Have you considered how provincial funding for tourism can find its way to businesses like Deerhurst, if not only through the efforts of marketing, consulting fees, support for the arts and special events? This is an opportunity that has definitely been missed to date.

I've mentioned this before: Deerhurst Resort is one of the longest-standing resorts in Ontario. We are woven deeply into the tourism fabric of our province. We have a

responsibility to our employees to get them back to work, contributing in the ways they love the most. We have a commitment to our industry in Muskoka and in Ontario to be one of the incredible reasons people choose to visit and spend their money here.

There are many things happening right now that are certainly pointing our province in the right direction, but businesses like ours, no matter how long they have been around, are facing financial challenges that threaten their livelihoods. If these businesses fail, the burden on our province to assist the growing number of people who are unemployed will only worsen.

Thank you very much for your time today. I look forward to your questions.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll move to the next presenter, Lindsay Agricultural Society. If you could please state your name for the record, and you'll have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Harry Stoddart: Harry Stoddart, general manager of the Lindsay Agricultural Society.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): You may start.

Mr. Harry Stoddart: Thank you for the opportunity to present to the committee this afternoon. I'm here representing the Lindsay Agricultural Society, or the LAS, and the Lindsay Exhibition, the LEX. We're located northeast of Toronto in the town of Lindsay, population 20,000 people.

The LAS is a federally registered charity that was founded in 1854, so this would have been our 166th fair this year. We own and operate the LEX grounds and the Lindsay Exhibition with a mission to showcase the vibrant agricultural industry in the city of Kawartha Lakes, or former Victoria county, while enriching the life of the community through the Lindsay Exhibition events, entertainment and volunteerism.

I'm here to make the case today that Ontario agricultural societies require direct, non-repayable government funding, since we're among the hardest-hit organizations due to COVID-19 and our unique structure has limited our ability to access the federal funding to this point. We are all important to our rural communities, and COVID-19 threatens our very existence.

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The LEX is a five-day fair that draws an average of attendance of about 45,000 people and is supported by over 300 volunteers directly for the LAS. It's also the primary fundraising activity for a number of not-for-profits in our community, including Lions clubs, curling clubs, churches, 4-H programs and a number of the local United Way—a number of other programs.

Additionally, the LEX grounds host about another 40 events that draw 100,000 visitors to our community. The most recent numbers we ran with the TREIM model suggests that we have an economic impact in our community of about \$6.1 million and about a \$7.6-million contribution to the provincial economy. Part of that is because we draw a lot of out-of-province, out-of-country visitors. Our dog shows, cattle shows, horse shows all have licence plates from out of province or out of country in the parking lots. We were selected to host the 2022 international

mounted equine games' nations cup that will bring visitors from New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, the US. The Dairy Summer Show that we host is the largest dairy show in Ontario outside of the Royal and always draws visitors from the US and from Europe to look at the quality of cattle.

So we have a significant impact on tourism in our area. We fill hotel rooms, we fill restaurants, and we generate business for local shops. And we're not unique; we're one of the larger fairs and exhibition grounds in Ontario, but there are another 200 agricultural societies across Ontario, with an aggregate impact estimated at \$700 million.

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on us. We were shuttered—essentially, March 13 was the first cancellation of an event, and we will be closed until probably one of the last businesses allowed to reopen. We understand that. Our business depends on gathering large groups of people. A small event here gathers 1,000 people. But because of that and restructuring the Lindsay Exhibition, we're facing a revenue shortfall that's approaching \$1 million for this fiscal year, and we're probably talking a long-tail event into 2021 as well.

We've cut expenses deeply; we've cut staff. But we have a number of non-deferrable costs from a facility this size that must continue. We've accessed the federal wage subsidy, but absent revenue from those staff, we have to spend a minimum of \$1.33 for every dollar, and we're continuing to burn reserves to keep a core number of staff available to help restart.

The initial \$40,000 through the CEBA was helpful, but when you go to access the next level of that, up to the \$6.25 million, you're required to demonstrate a debt-servicing capability and historical profits. We're a registered charity; the CRA frowns on generating profits. So we're challenged in our ability to access any additional funding through that.

We've existed for 166 years because we have a business model that's founded on the marketplace. We don't draw significant government revenue. About 2.5% of our budget this year was grants through Celebrate Ontario, federal Canada Summer Jobs, that type of thing. The rest of it comes from the marketplace, but that also means that all of our revenue is exposed to COVID-19 in a shutdown. So that creates challenges.

Then the federal government announced \$500 million for culture and heritage not-for-profits, but that money flowed almost exclusively to organizations that already drew significant dollars from the government and excluded anybody who could draw a wage subsidy or CEBA. So we were essentially shut out from that.

So we're sitting here with a business model that works and is robust, has lasted 166 years, and contributes significantly to our local economies through culture and heritage, and other not-for-profits that depend on us. But we're in a unique situation in COVID-19. We're hard-hit and we're falling through the cracks in the available supports.

For that reason, I'm asking that this committee recommend that there be funding made available directly for Ontario agricultural societies to—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Harry Stoddart: —ensure that we can continue and bridge this gap and continue to contribute to our communities. We've obviously been an important part of our communities. We've been supported for generations with time and resources. We would like the opportunity to continue that. Obviously, our communities would as well. We don't rely on tourism for our revenue; we generate tourism for our communities. Supporting us is indirectly supporting a lot of businesses within our communities.

I thank you for your time and your work and your attention while I presented.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. All right, we'll move to the government side for the first round. I'll start with MPP Miller, Parry Sound–Muskoka.

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you to all the presenters for your very good presentations. My question is for Jesse Hamilton at Deerhurst.

Jesse, let me begin by thanking Deerhurst and yourself for donating PPE to the hospital and for donating your food to the food bank at the beginning of COVID-19. It's very much appreciated.

Certainly, Deerhurst is a super important business for Parry Sound–Muskoka. It's certainly one of the biggest employers. I think, at times, when you're booming in the summer, you're up to as many as 800 employees.

I know I was there last year to open your latest capital project, which was quite spectacular. I think it was something like \$30 million or more you had spent at that point on that latest project. So you're a super important business for our area.

A resort experience is accommodations, but it's also meals, it's also activities and recreational activities. You have the big show at Deerhurst as well. At this stage, as you're starting to reopen—I understand that it's around June 12 or 14 that you're planning on reopening—what restrictions that are in place now would you think should be lifted that would allow you to more fully operate your business, and that you can do safely?

Mr. Jesse Hamilton: Thank you for your kind words as well, Norm. I appreciate that very much.

I think we are very lucky at Deerhurst in the area that we're in where we have so many wide-open spaces. It means that a lot of the things that are most important to our guests can exist with the restrictions that are there today, because they are so well set up already for social distancing and keeping people safe.

There are many aspects of the resort, by design, which I think will take a little bit longer—pools—for many people to be in, and indoor recreation facilities.

The biggest challenge for us, which I mentioned in my presentation, which is a really big one, has to do with conferences, conventions and social gatherings—weddings, as an example. That is going to be the biggest hit to our business and businesses like ours. I'm not sure how long it will take us to get back there. I don't have the answers as to whether or not gatherings like that can begin, and to what size they can begin, and keep the province

safe. But that is our biggest concern right now: when we can get that business back. We need to have the province focused on helping that happen quickly. I don't think that's overnight.

If we're looking at immediate things, the opening of patios as a way to start restaurant reopenings, that is job number one from the restaurant standpoint. I know there are so many restaurants out there that don't have patios. I think it's a way for us to open and start to test the procedures that we're putting in place to make sure that we're staying safe. So that would be one of the ones that are certainly on the top of my list.

Mr. Norman Miller: Thanks, and I know my colleagues have questions so I will just note that you did have a couple of asks with regard to provincial funding. Do you want to say anything about where that funding should come from and what it would be used for? You mentioned the tourism ministry.

Mr. Jesse Hamilton: Yes, I don't profess to be an expert in government funding, but I have been staying very, very close to what our Ministry of Tourism has been focused on.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Jesse Hamilton: I do appreciate Minister MacLeod's hard work, but it seems to me that businesses like resorts, hotels and restaurants have been left out of that dialogue for the most part, which has been concerning for me.

And I believe helping us to get through this period, helping us to fund, specifically, the costs related to opening our businesses—the PPE that is required, the retrofitting that's required—that, to me, is a very simple way to help us. We can produce receipts. We can show what we purchased. We can show that it's very specific to the new challenges that we're facing. That's one way that I think businesses like ours could be helped quite easily.

1720

Mr. Norman Miller: Excellent. I've got lots of questions, but I'll pass it on to my colleagues.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll go to MPP Smith.

Mr. Dave Smith: I really appreciate this. My question is for Harry. It's good to see you again. Lorien and Jamie both send their best wishes for you. Actually, Lorien asked me to lobby you for a new award at the Ex for older ladies who don't ride horses very well. If you could put something together for her for that, she'd greatly appreciate it.

Mr. Harry Stoddart: Is Lorien expecting to be the inaugural winner of that award?

Mr. Dave Smith: I think she's expecting to be the annual winner of that award.

You mentioned that you're looking at about a million-dollar operating loss right now. You also mentioned that most of the funds that you generate go back to charities. Is that million dollars reflective of the money that you would be donating to charity, or is that simply the operation of the Ex grounds right now?

Mr. Harry Stoddart: That's the deficit compared to our annual revenue, the shortfall that we're facing in terms of revenue. When you look at it on a net basis—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Harry Stoddart:—our budgetary shortfall this year is significantly less than that because we've also trimmed a fair bit on the expense side. The contributions to charity largely come through the organizations that work with us, and that usually amounts to several hundred thousand dollars in the course of a year over the number of events. That is all revenue that's going to be missing from the coffers of those various organizations because there aren't going to be the opportunities to generate that revenue here for them.

Mr. Dave Smith: It will be very difficult to do the Ex, but I know that you do a lot of other things like car shows and so on there. If we were going to put some guidelines on the square footage and the number of people that could be in there for things like the car show, the flea market and so on that you do, is that something that may help you at some point later on in the summer?

Mr. Harry Stoddart: Certainly, the dairy summer show that I referenced before: They've currently postponed—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off.

We'll have to go to the opposition now. I'll start with MPP Shaw.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I'd just like to let the presenters know that we're coming in on 20-plus hours of testimony from witnesses across Ontario. What we're hearing are incredible stories of struggle, but also incredible stories of survival and resiliency. We had a woman who has a resort that's 73 years old. We've got Deerhurst—did you say you're 125 years old? Though I think, Harry, that you have won the prize so far—166 years—but I just have to put in a plug for the Ancaster Fair in my riding. The Ancaster Fair is 170 years old, so there's a little competition there.

The importance of these fairs to communities cannot be understated. I just wanted to share also that the Ancaster Fair—not only do they run these fairs and have done so for 170 years, they put incredible amounts of money into their infrastructure. For example, they've just put in about \$30 million of upgrades for their location in Ancaster in my riding. This is money that is well invested in the community, and we respect and appreciate what they're doing. But they've done this—really what you're saying—without much government revenue.

You said that you're falling through the cracks in terms of support, especially in these troubled times, and that you haven't relied on a lot of government revenue. Can you just speak a little more about how you've managed to survive without relying on government sources to date and that you're finally asking for the supports? It seems to me that after 166 years, you deserve it.

Mr. Harry Stoddart: It's a philosophy of rural Ontario in being self-reliant really. It's a combination of putting on an event that is balanced against the gate revenues. In our case, in our facility—we have a relatively new facility, similar to Ancaster. In fact, we hold our fair exactly the same weekend as Ancaster. We operate that facility 12 months of the year to ensure that we're generating the

revenue we need to sustain that facility long-term. That's where we've landed with 40 additional events hosted there. We have the largest open space in eastern Ontario, between Toronto and Ottawa, that allows us to attract events. The combination of those revenues and good fiscal management—we have a philosophy that we don't want to be in a position where we're dependent on government funding from year to year, because it changes. We use it to try out new ideas and make capital investments, but we have a philosophy that it shouldn't be an annual contributor to our operating revenues. Unfortunately, that also then leaves us at maximum exposure to COVID-19. If I was sitting here with 50% government funding, I'd be fine; I can cut my expenses and continue with that grant. But that's not the reality. I'm fully exposed to COVID-19, unfortunately, and I'm also not on the radar screen of all of the major funders that are—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Harry Stoddart:—flowing support to other organizations, following dollars that they've already spent.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you very much for that, Harry.

I would like to talk to Jesse at Deerhurst.

If I heard you correctly, Deerhurst is 125 years old. If you think about what you've survived already in 125 years—you've already survived the Spanish flu and a couple of world wars. So this is an incredible story of survival as well. We have heard from almost every witness who's an entrepreneur, a small business—they've used the terms “liquidity,” and “cash flow.” They are very concerned about tax deferrals and loans, because you don't put debt on top of debt.

One of the things you talked about in terms of direct capital infusion that you need from sources, perhaps the government—you talked about offsetting your opening costs. Can you talk about how unpredictable it will be for you to open, not knowing what these costs will be for your business?

Mr. Jesse Hamilton: Certainly. Thank you for your comments on the history of the resort. I'm proud and I think our team at the resort is very proud to be part of something that is such a historic resort in our province.

Nobody has been through this before, and the landscape is changing constantly. It is changing in a way that it's improving, meaning that people are understanding COVID-19 better every day; we are understanding the right things to do and the wrong things to do.

The resort is very, very big, and understanding how to keep our employees safe, keep our guests safe, keep our community safe by bringing people from other communities to Muskoka—there's a lot required to do that. Investing in simple things like—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Jesse Hamilton:—reusable masks available for our staff, Plexiglas dividers throughout the entire resort, which is over 800 acres, the ongoing costs of leaving rooms empty between check-ins and checkouts, which means you're generating less revenue because those rooms can't be filled up. It takes twice as long to clean a guest

room today than it did before because of how specifically we are now cleaning and disinfecting those rooms, as well as the common areas.

Opportunities to generate revenues in facilities that can't be opened safely right now, and some that might even require vaccines before we can open them again—that's impacting our revenue streams. The tens of thousands of dollars I was referring to are all those things we're doing to retrofit our business to make sure that the people who are there are staying safe. I used it as an example because it's a very tangible way to ask for money—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I apologize to cut you off.

We'll have to move to the independent members now. I'll start with MPP Hunter.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you all for your presentations and the information you've shared with the committee today.

Today, Stats Canada reported that Ontario lost 64,000 jobs during the month of May, and many of those jobs are youth and seasonal jobs. It's going to become even more compounded. I'm wondering, Jim, if you can speak to what the effects of this are going to be on your seasonal workers and what you're hearing from your members.

Mr. Jim Facette: Thank you very much for the question.

Right now, in terms of the employment status, they're probably employing at about 10% of what they normally would, and they're waiting.

1730

The thousands who would be employed over the course of the summer, whether there would be a few hundred at Ripley's or 35 to 40 somewhere else, whether it's Polar Bear or elsewhere: That's just not going to happen until such time as we're able to open. And if we are able to open at all, it's not going to be to the maximum capacity which we're allowed. It's going to be—normally, we're finding it's about 50%. So if you're allowed to have 2,000 or 5,000 visitors, you'd be allowed to have, at the maximum, half of that.

But you're going to need the staff, because you're going to have more staff watching over the health and safety of everybody else around them. And it's going to be hard to find them, because there is some training involved that needs to be up to speed pretty quickly. Hopefully, they'll want to come back.

Right now, it's 10% of what is normally out there, and it's going to be really, really tough to get going. But at the end of the day, our members, our 11 accredited zoos and aquariums in Ontario, want to get open. They can do it, and they can do it very safely.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I want to move to the agricultural societies. You talked about some of the investments that are needed. The FAO, who also reports to this committee, has noted that our agriculture, food and rural affairs budget has seen a decline of 31.7% year over year. I'm wondering if some of that funding can be redirected into areas that can support the industry. I know that right now, concerns around labour and keeping people safe and making sure

that the environment is healthy is really important. Can you speak to the types of supports that you would want to see from government at this time? This is for Harry.

Mr. Harry Stoddart: As an agricultural society, we play a very specific role within the community in mounting fairs and promoting agriculture. I don't pretend to represent the industry as a whole or any particular commodity group.

But certainly, over the last number of years, going back actually 20 or 25 years, the ag budget has been one of the ones that has been gradually trimmed as other priorities have taken hold in government.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Harry Stoddart: We've seen the impacts: An asparagus farm in Norfolk county abandoned several hundred acres of crop because of an inability to get workers. Social distancing is a real challenge in a lot of our processing plants.

There are definitely some business adjustments that need to happen and some pivots that need to happen very quickly in a society that right now is very locked down. It's going to be challenging to implement that. But OMAFRA definitely—it was run on a shoestring before this, and there have been significant impacts in the industry because of COVID.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I appreciate that. It might be an opportunity to rethink. Many individuals have come forward, even in areas like the wine industry where there has been some investment, who are finding that difficulty on the labour side. That seems to be something that is going to spread right across, making sure that everyone has the required people to do these various skilled and necessary roles within the sector and also making sure that we keep everybody safe while they're doing that.

I just want to talk to Jesse about the absolute change in the industry around cleanliness standards and the need now for twice as much time in between cleaning and even supplies and all of that and how that is affecting the industry.

Mr. Jesse Hamilton: Thank you for the question. The way that it's impacting the ministry is pretty clear. The cost to operate the business now is substantially increasing.

The finer points of cleaning the room that weren't as great a concern before—because there was no risk to our guests if we weren't disinfecting a remote control, as an example, between every check-in and checkout. Those things, when you're cleaning 400 rooms and you take an extra 15 minutes per room times 400—that's many more employees to do that.

Right now, there's still not enough known, so we're being cautious. There are some hotels and resorts across the globe that aren't doing this. We have decided to leave our rooms empty for at least a day between guests. We're doing that so our hosts can feel safer getting into those rooms. But what—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I'm sorry to cut you off again.

We have to move to the opposition party for their second round now. I'll start with MPP Lindo.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: My first question is for Jim.

My mom has volunteered at the Toronto Zoo for a number of years. She's 81—but for the purposes of Hansard, which is transcribing this, and in the cockles of history, she is 36, because I need her to love me.

Laughter.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: One of the things that she says to me all the time is that the reason she volunteers there is because she's surrounded by young people who are doing their seasonal employment there—they're learning job skills—and even younger volunteers who are exploring careers and such.

We've had a number of people talk about the impact of COVID-19 on younger generations—because now they are out of school, they don't have anyplace to go. I'm wondering if you can speak about the importance of the reopening in terms of what you can provide to them.

Mr. Jim Facette: Absolutely. Basically, you're providing them with an opportunity to go back and do that, which doesn't exist right now.

It's going to be a very different place than what they're used to. There are protocols that they will have to follow, be it cleaning and all the rest of it.

Having said that, they'll come back, hopefully, and be able to have that connection again and be working again—rather than the idle time. The best social program is a job, right? They'll have that time to come back—and time with the animals.

I think the guests really like it, as well. The visitors really enjoy seeing younger people around and working with them. It's a fun kind of environment.

The zoo and aquarium experience has changed over the last 20 years. It's not what it was when I was young. It's much, much different today. It's much more dynamic. There's a lot more interaction, a lot more thinking, a lot more on the science side, a lot more on the conservation side, and a lot more learning that goes on. It's not just static. It's much different in that respect.

That said, it is a different environment with the pandemic and the protocols that we're putting in place in different parts of Canada. It will happen here, as well.

It would be welcomed, I'm sure, by the youth, by the zoos and, of course, the visitors, to have them back working.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: I would also just add that these young employees, then, who are at the zoos and the aquariums would get on-the-job training about what some of these new health protocols are going to be—because we're thinking long-term.

My next question is for Jesse. It's interesting; I have an event centre in my riding, Bingemans, that has spoken to me a number of times about some of the issues they're having. One of the biggest concerns they have, which I think you also alluded to, especially when you provide space for meetings and events, is the need to have very clear, direct decisions around the public health requirements so that people feel safe coming back to do these

events. You have a lot of other space and ways that you can be creative, but if you don't have clear direction from government, then it's hard to encourage people to come out. I'm wondering if you are feeling the same pressures and if you have anything that you would like to comment on around that.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Jesse Hamilton: I'll be quick because I don't want to get cut off again.

Yes, 100%, we have the exact same concerns. When a guest thinks about the confines of a guest room or the activities they choose to do on their own or as a family, that decision is different than the one a corporation or company makes to bring 500 or 1,000 people together all at once in a conference room. So being able to have very, very specific guidelines to follow, to show our clients that we're following them and that they're based in science and what's being told to us, is hugely important. And the cost, I think, to be able to change our businesses to adapt is going to be astronomical, compared to what we're doing right now to bring that business back. So I am definitely saying the same.

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Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: In the little bit of time that we have left, I'm actually wondering if you'd be able to finish the other thought, because I feel like it's interconnected, where you were talking about the extensive budget that you need to have now for cleaning, etc. If you could speak a little bit more about what some of those additional costs are that you would never have budgeted for in the past.

Mr. Jesse Hamilton: I think leaving space between rooms is a huge one. It means you can only make half the revenue you used to if your rooms are empty every second day after people are checking out. The cleaning of common spaces where people just coexist together—the amount of cleaning is going to triple common room labour, as an example. And then those things that generate business for us like pools, climbing walls, all of those activities that share a lot of space, that's coming right out of our top line until we can allow people to do those things safely.

I think our cost per occupied room is going to increase at least by 30% in response to making sure that our guests are safe.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Thank you for that. I'm wondering actually—Harry, you were talking a lot as well about the volunteers. We've had a number of people come through the 20-some-odd hours of the hearings who have talked about volunteers, and then we've spoken more about seasonal workers. Can you talk about why supporting the volunteer sector is also so important?

Mr. Harry Stoddart: The volunteer sector is essentially the third sector in most communities. You have the public sector and the private sector, and the volunteer sector provides a lot of services within a community, especially within rural communities, and a lot of those funds are raised by the organizations themselves. An event like Lindsay Exhibition is a key fundraiser for a lot of those

organizations to be able to provide the additional amenities in our town and towns across Ontario. It's a proven business model and self-reliant—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off. We'll have to move to the independent members now: over to MPP Schreiner.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Because we are getting close to the end, I just want to take a moment to thank committee staff and our Chair. It's been a gruelling more than 20 hours and I'm sure staff and the Chair felt it more than the rest of us, so thank you for your good work.

Harry, I want to start with you. I grew up on a farm, and I know I still have ribbons somewhere in my parents' basement from the ag fairs, so I know how important that is to rural communities. After 166 years of not needing government support, what kind of support do you think you would need and other agricultural societies would need to continue on with this long-standing tradition in the province?

Mr. Harry Stoddart: Right now, what we need are some operating funds to be able to bridge 2020 where most of us are going to see no revenue, and probably 2021, when we fully expect to be under restrictions. Some 45,000 people crowding into fairgrounds is not something that you can envision in a COVID world, so we expect our business models are going to be disrupted going ahead as well.

The short-term need is funds to meet our non-deferrable operating expenses, and then we're going to need some support to adjust our business models and figure out exactly how you can hold the types of community celebrations that we do in an environment where social distancing is needed. If we're limited to half capacity, we might as well not open, because a poor financial result for a fair is more deadly than no fair at all.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: That's a very good point. I know I have a limited amount of time, and I want to get a couple of questions in to Jesse, so I'm going to switch over.

You talked a bit about the role that patios could play in looking at reimagining the restaurant industry and how that would affect Deerhurst. Are there any AGCO regulations or anything like that that the province could be looking at to help facilitate outdoor eating and maybe having a drink along with dinner?

Mr. Jesse Hamilton: Yes, I think there are a few of them. We've managed to get delivery to include alcohol, which is a huge win for restaurants that are doing delivery service now. I think it's important that that continue into the future and not be a temporary fix.

Allowing businesses to expand patio size without the amount of red tape we would normally need to do so is going to be an important part of businesses staying healthy, and also the restrictions around how patios are defined specifically, because there are a lot of ways in which your patio has to be blocked off and very specifically closed in. I think there are going to be situations that don't impact Deerhurst necessarily, because we've very big, but other restaurants where they might not be able to meet those restrictions. I think those types of

restrictions do need to be lifted so people can make as much money as possible and grow the size of their patios.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Jesse, you'd also mentioned that the industry is going to need more than short-term deferrals. I think that some of the—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: —tax deferrals that were introduced initially were very welcome; it's like, we need some immediate cash flow help here. But can you maybe talk a bit about the limitations of deferrals and what other supports you're going to need long-term?

Mr. Jesse Hamilton: Yes. You're right that at the beginning, the deferrals were helpful, but now that we're understanding COVID and we're understanding how it's impacting our business and we're understanding the piece of our business that relies so much on group gatherings, it's going to take us much longer—the last report I read by CBRE was saying that it's going to be at least two or closer to three years. Those deferrals are just going to catch up with us because it's going to take us well beyond the time that they're available to us to make enough money to bring our employees back to work and also to pay for those deferrals. In my opinion, the best thing for us to do is to at least extend how long those deferrals last and give us many more years to pay them back. The timing thing is the biggest concern of ours, for sure.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I'm going to give Jim my final question. For the last two days, we've had a lot of people talk about the importance of guidelines and clear guidelines. I'm just wondering how important it is to ensure that we have those clear guidelines and that they're also enforceable, so we can really maintain public confidence as we look at reopening zoos and aquariums in your case but, I would just say, the sector in general.

Mr. Jim Facette: Thank you for the question. What we've experienced in the rest of Canada with those that are open to date is that the guidelines from provincial authorities are important, and then what happens typically is that our members will actually draft a specific plan that fits their space that meets those guidelines. Those plans are then submitted and reviewed by—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Jim Facette: —the health authority in question. That allows them to take the guidelines and apply them to their specific area.

Those guidelines are very important. The health officials want to see that you are, in fact, applying them. They usually do—for example, in Edmonton and Calgary, health officials will actually join them prior to opening and walk through the various elements of the facility and what they have in mind. That's why there's usually a little bit of time between when we're able to open in other jurisdictions and when they actually do open. We actually use that time to ensure that the authorities are comfortable with how we're applying the guidelines.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I think my time is done. Thanks to all of you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Yes. Thank you so much. Okay, we'll move to the government side now. I'll start with MPP Skelly.

Ms. Donna Skelly: My question is to Jim. Jim, many of the zoos in Ontario are municipally owned, but I'd say that most, actually, are privately owned. If they don't have a source of revenue right now, if we're not seeing people visiting these particular locations, what guarantee do we have that the animals are being cared for?

Mr. Jim Facette: That is an excellent question. As I said, our members are accredited, and part of that accreditation process involves that they put animal care first and foremost. We actually survey our members every month, and what I can tell you from the month of May is that we know that 77% of our members Canada-wide—and this is no different for Ontario—have made use of some form of government assistance, be it wage subsidy, loans or whatever it takes.

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Animal care is first and foremost, and that is why they—actually, those involved on the animal care side have not been laid off or let go in any way, shape or form. All those that have been, had to right away, starting on or about the 15th of March. In order to stay accredited, animal care must be number one. We actually surveyed our members. We asked them what they're doing, what's going on. We speak all the time about ensuring that that's taking place. We have a built-in, industry-led system to ensure that happens.

I can assure you that the people who are involved in animal care—some of them are actually saying, "I'd rather sleep here to stay with my animals and not go home, to make sure they're taken care of." So the assurance is that the commitment level, the connection between the two, it's pretty great.

Ms. Donna Skelly: If you could just keep my mike open; don't mute me.

It may be, but my concern is, if there's no money—I mean, I don't think there's a business in Ontario right now that doesn't put its staff or put its product—or whatever isn't paramount. People are so adamant that they want to keep their business alive, but if there's no money coming in, how do we know these animals are being taken care of? Is there a requirement to have some sort of a contingency fund in place prior to getting your licence or being licensed as a zoo to ensure that there is enough money to care for these animals? I don't know where you're getting your revenue if you're not open and running. How do we know that you're going to have some sort of a funding source to care for them?

Mr. Jim Facette: I'm not aware of any kind of minimum bank balance or fund necessary required by the regulator—not that I'm aware of. As you outlined, seven of our 11 are, in fact, private entities. We do have to meet animal care requirements of the government. Inspectors will come around on a regular basis to ensure that the animals are cared for.

They will have essentially some reserves. They're relying on those reserves and some loans to keep that

going. But should they be in a position in, say, four months or three months from now where they can't care for their animals, our 11 members, they will pick up the phone and they'll tell the animal welfare service.

We're actually more worried about those non-accredited facilities, the roadside zoos that aren't a member of ours.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Jim Facette: Those are the ones that we're more concerned about, that they'll call the government, and then, actually, we get the calls to go in and rescue the animals. It's the accredited zoos that do that; it's not the reverse.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Well, I hope you share, and I want to have your word that you will let us know prior to any sort of situation ever evolving. First of all, the African Lion Safari is in my riding, and they are fabulous. I'm not even suggesting anything. What I'm saying, though, is that people would be mortified if they felt that any animal was at risk because there wasn't enough money to care for them. If you have any ideas that something that isn't certified or doesn't come under your jurisdiction is also in trouble, please let us know.

I do have a question now for Jesse. Jesse, you raised some issues about the cost of having to purchase PPE and make modifications to businesses. Is that not tax deductible? Would that not come in as a tax deduction for all of these businesses?

Mr. Jesse Hamilton: I'm sorry that I don't know the answer to your question. I hope so, and I will certainly take a look at it now. I don't know.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Okay. Those were my questions. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Piccini.

Mr. David Piccini: Thanks very much. My question is for Harry and Jesse. Have you had clarity from government and/or public health delineating the changes related to COVID-19 that you're going to need to put in place as a temporary stopgap, potentially until a vaccine is developed, and those that are long-term forever? Has there been discussion on that?

Have you (a) had clear direction, and (b) have you had that discussion internally?

Mr. Harry Stoddart: From our perspective, no. Right now, we have four or five different potential plans—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Harry Stoddart:—depending on what COVID looks like when we hit the fall. But right now, the answer for public health that is it's an unknown. We're looking at what's happening in other jurisdictions and trying to project what that might look like here. But right now, we have no clarity on what it potentially looks like for us if we were allowed in 2020, or even starting to project what might be the case for 2021.

Mr. David Piccini: Please keep me unmuted, Chair. Thanks. Jesse?

Mr. Jesse Hamilton: There isn't clarity for us either. It does seem that when public health is joining us—they have been to the resort to take a look at our plans. They're

looking at them from, “Are they reasonable? Do they seem to line up with what other people are doing and what they’re hearing?” But there have been no discussions about what might be here to stay and what might be temporary, and there isn’t a guidebook by any means that we are following. We have them from many different industry associations in our industry overall that everyone is obviously looking to, but there isn’t anything specific coming from public health.

Mr. David Piccini: Harry, I’m just thinking long-term—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. That concludes our time. Thank you to all three presenters for your time and for your presentation.

That concludes our business today as well. As a reminder, the deadline to send in a written submission will be 5 p.m. on June 22.

The committee is now adjourned until 9 a.m. on June 11, when we’ll meet for report writing on the recommendations leading to the Economic and Fiscal Update Act, 2020. Thank you, and have a good weekend.

The committee adjourned at 1756.

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