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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

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des débats
(Hansard)**

F-33

**Standing Committee on
Finance and Economic Affairs**

COVID-19 study

1st Session
42nd Parliament
Thursday 18 June 2020

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

Étude sur la COVID-19

1^{re} session
42^e législature
Jeudi 18 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

Thursday 18 June 2020

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

COVID-19 STUDY

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Good morning, everyone, again. I call this meeting to order now. We're meeting for hearings on the tourism sector as part of a 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 with us: MPP Cho and MPP Fife. The following members are participating remotely: MPP Crawford, MPP Hunter, MPP Mamakwa, MPP Piccini, MPP Roberts, MPP Schreiner, MPP Skelly, MPP Smith, MPP Miller, MPP Stevens, MPP Kernaghan, MPP Pang, and—MPP Gretzky, she's here? MPP Lisa Gretzky and MPP Simard.

And we also have Wayne Gates, who has just joined us. If you can please confirm your attendance and you are present in Ontario? MPP Gates, can you hear me? MPP Gates? Okay. We'll come back to him again.

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 parties 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.

Are there any questions before we begin?

MPP Gates, we'll come back to you again for your attendance. MPP Gates? All right. Never mind; we'll come back again.

Okay. For the hearings today, our representatives have been grouped in threes for each one-hour time slot. Each presenter will have seven minutes for their presentation, and after we have heard from all three presenters, the remaining 39 minutes of the time slot will be questions from members of the committee. This time for questions will be broken down into two rotations of six minutes and

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

COMITÉ PERMANENT DES FINANCES
ET DES AFFAIRES ÉCONOMIQUES

Jeudi 18 juin 2020

30 seconds for each of the government, the opposition, and the independent members of the group.

GREATER TORONTO
AIRPORTS AUTHORITY

MR. TONY VISCA

WINERY AND GROWER ALLIANCE
OF ONTARIO

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Are there any questions? Seeing none, now I would like to call upon our first witness from Greater Toronto Airports Authority. If you could please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Ms. Lorrie McKee: Good morning. My name is Lorrie McKee, and I'm the director of public affairs and stakeholder relations for the Greater Toronto Airports Authority, otherwise known as Toronto Pearson. My colleague Gene Cabral from Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport is joining me today, and together we'll be available to answer any of your questions.

Chair Sandhu, thank you for your invitation to be here. I know that you have a strong understanding of the airport and airline business, given your proximity of Brampton West to Toronto Pearson.

MPPs, distinguished committee members, off the top I want to thank Minister MacLeod for her initiative and dedication to listening to the leaders of Ontario's travel and tourism ecosystem. She has been a relentless advocate for our industry, someone who listens carefully and has demonstrated a propensity for action, and now is the time for action. In a matter of a few months, everything has seemingly changed: the way we live, work, travel and communicate. Just look at the remote nature of this session today.

For the last two months, with Jeffrey Brown for Porter Airlines, I've had the task of co-leading the aviation industry panel reporting to Minister MacLeod. Jeff and I were joined by colleagues from airports in Ottawa, Waterloo, Simcoe, Thunder Bay, London, Hamilton and Oshawa, and from the airline side the panel had representation from the country's biggest airlines: Air Canada, WestJet, Air Transat, Sunwing, Porter, Canadian North and Wasaya. I understand that you've already heard from Mark Williams on behalf of the airlines.

There's no sugar-coating it. COVID-19 has been nothing short of devastating to the aviation sector. Nearly half of Canada's aviation industry is based in Ontario, and as a result of COVID, the industry has grounded most of its aircraft and shuttered terminal facilities, and tens of thousands have been laid off. Airport revenue is expected to drop by more than \$2 billion nationally in 2020. At Toronto Pearson, passenger traffic was down year-over-year in April by 98%. Aircraft movements—an arrival or a departure—have dropped from an average of 1,300 per day to 150. Billy Bishop is closed to commercial traffic, with only MedEvac and Ornge operations.

Unfortunately, we do not expect a quick turnaround. The International Air Transport Association, or IATA, predicts that we don't expect to return to previous levels of passenger and flight traffic before 2022, and possibly 2024, at the earliest. In the face of this, airlines and airports have supported repatriation of Ontario residents from abroad, the movement of essential cargo, MedEvac and emergency services, all while incurring operating losses that exceed the cost of simply opening their doors. The industry has demonstrated ingenuity to retool passenger aircraft and terminal facilities to move essential cargo, particularly cargo required for the fight against COVID.

Aviation is and will continue to be the critical link to travel and tourism and trade, the conduit to Ontario's rural and northern communities, and the first and last impression that visitors often have of our amazing province. We truly are the link that connects the world to Ontario.

As an aviation panel, we offer the following recommendations for your consideration. Aside from immediate aid to support our individual businesses, what we need now is to get travel restarted and people back to work. With health at the core of operations and decisions, we are watching the world begin to open up travel and to remove restrictions and quarantines. With internationally accepted health measures in place at airports and airlines, Ontario and Canada need to begin a phased and coordinated reopening of air travel.

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

Ms. Lorrie McKee: Following global best practices by IATA and ICAO, airlines and airports have demonstrated and implemented measures to protect the health of workers and passengers. This is what travellers can count on when they have their next trip through an airport: mandatory face masks, restrictions of access to buildings, physical distancing, and cleaning hygiene.

Ontario needs to play a leadership role to remove interprovincial restrictions. It doesn't help us to promote travel to Ontario when we still have restrictions in place in BC and the Atlantic provinces. Ontario must push the federal government for unified national health standards and protocols that align the provincial rules. Ontario can also help by putting in place measures to increase competitiveness and stimulate travel: things like removing Ontario's portion of the HST from travel and tourism, eliminating tax on airport consumer goods, and eliminating the aviation fuel tax.

Before COVID, Ontario was doing great in terms of moving forward and significant activity in the aviation sector. We know that this will resume in time and we can re-establish the air transport sector as a major economic contributor to Canada and Ontario.

We look forward to your questions. I'm confident that by working together, and with Ontario's attention to this, we can restore the health of the air transport sector. Gene and I would be happy to answer any of your questions.

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

We'll move to our next presenter, from the Winery and Grower Alliance of Ontario. If you could please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

The Winery and Grower Alliance of Ontario?

Okay, so we'll go to our next presenter, Tony Visca. If you could please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Tony Visca: Good morning. My name is Tony Visca. I'm a restaurateur in the Niagara region. I'm speaking this morning on behalf of myself and many of my peers.

I just want to talk a little bit about the impact of COVID-19 on the restaurant industry. The restaurant industry is probably the fourth-largest employer for employees. I know personally, myself, I had to do the dreadful thing in March and lay off over 200 employees and see a significant decrease in our business. We saw a decrease of about 80% in our revenues.

0910

I appreciate the support that the government and the province have given us so far, but I think we want to see the recovery of the restaurant industry. We need more help. I'm thankful that tomorrow we start—we were put in stage 2, so we are reopening our patios. But I don't think that's enough to survive. We need to see more of the rent relief extended. That's something that we've all talked about, and we need to see the government and the province forcing landlords and helping with the rent relief, because we do see a lot of landlords not working with us.

The Niagara region heavily relies on tourism. Knowing I have businesses in Niagara Falls, summertime for us is very crucial, and that's when we do most of our sales. We expect a heavy decline in tourism this year because of the restrictions. My fear—and I hope I'm wrong—is that in the fall, we're going to see a lot of pain and suffering in businesses closing down because they won't have that summer cash flow to carry them through the winter months.

I'd also like to see the province maybe follow some of the other provinces. I know BC just introduced a bill where they're going to extend a 25% wholesale price to the restaurants for alcohol, which makes them a little bit more competitive. We here in Ontario just saw an increase in our beer prices. We have to increase prices to our guests who are coming in, who are probably suffering just as much as we are.

The wage subsidy is great. I know it has been extended till August, but we need to maybe look at extending it further and consider a scaled approach so that, as we recover, the subsidy gets scaled back.

Also, I'd like to see the province maybe consider some type of grant for retrofitting our businesses.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Two minutes.

Mr. Tony Visca: We are spending a lot of money to retrofit our businesses to make it safe for our guests and our employees. So hopefully that's something that the government will talk about helping out.

In closing, the restaurant business has always played an essential part in our region. We need it to recover. Like the previous speaker, the airline business, we need to get back to normal life. But I don't think it's going to be a quick recovery. I think it's going to take months and maybe years to get back to our normal businesses and livelihood.

That's all I have for now.

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

We'll go to our next presenter, the Winery and Grower Alliance of Ontario. If you could please state your name for the record. You will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Aaron Dobbin: Thank you very much. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. We're actually proud to announce that, as of Tuesday, we are now Wine Growers Ontario. We rebranded on Tuesday. Our rebrand is to better reflect the value-added agriculture nature of our industry. Our industry supports 18,000 jobs in Ontario. We welcome over 2.4 million visitors—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Sorry; I apologize to cut you off. Can you introduce yourself first, for the record?

Mr. Aaron Dobbin: I'm sorry. My name is Aaron Dobbin. I'm president and CEO of Wine Growers Ontario. I'm joined by Del Rollo, who is the chair of my board.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Go ahead, please.

Mr. Aaron Dobbin: Our industry supports 18,000 jobs in Ontario. We welcome over 2.4 million visitors to our wineries every year, and annually our industry contributes over \$4.4 billion to the Ontario economy.

My members are from Niagara, Lake Erie North Shore and Prince Edward county. My members make 80% of the wine made in Ontario. We purchase the vast majority of grapes that are for sale in Ontario for making wine. We make over half the wine that is made from 100% Ontario grapes, and we are the largest producers of VQA in the province.

I want to begin by thanking the government for its announcement yesterday on improved access to the LCBO and more domestic bag-in-a-box. Improved access to the LCBO and a greater focus on buying local will help our industry address some of the sales that have been lost through key channels such as restaurants, sales at the winery, sales to tourists, and special events such as weddings.

Ontario wineries are key to Ontario tourism, particularly in the communities where we are located. Winery

tourism is, in fact, central to those economies. Bringing tourism back to Ontario wine country will support our wineries but will also help local hotels, bed and breakfasts, restaurants, artisans, and everyone who makes up the diversified tourism economy in our communities.

To do this, however, we must have a viable and healthy wine industry. Yesterday's announcement will help, but I want to let you know about a key challenge that we are facing that has been exacerbated by COVID. The massive subsidies that foreign governments provide to their wine industries make it a very unlevel playing field for us, even on our home turf. Right now there are easily over a billion litres of wine from around the world looking for a home. The reality is that many of the wineries around the world have faced the same challenges we have at home in terms of restaurants. But also, exports have stopped, and those exports have now built up and are just waiting to be released.

Hundreds of millions of dollars will be spent by the governments of France, Spain, Italy, Australia and other large wine-producing countries to sell those billion litres abroad. A good portion of that will be targeted at Canada and specifically at Ontario. Now is not the time to be helping those foreign wineries. We must have a home-team-first approach.

Many wineries in Ontario are struggling to make ends meet. To address this, we are encouraging the government to take two additional steps in addition to what was done yesterday.

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

Mr. Aaron Dobbin: The first is removing the 6.1% wine basic tax. This is a tax that is only on domestic wine that was imposed during the harmonization of the GST and HST. It directly impacts our bottom lines but is most acutely felt by those smaller wineries that rely almost exclusively on sales at their wineries.

The second is uncapping the VQA support program. This program is currently capped at \$7.5 million. Uncapping this program will create an environment where wineries will feel able to hire and make the investments necessary to survive and grow.

There is a wave of highly subsidized imports headed to our shores. It truly scares us, and we need the government of Ontario by our side.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. We'll start with the questions now. For the first turn, I'll start with the official opposition. I'll go to MPP Fife, then MPP Stevens and MPP Miller after that.

Ms. Catherine Fife: And Gates.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): And MPP Gates, yes.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you. My question is for Lorrie or Gene. We agree with you: Airports are a vital piece of the economic puzzle for Ontario and Canada.

You had mentioned, Lorrie, in your presentation that you were looking for two things: One was immediate aid, and I want to get a better sense of what that is; and second of all, health protocols that actually instill confidence in people going to airports. That's a common theme that

we've been hearing at this committee, that we can take some measures into place, but if people don't feel confident and safe, then they won't go to an airport. So please address the immediate aid and then one of the proposed health protocols that you're hoping to see from the government.

0920

Ms. Lorrie McKee: Thank you very much for your question, MPP Fife. The first question, with respect to immediate aid: Every airport is different and unique in terms of the aid that they've able to access, so I'll speak to Toronto Pearson and I'll let Gene speak to Billy Bishop.

We have accessed the wage subsidy program at the federal level. We have a unique situation at Pearson in that liquidity is not a particular challenge for us, but we do continue to speak to the federal government about providing backstops to protect us from being offside with our lenders. So rent relief, and that's the federal rent that we pay to the government of Canada—it was relieved for 2020. But that's a very immediate opportunity on our balance sheet because it's an expense and it shows up that way on our balance sheet. So that is something that we have requested for future years as well, so that the rent that we pay—it's something that will be very helpful for us in terms of how we manage with our lenders.

The immediate things with the province really are about stimulating the rebound of travel and some incentives to do that. Some of those I had in my remarks.

Maybe I'll ask Gene to talk about Billy Bishop in particular, and then I can speak to some of the health measures that you asked about in your second question.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes, please. Gene?

Mr. Gene Cabral: Good morning, and thank you for that question. Lorrie addressed part of it as well.

I would speak specifically to Billy Bishop, but also at the same time for other airports in the province, because we are in the same situation where we have seen, literally, commercial revenues gone. We at Billy Bishop don't have any commercial operations, so we are in a situation where our revenues have declined dramatically. Similar to what Lorrie has said, we've also applied and been successful in the wage subsidy program. That has not been sufficient. Unfortunately, we've had to do staff reductions and layoffs during this period of time. We've also reaped the benefit of the rent relief program. But the challenge with the rent relief program is that you need revenues to be able to receive benefits from that. With zero revenues or limited revenues, you don't really see the opportunity for a benefit.

Similar to what Lorrie said, we are looking for additional support, especially on the recovery side, to be in a position to be able to provide recovery for when we get to that point in time. Many other airports in the province—

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

Mr. Gene Cabral: —are also in the same situation. I think the stimulus components, as Lorrie talked about, are the key pieces we'd look at.

Maybe I'll turn it back to Lorrie to talk about the health measures and consistency we're looking for in airports.

Ms. Lorrie McKee: Thank you. In order to begin to restart travel—you're absolutely right—we need to build back the confidence of Canadians and others to travel. To do so, we need to ensure that we're protecting the health of travellers and our workforce. People need to see that as being done in a visible way. There are international standards that have been put in place, and guidance has been issued by bodies like IATA, which is the airlines, and ICAO, which is the airports. So we have been systematically bringing in and putting in place those measures: mandatory health masks for anyone on our property; restrictions to access to our facilities—you must have a boarding pass and be a flyer or on shift; physical distancing rules; and hygiene and cleanliness.

This is layered on top of what Transport Canada has provided in terms of the international orders that are place and questions that are being asked of passengers. Just last week, they did announce temperature checks for all passengers before they board aircraft en route to Canada, and soon thereafter, temperature checks on passengers as they leave.

We have a number of innovations that we're rolling out in the airport that you'll start to see next week. We call it our healthy airport program, so lots of innovations—

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

Ms. Lorrie McKee: —to help support the health and safety of passengers and our workforce.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much. There's one minute left. Jenny, do you want to do your question?

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

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Yes, thank you. I hope we get an extra 10 seconds for unmuting.

My question is to Aaron Dobbin. It's going to be quick because I only have one minute, Aaron. I just want to highlight that the sales of a VQA wine bottle helps our economy—one bottle actually helps our economy's spin-off—I think it's \$98 a bottle. So it's very important that we highlight these VQA wines that are generated here in the Niagara region.

The wineries and growers of Ontario: Congratulations. You do play a vital part with the wine industries from stage one, from agriculture and farming to the end product of a beautiful VQA wine. What, maybe now more than ever, would be the next steps to help regenerate or—

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

We have to move to the independent members now for their time of questioning.

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Before we do that, we need to do a quick attendance check on MPP Gates. Can you confirm your attendance and if you are in Ontario?

Mr. Wayne Gates: Wayne Gates. I'm in Ontario, in Niagara Falls. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll go to MPP Hunter for the next question.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you, and good morning, everyone. I want to thank our three presenters. You

provided this committee with the insights we need and the work that you have under way as you seek to recover your industry from the effects of the impacts of COVID-19. I just want to say a huge thank you to all of the presenters.

My question is related to what you shared, Lorrie, about the airline industry. There are many nuggets that you have here, and I'm very pleased to see that you have a table that the industry is sitting at with our minister responsible for this area, because I believe that this is not a short-term fix. You have given us a projection of 2022 for some return of operating, and then not likely till 2024 in terms of a full return. So that's a very long horizon.

I'm wondering about specific ideas—and I actually think that this question goes along with all the presenters this morning. What are those old ideas? So not going back to pre-COVID; but actually, how do we transform? Because when you talk about international standards, where it's only passengers with a ticket and people on shift going through the airport, that is very different than the business model that you have today, where you're reliant on things like retailers and maybe signage and advertising. Your whole model has been shifted, and I do understand that it is the health and safety of passengers that is at the forefront of the decision-making. It is also the survivability of the industry and the movement internationally and domestically—you know, inter-provincially.

So if you could just please share some of the things that you and your sector want to see the Ontario government support you on, even if it is making this known to the federal government. Go ahead, Lorrie.

Ms. Lorrie McKee: Thank you, MPP Hunter. Nice to see you. You're absolutely correct: The ground has shifted in a dramatic way. We are, heads down, thinking about the resiliency of our business and the things that we need to do to support recovery, but also what the new normal will be: obviously investments in technologies that have low-touch or no-touch processes involved; technologies that use biometrics, facial recognition. We've seen airports around the world adopt these technologies more quickly than Canada has. These were critical, we thought before, when we were a 50-million passenger airport and our challenges related to managing the massive flows of people. Now it's about managing people in ways that they're maintaining social distance, in ways that they're not risking their health because they're touching things: So elevators that you wave in front of so that they open; processes where your bag tag isn't printed anymore, but maybe there's an RFDI code that's embedded in your bag—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.
0930

Ms. Lorrie McKee: —all of those things.

One immediate thing that maybe I didn't say in my remarks that will be very important: that Ontario can play a very important role to remove the provincial restrictions right now that are in place. Nobody from BC is going to travel to Ontario this summer if they have to quarantine when they get back home; the same for Atlantic Canada. So those other provincial restrictions are really going to

hurt Ontario and Canadians' ability to travel to Ontario this summer.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: With the time remaining, Gene, we have to think about our northern communities as well. I know you play a role in that. Can you speak to what you're thinking of? We've heard in this committee that things like food supply and other types of supply chains are at risk at this point because of travel being so low—well, not at all, actually. So can you speak to any of that that you're thinking as you contemplate restart?

That's for Gene. Please unmute him.

Mr. Gene Cabral: Thank you very much. You can hear me?

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Yes.

Mr. Gene Cabral: Okay—a great question. Just building upon what Lorrie said as well, I think our airports—and to your point, you hit a really key piece: rural communities in northern Ontario and being able to ensure the chain of supply there continues to move smoothly. Airports are in a position to continue to do that. We've done that throughout, but the challenge is, obviously, as the revenues are not coming in—that is the real challenge. So airports are looking at those programs that will allow them to be in a position to be able to continue to provide those critical pieces. I think that is back to the point about where the support can come from an aid perspective.

I think the other piece that I would say comes hand in hand with what Lorrie said is the unification of standards across the province and then, more importantly, also is across the country. I think the inconsistency from one airport to another will be a major challenge.

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

Mr. Gene Cabral: Somebody arriving in an airport like Thunder Bay versus Billy Bishop or Toronto Pearson—if they have different standards and expectations of guidelines, it will be a challenge that will, unfortunately, not help. I think the unification of a federal approach on health protocols for airports would be an important piece that will allow us to be able to continue to provide access to those key markets.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Could either Gene or Lorrie talk about consumer and customer confidence? Because no matter what you do, unless people feel it, it's not going to change behaviour. What are you doing to make them feel safe?

Ms. Lorrie McKee: I think unification of standards, as Gene says, is the starting point. People need to see that it's the same for this airline versus that airline and this airport versus that airport. That's the starting point. Then people need that visible reassurance and communication to know that their health is at the core and the heart of all the processes that—

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

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

Ms. Donna Skelly: Good morning. My question is to Lorrie. Lorrie, I represent Hamilton, and in my riding is Hamilton airport. We haven't had any discussion this morning yet regarding cargo. As you know, our airport plays

a critical role in the supply chain. I would like you to speak to the need to perhaps expedite some of the programs that we have—projects—that would improve ground transportation, because we see bottlenecks, especially in the GTHA. Can you speak to what we, as a government, should and can do to improve ground transportation and the implications on cargo in your industry?

Ms. Lorrie McKee: Thank you very much for the question. Hamilton airport was very much a part of our panel and did provide input to the submission that we made. We work closely with them. You're absolutely right: Hamilton plays a critical role in the movement of goods for Ontario.

One of the areas that we have seen an uptake at airports in the face of COVID is in some cargo movements, as airlines and airports have had to do some retrofitting to try and make sure that critical movement of goods was still happening. But you're right: That only works so far. If goods are getting stuck on our roads and stuck in congestion, it doesn't help. So I think we have an opportunity—I mean, you don't get a chance in life to do a redo very often, but I think there's an opportunity for us to rethink our ground transportation networks and think about how we can make investments, and smart investments, as we look to stimulate and support job creation and make investments in critical ground transportation linkages to support the movement of goods among and between our aviation facilities and across the province.

I think your question is very poignant and an important one to think about as the government looks at how it can stimulate investments into transit and transportation that moves people off of our highways and into transit. That helps to support the movement of goods.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Further questions?

Ms. Donna Skelly: If you could keep me unmuted, perhaps.

My first question again, I should say, is: Can you give me examples of where you see bottlenecks in the GTHA?

Second, we have seen some silver lining in this, and that is we're seeing an increase in online shopping. Of course, that, again, is cargo transit. What can Ontario do to attract more businesses from outside the province, from outside the country, to locate in Ontario, that are involved in that particular sector? What can we do? What incentives—what can we do right now? Because economic recovery, of course, and more job creation are going to be critical once we move beyond COVID-19.

Ms. Lorrie McKee: In particular, I think some of the ways to attract businesses to obviously make our economy very cost-competitive for investments—we know that airports, regardless of where they're located in the province, become magnets for investment, and the types of business that locate around airports often rely on that connectivity that an airport can provide. Pearson is the largest employment zone, next to downtown Toronto, in the country, so we know that we'll be back there again soon, when people get back to work.

Provincially significant employment zones is a concept that Ontario has put in place—

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

Ms. Lorrie McKee:—and we think there's an opportunity to introduce policies that will help with recovery and specifically make sure that the attraction for investment in and around airports support airport operations and the businesses that rely on global and national connectivity. We're looking to work with Minister Clark and his team as well as other ministries as the policies related to those provincially significant employment zones are developed.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We'll move to MPP Rasheed for the next question.

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: My question is to Lorrie as well. I have been part of the task force that had conversations about the airline industry and the role of airports, especially the role that Pearson airport is playing.

My brother, I think this coming Monday, will be flying back to Australia. Just this morning, he and I were talking about consumer confidence when travelling, especially at the airport but also the airlines. We had several conversations about how the airline industry is going to behave moving forward in terms of airlines and sanitization—disinfection. Lorrie, maybe you want to just—

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

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed:—provide us some background info on what the airports are doing, and especially airlines.

Ms. Lorrie McKee: Thank you, MPP Rasheed, for your question. Obviously, cleaning and hygiene are a core piece of what airlines and airports are putting in place to ensure the health and safety of travellers and workers. I can speak most specifically about what the airport is doing in terms of air quality measures, cleaning and hygiene, and looking at technologies where there's self-cleaning but obviously using products that make sure that they're killing the virus. We're using UV technology for cleaning high-touch areas. Physical distancing can be a challenge in an airport and, no question, on an aircraft, and so, mandatory masks, improved hygiene, air quality and the exchange distance—

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

We have to move the second round now. I'll start with the independent members this time. MPP Schreiner.

0940

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I just want to quickly follow up on a question that I think MPP Hunter started—I think primarily directed to you, Gene. We've heard from northern tourism operators that a lot of their business comes from the US, and with the border closed, that's going to be very challenging.

I personally love the drive to Thunder Bay from the south, but it is a long haul. I've done it a few times with a canoe strapped to the top of the car. But I'm just wondering—maybe for either you or Lorrie—if there are some ways that we can encourage people in the south to travel to the north and enjoy nature in the north this summer, to help those tourism operators.

Mr. Gene Cabral: Thank you for that question. I think, from an airport perspective—and obviously, driving up

would be something that would help in getting people to the area and enjoy it from a tourism perspective. It won't help, obviously, airports and the aviation industry.

But I think I'd go back to the point of—one of things that airports are looking for specifically here is when we're ready to be able to stimulate the traffic coming back. Part of that is understanding, as Lorrie said, the measures that are being put in place to make airports safe and airlines, and the customers feel confident to have safe travel when they come back—I think one of the pieces for the industry is making sure that we can do this in an economical way. Otherwise, you're in a situation of driving up costs. Looking at user fee increases will not help building confidence back for travellers to get back to the industry itself.

I think it's about building the confidence back and encouraging—like you said, removing some of those restrictions that today would prevent people moving from one part of the region to the other part of the region itself, or bringing in tourism from outside of the province into some of the beautiful places that we have in this province of Ontario.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Thank you, Chair. Yes, please leave me unmuted while I'm asking questions.

Thanks for that. I think if we could get people flying from the south to the north, that would certainly help.

I'm just going to shift really quickly to the wine growers, because you talked about the exports that you may be confronting. I know MPP Stevens made a very good point about just the value of grape growers and the VQA industry to Ontario. There's some tax unfairness that I see in the way we tax wine, and there are some adjustments that could be made that would help make you more competitive against this onslaught of wine exports from other locations that you might be facing in the near future.

Mr. Aaron Dobbin: Most definitely. I think the biggest challenge we're going to face going forward is getting wineries back on their feet, and the double whammy of the challenges they have getting back on their feet as a result of COVID and then the onslaught that is coming in terms of the heavily subsidized foreign wine that will be coming here.

I think the biggest opportunity we have to help those wineries is to help them help themselves. The opportunity to get rid of the 6.1% wine tax, which is only on domestic wine—that would go straight to wineries' bottom lines. It would improve their margins and allow them to make the investments necessary.

The other tax change we would like to see is a fair tax system in terms of how our markups are impacted.

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

Mr. Aaron Dobbin: We are treated like an export when our wines go through the LCBO and are subject to the same markups. Because of world trade issues and the WTO, the solution for that is uncapping the VQA support program. While it is a margin tax issue, because of the WTO, the way to solve it for us—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Sorry, two minutes.

Mr. Aaron Dobbin: —is uncapping the VQA support program.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Thank you for that. I appreciate it.

I'm just going to go to Tony for a quick question. I know that the airport talked about the need for guidelines and support for reopening, but I've also heard from a lot of small businesses and restaurants in particular about the added costs of PPE and meeting public health measures. Can you maybe just share what those costs mean and the kind of support government could provide to help you meet those costs?

Mr. Tony Visca: I can give an example in my restaurant of what we had to do just to get ready to make sure our workplace is safe for our staff and also safe for our guests. Like the airports, we need to make everybody feel comfortable coming back.

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

Mr. Tony Visca: Just in Plexiglas alone, I've spent over \$3,000. I feel like we're paying anywhere between \$4 to \$5 a mask for our staff. That's going to be an incurred cost for us. That's something where I would like to see the government or the province help us with some kind of subsidy to offset those costs, because it seems like we're just creating more debt, which is going to take us longer to become a positive cash flow.

When we finally get to open up our patios tomorrow—I usually have a 160-seat patio; it's like 70 seats. Am I grateful we're opening? Absolutely, but it's not going to cover our costs.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Am I out of time, Chair?

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

We'll move to the government side for their second round. I'll start with MPP Cho.

Mr. Stan Cho: It's great to see all of you this morning. I appreciate you being here.

Aaron and Del, it's going to take me a while to not call it WGAO. You just switched that last minute on me. It's great to see you here, and I know I'm looking forward to our call later this afternoon.

Of course, you gentlemen understand how complex the wine landscape, the alcohol landscape, is really in Ontario, with a lot of moving parts internationally. We have to be aware of trade challenges, and that's why it's not so clear-cut all the time. With tax breaks, there is a potential international reaction to that. There are ongoing negotiations domestically that also impact the landscape here in Ontario.

But having said that, we're obviously working towards helping our domestic producers and grape growers and showcasing the jewels of our province, like in the Niagara region and throughout Ontario.

You mentioned our announcement yesterday. Much of that announcement was based on the feedback through this committee. We were able to increase shelf space at the LCBO, and specifically, it's the discretionary shelving at the LCBO. So it's actually a very significant portion of the LCBO stores, and this is intended to showcase our

domestic product and how wonderful that product is. This is a measure in response to the pandemic that will last through until October, around Thanksgiving. This will be active as of next week. So I'd like to thank all the members of SCOFEA for being participants and to all of the stakeholders who contributed to accomplishing that end.

There will also be publications for the LCBO, a promotional space on all social media as well as the magazine that the LCBO produces, dedicated to showcasing our local producers.

I'm wondering, gentlemen, if you could share with me if there are any other regulatory changes that we can look at, at the Ministry of Finance—low-hanging fruit, if you like my pun there—any suggestions you may have that we can help your industry further and quicker.

Mr. Aaron Dobbin: We actually have had a lot of progress on some of the red tape issues. Minister Sarkaria has been a great friend of our industry. He and his staff and the folks at the Ministry of Finance have been great in terms of listening to us.

On the red tape stuff, I think the one big item left—and I'm not sure it's completely low-hanging fruit, but on a red tape perspective—is that in British Columbia, wineries are able to provide discounts to their wine club members and for online sales. So what we have seen: I have members who do business in BC and Ontario, and their wine club membership revenue stream is significantly greater for them because they are able to incent folks to be consistent, regular buyers of their wine through the discounting available to the wine club members. In Ontario, we aren't able to provide that opportunity. We have seen from our experience in BC that particularly for online sales—

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

Mr. Aaron Dobbin:—which more and more wineries are using, through COVID, is being able to provide that discount.

0950

Providing an extra dollar or two off on a bottle that is purchased as a wine club member or online would be incredibly helpful in terms of improving that revenue stream.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll go to MPP Crawford for the next question. Are you there? MPP Crawford, are you there?

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Yes. Hello. Do we only have a few—a minute left, Chair?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Two and a half minutes, yes.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Two and a half minutes; okay.

I wanted to ask Lorrie a little bit more about—I know you mentioned and we've heard before about the aviation fuel tax. I wonder if you could just touch a little bit more on that.

Ms. Lorrie McKee: Of course. The province has already gone one step to remove the aviation fuel tax, which is really a disincentive on travel, and in particular international travel. That was done in the last provincial budget, and so the request from the sector is for a further

removal of that tax. It's something unique in Ontario. We don't see it in other provinces, and we definitely don't see it across the border in the United States. It creates a real disincentive and makes Ontario less competitive. That's why, together with our airline partners, who would be the beneficiaries of removal of the tax, we would support—airports as well—the removal of the aviation fuel tax in Ontario.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Crawford, can you unmute yourself, please?

Mr. Stephen Crawford: As the government, obviously, anything that involves taxation involves revenue, so we have to weigh the pros and cons of that. These are big decisions the government has to make.

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

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Are there any non-financial concerns or regulatory issues or red tape that you feel are low-hanging fruit that we can quickly make changes to that will help your industry?

Ms. Lorrie McKee: Some of the tax incentives that we've talked about are: How can you, instead of removing a tax, actually provide a credit so that you have some ways to stimulate travel? So it would be a tax credit associated with purchases of hotels or flights or consumer goods within your travel process at the airport, for example.

There is one red tape item that we had been speaking to the government about and working very closely with Ministers Mulroney and Sarkaria before COVID hit, and it's something that benefits a number of other Ontario airports, including Billy Bishop. It's changes to the Highway Traffic Act—

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

We'll have to move to the opposition side for their second round. I'll start with MPP Miller.

Mr. Paul Miller: Hello. How are you? Good morning. My question is to Lorrie and Gene. My staff and I have been looking at other jurisdictions and how they've been handling the impact of COVID on travel and tourism. Areas reliant on tourism revenue such as the Italian island of Sicily have begun to announce travel deals such as paying a portion of the traveller's costs by covering half of their airline ticket and maybe one out of the three nights of a hotel stay. Japan has already set aside \$15 billion to jumpstart the travel and tourism industry domestically. There are also plans to stimulate the economy by encouraging domestic tourism through vouchers offered to lower-income families to spend in Italian hotels, campgrounds and other establishments.

Has the airlines industry looked at offering incentives such as these, potentially in conjunction with government partnerships? I notice that the airlines are asking for government tax relief. Are they also going to be partners in offering incentives to the public?

Ms. Lorrie McKee: I can't speak to what the airlines may or may not be offering. I can tell you that we're also looking around the world and seeing the way other governments are treating the aviation sector. One of our worries is that the Canadian airport system is going to

come out of COVID very much indebted and will not be able to make the investments in facilities and programs the way, for example, American airports will, who have received significant grants from their airports, and so that will be a very big competitive challenge for the Canadian airport system, coming out of this.

We would like to see incentives for travel—and that was part of our remarks today—to help to stimulate, and we're happy to work with government on the development of some programs around how to stimulate and grow back traffic in a healthy way.

Mr. Paul Miller: Just a follow-up to that: You realize you've mentioned that you hope that the rebound is in 2022. You're suspecting it could be 2024 before things get back to a reasonable amount. I think that, by what you've discussed, offering incentives to travellers certainly would bring them back faster, and I think it would stimulate the airline travel and also help the airports and the surrounding businesses around airports if you do that. But if you rule out any incentives, I think it could be a slower turnaround than you're hoping for. Do you agree?

Ms. Lorrie McKee: I agree that stimulation is effective, and we're all looking for ways to help bring back travel. I think the challenge that we face is that our revenue streams have dried up, so airports don't have money. Without a passenger buying a ticket, we don't have any revenue. We have to get creative; I appreciate that. And we're prepared to work with governments on creative solutions that will help to stimulate.

Mr. Paul Miller: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I think MPP Stevens—you were cut off last. MPP Stevens, do you have any comment?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Yes, thank you. Quickly, I just want to get back to what I was saying to Tony and Aaron—thank you for coming—as well as Del and Lorrie. However, quickly—how many minutes do I have—one again?

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

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Three? Great. Thank you.

Again, the wineries and growers of Ontario play a vital part with our winery industry. Like I said earlier, you're from stage 1, your agricultural farming to the product of actually a VQA wine. Probably now more than ever, what next steps can this government do to regenerate our local wineries that bring in thousands of tourists to our main street businesses? Tony, I know you sell VQA wine down there at Johnny Rocco's. But what can this government put in a strategic plan, maybe, to help the economic recovery for wineries in Niagara and across Ontario, to recover the costs of tourism, retail and wholesale? Also, I want you to just highlight, if you could, your 6.1% tax on domestic wine program.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Unmute yourself, please. Mr. Visca?

Mr. Tony Visca: Sorry, I didn't think the question was for me.

But yes, we support VQA wines in our restaurant. The challenge we have is—we like to see us getting a better rate so we can offer a better rate to our guests because, believe it or not, we're competing with the wineries to sell their wine. I think if we can get a better rate and offer more VQA wines instead of imported wines—which we heavily support here in Niagara—I would actually just have VQA wines on the menu.

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

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'm not going to have a lot of time, but I want all the MPPs, including my own MPPs, to realize that in Niagara, we have 40,000 people who have lost their jobs during COVID-19, so how important the tourist sector is in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Fort Erie and Niagara Falls.

On the wine industry: The 6.1% can be fixed with my Bill 50. The Conservative government can bring it back. We've got to stop being the Boy Scouts of free trade. We have to protect important industries like the wine industry. Italy is doing it; France is doing it. There's no reason why we can't do it.

To Tony, I apologize for not having a lot of time, but can you tell me how the rent and your property taxes have affected your businesses—many businesses in Niagara—to stay afloat during this crisis? And thank you.

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Mr. Tony Visca: Thank you, Wayne. Basically, I've been lucky. Some of our landlords are working with us with the rent relief so that has helped us, and the wage subsidies helped us. My concern is down the road—two, three, four, months—

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

Thank you to all three presenters for your time and for your presentations. Thank you so much.

CANADIAN FOOTBALL LEAGUE

FALLS MANOR

RESORT AND RESTAURANT

CANADIAN MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION, ONTARIO DIVISION

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Moving along to our next presenter, from the Canadian Football League: If you could please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Randy Ambrosie: Good morning. My name is Randy Ambrosie, and I am the commissioner of the Canadian Football League. Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee, and thank you all for your commitment to public service, especially at this challenging time.

Let me say at the outset how proud I am to represent the Canadian Football League, and in front of this Ontario committee. Our three teams here in the province: the Toronto Argonauts, the Hamilton Tiger-Cats and the Ottawa Redblacks.

The Tiger-Cats and the Argos are rivals, of course, and one of the things they occasionally battle over is which is

the oldest professional football team in North America. Suffice for me to say, they both have a history dating back to the 1800s. The Redblacks joined the CFL in 2014, but the franchise builds on a football tradition in Ottawa that began with the founding of the Rough Riders there in 1876.

For far more than a century, football has been a force for civic pride across Ontario and national unity across Canada. It has also been a source of positive community engagement. Today our Ontario teams deliver a range of programs that battle violence against women, combat bullying, encourage fitness and literacy, support amateur football and celebrate local heroes in fields such as the military, health care and education.

The CFL's economic impact is also significant. Across the league it has been estimated to total \$1.2 billion per year. The Grey Cup, our championship game that is preceded by a multi-day festival, generates an estimated \$80 million in economic activity each year, and we look forward to bringing it to Hamilton in 2021.

The ownership structures in Ottawa, Toronto and Hamilton reflect the variety across our league. The Redblacks are owned by a small group of Ottawa business and community leaders, which also owns a junior hockey team and a basketball team. These community builders brought football back to the nation's capital after previous teams failed to succeed, and they have built one of the most stable franchises in the CFL.

The Argos are owned by Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment, one of the world's largest sports organizations. They took on the Argos, which had been struggling financially, out of a sense of commitment to the community and their passion for Canada. They have made significant improvements to their operation, and they have the team on the road to recovery.

The Tiger-Cats are owned by entrepreneur Bob Young, who took over a franchise that was teetering on the edge of disaster and has built it into a model franchise after investing millions of his own dollars over the years.

I tell you these stories because it illustrates that ours is a league that has often had to battle to succeed. In recent years, our nine teams have posted total losses approaching \$20 million. But we have been working towards financial success with a plan built on attracting players and fans from around the world—that is, until COVID-19 hit this year.

The pandemic literally stopped us in our tracks. We know that COVID-19 has affected almost every business in some way, and we sympathize with our fellow Ontarians and Canadians. For us at the CFL, it's hard to imagine many businesses that have been affected more directly or for whom the negative impact will be more long-lasting.

We totally support government and public health officials as they help us all to cope with the crisis, but their directives have forced us to postpone our season, which was scheduled to start this month, and they are preventing large gatherings, which is our lifeblood—fans in the stands. Other US-based leagues depend on television for the lion's share of their revenue. In the smaller Canadian market, we depend on ticket sales.

While Ontario has now embarked on a gradual and careful return to some form of normal, all of the experts tell us that large crowds will be the last thing to return and that they may not return until there is a new vaccine or treatment. Currently, we are working to determine whether we can start a dramatically shortened season later this summer or fall.

A lot of attention has been paid to the fact that we have reached out to the federal government for help. This outreach was overshadowed by the work being done on our COVID-19 recovery plan, which includes compensation, budget and staffing reductions.

The situation facing us is daunting, but we are determined to survive and, in the future, thrive. We owe that to the communities that we call home, we owe that to the people we employ, and we owe that to the country. I know that our teams in Hamilton, Toronto and Ottawa—

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

Mr. Randy Ambrosie:—believe we owe it to the province of Ontario, where we have long been part of the economic and cultural fabric of life.

Thank you again for inviting me to speak on the CFL, and I look forward to your questions.

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

All right, we'll go to our next presenter, from Falls Manor Resort and Restaurant. I see that there's an additional presenter as well, so if you can both please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Falls Manor Resort and Restaurant? Can you unmute yourself first?

Ms. Bianca Perron: Good morning.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Yes, there you go. Please introduce yourself, and then you can go right into the presentation.

Mr. Joseph Falletta: I'm Joseph Falletta.

Ms. Bianca Perron: I'm Bianca Perron.

Mr. Joseph Falletta: We are the owners of Falls Manor Ltd.

Ms. Bianca Perron: In Niagara Falls, Ontario.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): You may start your presentation.

Ms. Bianca Perron: Okay. Like we said, we're the owners of Falls Manor Resort and Restaurant in Niagara Falls on Lundy's Lane. As you know, due to COVID-19, we've definitely taken a huge hit. We have loss of business: 95% in our motel, as many guests from all over the world have cancelled, and probably 75% to 80% loss in our restaurant. The majority of our business that comes to us, they come with the hope of staying with us and enjoying our restaurant, and currently that's not happening. We are looking for government support as much as we can get.

Mr. Joseph Falletta: Past the end of August, which is the 75%, we feel that that should be extended a lot longer than that, because by August, we don't see full business coming back at all, really. Ontario has just announced to reopen the patio, but the cost of reopening the patio is

actually more than what we're going to bring in, because my patio only holds about 20 chairs. I can only serve 20 people at a time, but I have to have approximately six to eight people, if not 10, trying to serve these 20 people. So the cost is outrageous compared to what we're going to bring in.

Ms. Bianca Perron: We do make the majority of our money in the summer months, and we are going to need extra support come fall and winter, as that's normally our low season. We really save our money in the summer to make sure that our business can continue running come fall and winter, waiting for the spring and summer to arrive again.

Mr. Joseph Falletta: To give you an example, we're losing June, July and August. That's approximately \$200,000 in the motel income. It's gross income, but that's like 80% profit. Out of that \$200,000, \$160,000 is probably income that we use for the winter to pull us through the winter, which we're not going to get this year at all. We don't know how we're going to make it, come September, October, November and all that. It's really unbelievable, what has happened.

Ms. Bianca Perron: As you're aware, as of 2018, small businesses employed 8.4 million individuals in Canada, 69.9% of the total private labour force. Medium-sized business only employs 2.4 million, and large business only employs 1.3 million. If you lose your small business sector in Canada, there won't be jobs for people, and then the economy is really going to fail.

We are looking for the government to extend the CEWS for at least six to 12 months at a minimum and give us access to business loans that will accommodate our slow economy.

1010

Mr. Joseph Falletta: Yes. Without any of that, we have a problem staying alive, and we've tried our best so far with the \$40,000 that we have gotten from the government. We also applied for \$100,000 from the BDC bank, and we got that. But we feel that it's not going to be enough to pull us through another six months or eight months of no income. In our case, my expenses are approximately \$30,000 to \$40,000 a month. Where am I going to get that money if I don't have a business that supplies that to me?

Ms. Bianca Perron: We feel that business loans from the government should be interest-free and we feel that the government or the banks—

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

Ms. Bianca Perron: Two minutes? Okay. The banks are making money off of our unfortunate events. That's not really fair, and like I said before, if you don't save small business, you're going to lose the—

Mr. Joseph Falletta: The economy.

Ms. Bianca Perron: Yes. The ability to employ people who are going to reinvest in the economy.

We're also wondering why the government extended the CERB. We understand that there are people without jobs, but you need to do your due diligence and actually

find out if people are being offered their job back and they're not going back.

Mr. Joseph Falletta: Because what we find is that we're asking them to come to work, but they say, "I can only work two days a week because otherwise I'm going to lose my CERB." They don't want to come to work because they're already getting the money, and we're having the toughest time trying to get them back to work for a full week, because they don't want to work a full week.

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

Mr. Joseph Falletta: They're not going to work. Actually, they've told us already, "I'm not coming."

Ms. Bianca Perron: "I'm not coming."

Mr. Joseph Falletta: So what do I do as a businessman? How am I going to open the door when these people are not coming back to work?

Ms. Bianca Perron: And basically—

Mr. Joseph Falletta: I think we've said what we have to say. I think the government should, first of all, like we said, help out with business loans that aren't interest—there's no interest; they should be interest-free. Second, they should check that people don't make \$3,000 or \$2,000 a month so that they can refuse to go back to work. How do we get them back in our place? But anyway, that's what we need. We need to—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. Sorry to cut you off. That concludes your time. However, before we move to the next presenter, Mr. Joseph, can you confirm your last name for the record, please? Mr. Joseph?

Ms. Bianca Perron: Hang on. There you go. Say it again.

Mr. Joseph Falletta: My last name is Falletta, F-A-L-L-E-T-T-A, first name Joseph. I don't have a middle name.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. All right. We'll move to our next presenter, from the Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario division. Can you please confirm your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Ms. Camille Quenneville: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My name is Camille Quenneville. I'm CEO of the Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario division. On behalf of the Canadian Mental Health Association, thank you for the opportunity to present our perspective on the Economic and Fiscal Update Act and the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the mental health and addiction sector.

CMHA Ontario and our 28 local branches are part of the community-based mental health and addiction sector, which serves approximately 500,000 Ontarians annually. We actively contribute to health system development by recommending policy options to improve the lives of all Ontarians. Through leadership, collaboration and the continual pursuit of excellence, CMHA works to achieve the vision of a society that embraces and invests in the mental health of all people.

A focus of our work is addressing the needs of Ontarians living with substance use and addictions conditions, offering harm reduction programs, rapid access to addictions medicine, withdrawal management and other treatments, services and supports. This perspective informs our comments and recommendations on the Economic and Fiscal Update Act.

According to polling commissioned by us, seven out of 10 Ontarians believe the province is headed for a serious mental health crisis as it emerges from the pandemic, and nearly eight out of 10 say more mental health supports will be necessary to help society.

As well, research from Children's Mental Health Ontario and Addictions and Mental Health Ontario show that, prior to the pandemic, almost 50% of Ontario children and youth were at moderate or serious risk of a mental health issue. Since COVID-19, nearly 60% of parents noted behavioural changes in their child.

While various levels of government are currently offering expansive resources and stimulus across the health care system and economy to manage the pandemic, the needs of the community mental health and addictions sector are, to be blunt, not being met. CMHA and our partners were disappointed that the mental health of Ontarians was not prominently featured in the Economic and Fiscal Update Act.

During this pandemic, the Ontario government has many times cited the importance of the mental health of Ontarians; however, emergency funding to our sector has totalled \$12 million, which is less than 1% of the more than \$1.4 billion allocated to hospitals and long-term-care facilities during this crisis.

We need an immediate investment for staffing, the cost of redeployment of additional clinical and non-clinical staff for prevention and protection, which is the cost of equipment and supplies such as personal protective equipment; and for digital solutions, which are the costs of technology to continue to provide high-quality, confidential services such as counselling and therapy by phone or video conference.

We continuously applauded the government for its unprecedented total commitment of \$3.8 billion over 10 years specifically for mental health and addiction services, which includes matching dollars from the federal government. But money has been slow to flow. The first wave of funding came in the 2019-20 Ontario budget; \$174 million was invested in mental health and addictions across the life span, in specific programs and services and for specific populations. A continued investment of \$380 million per year, as per the government's platform commitment to fund mental health and addictions, is required to build system capacity in key areas of the community sector.

As noted in our 2020 pre-budget submission, we offer several recommendations for new investments. The first is access to supportive housing, which is an effective means of addressing the growing alternate-level-of-care needs in Ontario. New investments in mental health and addictions supportive housing are required to develop an additional

30,000 supportive housing units across the province over the next 10 years.

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

Ms. Camille Quenneville: The second is that it's vital to support community-based care to enable emergency department diversion. This is an effective means of ending hallway medicine.

The third is an upcoming investment for the new Mental Health and Addictions Centre of Excellence with Ontario Health. It must focus on core mental health and addictions services, comprehensive data and performance measurement strategy and quality improvement supports.

I'd like to just spend a second focusing on police response to mental health crisis for a moment. Diversion efforts often involve police, as they have become the first responders to individuals in crisis. We need to refocus on what it is that those individuals in crisis need. We know that they need ongoing mental health and, in some cases, addictions support. Police need de-escalation training and support, which they have continually requested from us.

We have an excellent program at CMHA Middlesex, where hospital law enforcement and community work together to help individuals in crisis through our 24/7 crisis centre located at our branch.

Our fourth recommendation is additional services that will help to avoid having people reach a crisis point in their lives. That will include a base budget increase of 3% to sustain service delivery capacity and meet growing demands, as referenced, in the community-based sector.

In closing, community mental health and addictions agencies are an essential service that is actively responding to the COVID-19 crisis in Ontario. I want to thank each of you elected officials for your time today. I sincerely appreciate it. I know that these are very trying times, and I have to say that I've been extremely impressed with how you have managed this over the course of the last several months, including today, by allowing us to still have an opportunity to present to you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. We'll start with the questions now. We'll go to the government side this time. MPP Dave Smith?

1020

Mr. Dave Smith: My question is for Mr. Ambrosie from the CFL. I'm probably going to date myself here with some of my comments. Most kids get involved in minor sports because they have a parent that was involved with it or they have fallen in love with the game because of professional sports. I myself decided I wanted to be a football player because of the 1993 Argos. Cedric Minter, Terry Greer and Joe Barnes were the three players that made me want to play. I wanted to be a combination of a wide receiver, quarterback and running back. I liked the idea of running over people as the running back; I liked the idea of the glory that Terry Greer got when he scored those touchdowns—although in the Grey Cup I believe it was Minter who scored the winning touchdown for the Argos—and how do you not like Joe Barnes?

My point is that the kids are inspired to play sports because of what they see on TV. The CFL went through a

problem in the 1990s and early 2000s with their blackout policy, but you've done a great job of getting sports fans back. In my own community, we have Canadian Football League-style minor football here, where they're playing three downs, not the US-style four downs. How much damage, long-term, is this going to do to the sport itself because kids aren't going to be able to see their heroes on TV playing the game?

Mr. Randy Ambrosie: Well, first of all, let me say thank you for your passion for the Canadian Football League and for football in general. The answer is that we don't know how much damage this is going to create. We've been working with Minister MacLeod, and one of her great passions is getting amateur sports back up and running in the province. That is something we strongly support. We know that getting kids active, getting kids out of the house, getting kids playing together—we also know that the game of football has unique characteristics around teamwork that we think ultimately help children develop into better, very productive adults.

We don't know, because we don't know what happens next. This has been one of the problems that has plagued us from the very beginning. We don't know what happens next month or the month after that. We don't know when we can return to play. Obviously, we would love to. We would love to get our players back on the field, but there are still a number of unanswered questions, through no fault of yours nor ours. But we do hope and we're optimistic that we will get back to the field, that we'll get back to entertaining fans and, certainly, as you properly pointed out, get kids back to watch these amazing players who become heroes and inspire those children to go on to have their own dreams in sports. Look, I thank you for your comments. We remain optimistic.

Mr. Dave Smith: I've often made the comment, because I've been involved in minor sports so heavily here in my community, that everything you need to survive socially in the world you can learn through team sport: You play with your friends; you play against your friends; sometimes you have to play with people you don't like, and you still have to treat them as your teammate and work with them. Sometimes you win; sometimes you lose. Sometimes you're on the field when the team scores, sometimes you're on the field when the other team scores, but most of the time you're on the sidelines and cheering your team on. Learning all of those skills are some of the most valuable things that you will do as a youth. So I'm a huge fan of team sport.

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

Mr. Dave Smith: I recognize that this is going to have long-lasting effects. We may not actually see the total effect of what this has done to your sport in particular for a decade because you will lose potentially a generation of fans.

Mr. Randy Ambrosie: Well, I hope that you're wrong. I hope that we can manage our way through the crisis. Again I would say that we really share the support for how the government has handled the crisis. We support the

health care initiatives that have been taken. We are optimistic that we can get through the crisis together, get back on the field to play and resume normal activities. You have to remain hopeful through this process. Then, we'll fight to get our fans back and cheering for these great heroes, as you've indicated. Again, I thank you so much for your comments.

Mr. Dave Smith: I'm going to turn it over to MPP Skelly now.

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

Ms. Donna Skelly: My question is also to Mr. Ambrosie. I'm from Hamilton, and a big TiCat fan. I've been there for years. I was a broadcaster before getting into politics, and I watched how the league and the team, in particular, struggled with change of ownership over the years, as my colleague referenced.

I'm just wondering: As you mentioned, MLSE—a pretty successful company. Bob Young owns the TiCats; MLSE owns the Argos. You have, as you mentioned in your comments, asked the team, staff and players—

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

Ms. Donna Skelly: —to have a haircut. What are these wealthy team owners doing to contribute to help the players during the time that they aren't able to play this season?

Mr. Randy Ambrosie: Well, the owners, of course, continue to fund the team's operations. As you can well imagine, we have expenses that don't go away just because your revenue goes away. We have to pay staff. We continue our planning process. In fact, even in the crisis, trying to figure out how we might return to play and how we get our teams back on the field is an enormous task and requires a great many people, and the teams continue to fund all of those activities.

As it relates to the players, we have been working with the players' association to try to see if we can get our players to qualify for the CEWS program. It has been something—

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

We'll have to move to the opposition side now for their time of questioning. I'll start with MPP Gates and then MPP Miller.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Thank you very much. My questions are going to go to Falls Manor Resort. I want to say to Joe that your passion comes through to all of this committee. That's how businesses are feeling in Niagara Falls. They're fighting as hard as they can just to survive, and I just want to say to your family: Thank you for everything you've done in our community. You're loved by our community, and I know you've got lots of support in our community. I want to make sure you understand that you're not in this alone.

Every day I walk down Lundy's Lane, one of the things you see is that there are less major corporations and more medium and small businesses. In terms of your business, how devastating has the COVID-19 lockdown been for your family and your staff? And do you believe there has been enough support for businesses, like low-interest

government loans at, maybe, 1% or 1.5%, where you can also utilize credit unions?

Mr. Joseph Falletta: No, there hasn't. I mean, even the \$100,000 that we got from the BDC, the interest rate is approximately 4.3%, which is very high. The one that was good was the \$40,000 that we got interest-free, but \$40,000 is not going anywhere. In one month, I've spent \$40,000 on my expenses, and what do I do for the other months? There's no—how can I say—support at all.

The 75% support has been good. We appreciate all that the government has done with that. But I'm hoping that that continues after August, September and October. We need that, because without that, we might as well close the doors because we just can't pay the bills. So we need that support to extend, let's say, till the end of the year or, maybe even better, until we have full business. Then we can pay our own bills again. But until then, we can't pay the bills. We just can't.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Thank you. I've got one more quick question. You need loans of 1% to 1.5% with the credit unions, and that has been raised by a number of businesses in Niagara to this committee. Business owners in Niagara Falls are telling me that a big expense for closed businesses 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 tourist operators and owners like yourself?

Mr. Joseph Falletta: Yes.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Thank you.

Mr. Joseph Falletta: The province should be stepping in and taking care of the property taxes, since the city cannot afford that. They don't make money unless we pay it to them. So the province should be coming in with all the taxes they collect and pay for the property taxes. To tell you the truth, in my case, we're looking at \$70,000 to \$80,000 a year in property taxes. That's a lot of taxes every month. I feel that the province should be coming in to help us out, yes.

1030

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. MPP Miller? And three minutes left.

Mr. Paul Miller: Three minutes? Great; thank you.

I have two questions. If I don't finish the second one, I'll do it in the second round. This is to Randy of the CFL. A recent article by TSN mentions the question of international travel for many American players, coaches and support staff. It states that if the 2020 season was to move forward, there would be over 500 players plus coaches entering the country, many coming directly from such hot-zone states as Florida, Texas and the Carolinas.

If a 2020 season was to be played, how does the CFL intend to respond to the notion of these members of the organization living in what is now being called a bubble? This would subject these athletes to potential isolation from the public while playing out their year. Other elements that may be considered would be contact tracing and location monitoring. Do we have any idea of how the athletes and staff feel about these potential measures?

Also, has there been any conversation with the Canada Border Services Agency about exemptions for players and staff?

Mr. Randy Ambrosie: Thank you for your questions. The answer is that we have been watching carefully what has been happening at the border. Obviously, the federal government recently extended the restriction on border crossings, so we're paying very close attention to that. That would obviously be an issue. You've identified something that is clearly part of the challenge.

In fact, MPP Miller, what you've really done in a nice way is kind of framed some of the challenges that we have to consider as we look at: How can we get back onto the field this year? What you've properly identified, and I thank you for that, is just how complex it really is. It's not the simple matter of deciding that you want to play. If it was as simple as that, that we just wanted to play, then we could do that. But, of course, it involves a lot of complexity, the border being one of the issues—

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

Mr. Randy Ambrosie:—another relating simply to: How do you make it happen? How do you put players in isolation for the period of time that we would have to have them? I know the players' association recently put a survey out to its members asking them that very question. I think that was a great move on behalf of the PA, to really see how their players would feel about that, because it's not so simple. I think there are lots of issues, including mental health issues, related to asking people to be away from their families for an extended period of time.

But again, as you properly have pointed out, lots of complexity—which is one of the reasons why we have been struggling to make a decision on what the best course of action is for our league. Again, MPP Miller, I thank you for your question.

Mr. Paul Miller: Thank you, Randy. I'll have another question for you in the next round.

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

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I really want to thank all three presenters for coming in today. Camille, I'm actually going to direct some questions to you, but I'm going to try—I hope I don't put you on the spot—to connect it in to the conversation around tourism right now. But before I do that, I just want to say that I really appreciate how you've highlighted the important role of mental health services, particularly during this pandemic, and I also think the suggestions you made around supporting mental health services, as we reimagine what policing would look like and community care would look like in our communities with the whole conversation that's happening around Black Lives Matter—thank you for bringing that up.

There are a lot of studies that have talked about the importance of leisure time, being in nature and getting away from work for a bit in terms of people's mental health, and obviously tourism plays a critical role in providing the foundation for people to access that. Could you maybe just talk a bit about the link between tourism,

and especially maybe ecotourism and nature and the connection to mental health?

Ms. Camille Quenneville: I'm happy to. Thank you so much for that excellent question. We actually run a program called Mood Walks, which is walks in nature, so very much connected to the great outdoors. At this point, it is targeted to young people on campus, so students who are obviously under a lot of pressure as they work through their degree. We run the Centre for Innovation on Campus Mental Health across Ontario. This program allows us to bring a professional in who leads a guided tour with a group of students on a regular basis. There is a lot of scientific evidence that suggests that any walk in nature improves your mental health. If you are actively part of any kind of—I'm going to bridge here to talk a little bit about sports, if I could, as well, because I'm intrigued by the conversation we're having around football. I'm going to link it to hockey for a second, because I also want to mention that we have a program called Talk Today, which is in the OHL. I'd like to speak to Randy, because I think this is entirely possible to transfer to football.

In any event, unfortunately, it had a sad beginning, which was the death by suicide of a young hockey player in the OHL. We developed a program where we provide both mental health and suicide awareness training to these young athletes, and we do it over a three-hour period where we have them in a classroom and we talk to them in very frank ways about the importance of their mental health and about having open conversations about your mental health. It is a highly evidence-based training that we provide.

Long story short: We have taken this program, scaled it across Ontario in 2014. We now run it across Canada—

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

Ms. Camille Quenneville: —across the entire Canadian Hockey League. We've trained thousands of young athletes on the importance of their mental health, and we have prevented deaths. We know this. We have a great partnership with the Canadian Hockey League, and we are immensely proud of this Ontario-born program.

To get back to your question: We run a lot of programs that engage with nature, that are intended to bring people back into that world, to get them out of their everyday, to get them to clear their mind. Mood Walks is the most obvious example of that from our end, but we really focus on giving people daily tips that are cognitive behavioural therapy that will help them work through the challenges that they face.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Great. Thank you for that. I appreciate the connection to the CFL, because I was going to ask Randy a bit about that.

You had raised the mental health challenges that your players are going to face, potentially, in isolation, and I've heard that related to all sports leagues. I'm just wondering how you intend to overcome some of those challenges as we think about how we can restart professional sports.

Mr. Randy Ambrosie: Thank you for your question. It is an ongoing issue. Camille, thank you for your comments. I'm so impressed by the progress we're making.

There was a time in sports where, I guess, the macho-ism of sport required that you couldn't be vulnerable. I think players hid injuries, whether they be physical or mental.

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

Mr. Randy Ambrosie: The conversation that has been started in the community—Camille, your organization and what you've done is creating an environment where people feel like now they are able to share how they're feeling more than ever before, and yet, I would still say, Camille—I hope you'll smile when I say this—that we have a lot more work to do. We're nowhere close to being where we want.

But I think it is something that we are working towards being more conscious of, that we're working to potentially, as an idea, do a mental health assessment as part of the annual physical so that we have a baseline for how our players are feeling. We know, for example, that things like learning disabilities can have an effect on their ability to assimilate information, but it also has an effect on their concussion recovery. There's documented evidence now that learning disabilities and depression can have an effect on concussion recovery.

So I thank you for your question, and I think it is something we have to continue to push at and—

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

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Thank you. We're out of time.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We'll go to the opposition side for their second round. MPP Miller: Are you there? Okay. We'll go to MPP Fife, then.

Mr. Paul Miller: I'm all right. I'm here.

1040

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Yes, go ahead, please.

Mr. Paul Miller: This is again to the CFL and Randy. Randy, with the recent announcement of the CERB program extension for an additional two months, what are the CFL's plans to work with their many stadium employees who will not be able to work due to the closure of the stadiums beyond that point in time? The seasonal contractors may not have made enough to qualify for the federal assistance. Do we know how many people we are talking about across the CFL's many venues, and are these people seasonal? Beyond the government financial support programs, is there anything the CFL can suggest that may be able to help the workers find something to hold them over until we can resume operations again?

Randy, I think that the CFL in general—I'm praying and hoping they come back strong, and anything we can do to support that, we're behind you. As the sports critic for the province, I understand what you're up against, and a proud Hamiltonian of the Tiger-Cats too. We're there with you, and we're going to get through this. Thanks, Randy.

Mr. Randy Ambrosie: Well, again, thank you, MPP Miller. For the most part, we are tenants in the vast majority of our stadiums, so we don't have a direct line of sight to the employee-employer relationship with a lot of our venues from coast to coast. That is not to say that we

don't take an interest, because we do, in the overall ecosystem that we work in. We're obviously very hopeful that all the employees relating to our game, whether they be in the stadium-support side of the business or more directly in our league, can benefit from government programs.

Some of the problems that we are all facing—and I'm thinking of the presenters from Niagara Falls—is that some of our businesses are seasonal, and some of these programs and the qualifications for some of these programs don't allow seasonal workers to benefit from the programs the way that a 12-month employee would. This is one of the conversations we are having with the federal government now on behalf of and with our players: How do we get our players to qualify for the CEWS program, because technically, under the definition of CEWS, they don't have the pre-qualifying income because they're seasonal workers? That's preventing them from being able to qualify.

One of the things that we have asked the provincial government to do—and again, I point to Minister MacLeod, who has been such a great advocate, and I thank all of you for your comments this morning—is that we're asking you to help us work with the federal government to make some changes that will help all of these employees get through this crisis and—I'm selfishly thinking about our players—help our players get through this crisis so that we can get back to playing and return to entertaining our fans.

Mr. Paul Miller: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. MPP Fife: three minutes.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thanks to all three of the presenters this morning. I find the conversation to be very interesting. There are some real challenges.

Camille, it's very good to see you. Thank you very much for the advocacy that you've been doing throughout the last three months. Camille, this morning I heard a report that's out of U of T correlating suicide rates with unemployment rates. There's a direct correlation between a loss of job and depression, which of course is a precursor to suicide.

Obviously, our employment rates are very challenging right now. Where do you put mental health as a priority for the government? There has always been an issue, even outside of the crisis, of accessing mental health supports. We need to make sure that those supports are in place in a time when people need them. Can you speak to the importance of responding quickly and prioritizing mental health to our economic recovery as a province?

Ms. Camille Quenneville: Thank you for that question. The report you referenced out of U of T is exactly right. One of the many concerning areas that we have—those of us in the mental health and addictions business—is that we have, as you point out, watched the unemployment rate go up, and, as we've heard from our fellow presenters, the concerns they have running a small business.

This is obviously pervasive across the province. We have seen a number of models that indicate that mental health and addictions are the fourth phase of this pandemic. As people work through a re-entry to work and as we start to see our lives return to some sense of normalcy,

the impact often is shown at the end of that exercise; in other words, as people start to realize what they've been through, and they're dealing with the after-effects of either having lost their job or—

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

Ms. Camille Quenneville:—some financial repercussions as a result of having been unemployed for a period of time.

I have to just state for the record that the opioid crisis is very significant. Overdose rates have increased dramatically across the province, and it's terrifying to look at those numbers. These are very real and immediate concerns, and our view, for those of us in the sector right now working with individuals, is that there isn't a fourth phase. We're in that now, and it is hard to imagine that we will continue to get worse.

As you rightfully point out, our hope is that we can increase supports and their availability now so that we can put people who are high-functioning back into the workforce as soon as possible.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much, Camille. No further questions.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll go to the independent members now. Who wants to go first? MPP Simard.

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: I don't know if it's my turn? Yes?

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

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: Thank you. I'm French, but I'll try to ask my questions in English for practicality. I'm MPP Amanda Simard from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell.

I was actually Mr. David Braley's assistant for many years—and my question is to the commissioner of the CFL. I was the assistant to Mr. Braley, who owned two football teams at the time: He owned the Argonauts and he owned the BC Lions simultaneously. He had previously owned the Hamilton TiCats and was the interim commissioner for some time. We would talk about politics every day, but half the day football. I learned a lot about the mechanisms behind the scenes, the operations.

I remember it was so difficult for the Argonauts to—the attendance—fill up those stadiums, because the competition in Toronto is extremely fierce with sports. We have the Raptors, the Blue Jays, and fans can only have so many season passes. So I can only imagine how challenging it is right now, especially because your season is in the summer.

I know you're asking the federal government—you have an ask and you want us to work with them. But what can we do as legislators to help with the provincial guidelines and how we communicate with the other provinces so that there's no discrepancy in the sense that—I share a border in my riding with Quebec, and in other sectors it was a nightmare because the two governments weren't talking to each other. So how are all the provinces working together, in your opinion, to make sure that we're consistent and that you have clear communication on what is expected of you for your teams in every province? What's the coordination like? Do you know at this exact

time what is expected of you for when you're allowed to resume your operations?

Mr. Randy Ambrosie: MPP Simard, thank you for your questions and your observations. I'm a very big David Braley fan, and I appreciate your efforts to work with David over the years.

I'll start by saying that tonight I am joining a call with the federal minister for sport and heritage, along with his provincial counterparts, including Minister MacLeod, for a conversation about the overall situation that the CFL is facing. I'm hopeful, MPP Simard, that one of the conversations we'll have is: How do we all work together? How do we make this not just a federal government situation but one that all of us are sharing together and looking for a solution that we can all bring together as true partners?

Some of the answers to the very good questions you've raised I hope will begin to be answered through the conversation that I'm having tonight, at both the federal and provincial government levels.

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

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: Okay. Can I ask a follow-up?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Yes, sure.

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: Okay. Then going back, sorry, again about Mr. Braley—we still talk every day, and I remember that we discussed this just recently too—when he owned the Argonauts, it was challenging. The BC Lions were making—there's a big ask right over there, but a lot of the time you're not making money. This is out of passion, and it was very difficult.

1050

Do you fear that some of the teams, the owners, may not be able—is there a risk there that some of the teams may be lost, in the sense that there are only eight teams and if one of them goes, that significantly impacts the league as a whole? Is there a risk, do you think, at this point, right now?

Mr. Randy Ambrosie: Well, MPP Simard, I guess the honest answer is that we still don't know entirely how this is going to play out. I think, in some respect, the answer to your question will come in the form of: How quickly can we get back to action and how quickly will fans return to stadiums? The province did some research that I was able to see on the sentiment of Ontarians and their interest in returning to large group gatherings. One of the things it indicated was that the vast majority of Ontarians indicated they would not return to large group gatherings until such time as either there was a treatment or a vaccine. So, again, this is one of the questions that we all are facing together in society: When can we get back to more or less of a normal operating environment, or much closer—

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

Mr. Randy Ambrosie: —to what we remember pre-COVID virus?

I work with amazing owners, who are all passionate and committed. But you're right: There's an element of sports philanthropy in what they do. They're not owning a CFL team because it's going to make them riches. They own it because they love Canada, they love football and they love

what sports does for Canadians. I'm hopeful that we will see answers to the questions that you've raised in the days ahead and allow us to move our league forward. We are, by nature, optimists and we want to see our league continue. But you've identified the real risks that we face, that if we can't return to play, it puts our league in jeopardy. But for the moment, we're looking at solutions and are optimistic that we will find them and take our league to a much better place in the days and years to come.

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. All right, so we'll move to the government side now: MPP—
Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Sorry. Before we do that, I need to do an attendance check on MPP Norm Miller, Parry Sound–Muskoka. MPP Miller? All right, we'll come back to that.

MPP Skelly, the next question?

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you, Chair, and again my question is to Mr. Ambrosie. I really want you to expand on the comments that you were just making, and that is: What does the new normal look like? We know that people will be hesitant to gather in large crowds. We may be forced to live with extended social-distancing regulations for events such as all sporting events, which means fewer bums in the seats, and your business model currently relies heavily on bums in the seats and some advertising through—I guess your partner is TSN—broadcast revenue. What could the new normal look like in terms of a business model.

Mr. Randy Ambrosie: MPP Skelly, it is a great question. Again, what your question highlights is the complexity of the challenges that we're facing. And not just me; we're talking about our co-presenters today and the challenges they're facing. We don't know what the new normal is going to look like. They don't know how it's going to affect their business in Niagara Falls.

In fact, it ties back into what Camille is sharing. I think the uncertainty created around this virus has left us all feeling more vulnerable than perhaps we ever have before. Specifically, we have looked at what a socially distant model for our stadiums would look like. If you take Tim Hortons as an example, it would take the attendance in a normal game environment in the low to mid-twenties down to somewhere in the neighbourhood of 6,000 fans—obviously, a very different environment for sports to play in front of 6,000 fans than a full stadium, as we often see at Tim Hortons. And of course, it has tremendous implications for our financial model. So MPP Skelly, you've asked entirely the right question, and that is one of the challenges that we're facing as we think about how to get our league back up and running.

The challenge that we're facing longer term is: What is that new normal going to be? Of course, as you can imagine, we do models on any one of many scenarios. The honest answer today—what plagues us—is that we really don't know. We don't know what new normal—we of course pray for a vaccine. We pray for a treatment.

We think about this through the broadest lens. Obviously, what's best for all of us, for all Ontarians, for all Canadians and around the world, frankly, is that we resolve some of the challenges of COVID-19. It's putting stress on everyone, and we're hearing that in great supply during the presenters' comments this morning.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Before I hand it over to my colleague, I wanted to ask you about the future of the Grey Cup—this year; we know it's going to be around forever. This year, if you can get a season in, are you talking about a Grey Cup this year?

Mr. Randy Ambrosie: Again, it's something that we would very much like to have. This would be our 101st consecutive Grey Cup, if it was able to be played.

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

Mr. Randy Ambrosie: We do know that our fans are going to be quite accommodating around a unique type of season that would lead to playoffs and a Grey Cup, so that is positive, but we still have a lot of work to get to before we know if we can have a season.

But again, I'll go back to something I said earlier: We're optimists by nature. We want to get our players back on the field. That's really good for our players and really good for our league, if we can get back on the field. Boy, wouldn't it be nice to turn our TVs on sometime later this year, in the fall, and—

Ms. Donna Skelly: And watch the awesome Tiger-Cats winning the Grey Cup. I had to say that. Oskee wee wee!

I'm going to hand it over. I think MPP Crawford is up next, if I understand.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Crawford, yes.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: I know we have very limited time, and I want to ask questions, really, to all three members. I'll start out by saying that unlike MPPs Miller and Skelly, I am not a Hamilton Tiger-Cats fan. But I'll leave it at that for now.

I'd like to ask Falls Manor: We've heard from a number of people and I've heard from a number of businesses about the CERB. Although well intentioned, it has been a disincentive for people to work, unfortunately. So it's interesting to hear that from you and to get further data on that. But I wanted to get a sense on: As we move into phase 2 in Niagara region, is there any economic activity pick-up? I know we are in dire straits relative to where we were a year ago, but are you seeing any new activity with restaurants? Will your manor be open? Is there any sort of—even slightly—increase in pick-up in interest with tourists coming to your location?

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

Mr. Joseph Falletta: What we've seen in the last three weeks, let's say, is that there have been a lot more people in the Falls than there were a couple of months ago. When the pandemic started, the Falls was completely dead. Last weekend, we were riding around a little bit and down River Road and the gorge—there was a lot of people actually outside. There was a lot more than there has ever been. We're hopeful of that. I'm very hopeful that people

will come out once we start to get back to normal, let's say.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: In terms of your own business, how is the activity now?

Mr. Joseph Falletta: To the business itself, it hasn't been the greatest, like I said. At the motel, we've lost completely everything. We've had nothing but cancellations, and they're cancelling in July and they're cancelling in August, which is not very good news. It's bad news—

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

Thank you to all three presenters for your time and for your presentation. Thank you so much.

BAYVIEW WILDWOOD RESORT

FESTIVAL OF THE SOUND

ANISHNAWBE BUSINESS PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We'll move along to our next presenters. First, we'll start with the Bayview Wildwood Resort. If you could please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

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Mr. Jason Stanton: My name is Jason Stanton. I'm the general manager of Bayview Wildwood Resort. First of all, thank you for letting me present today. I really do appreciate this opportunity.

Our property is located about an hour and a half north of Toronto, in Severn township. We are on the south shore of Sparrow Lake, which is located on the Trent-Severn waterway. Our resort has been in operation for over 120 years. We've been welcoming families and couples to Bayview Wildwood for that time period.

Our property specializes in an all-inclusive style of vacation. That includes packages which would have meals included and which would include entertainment. There would be daily activities and programs, as well as the use of all the resort facilities: specifically in the summer, things like kayaks, canoes, paddleboards, bikes etc. Also, throughout the shoulder seasons, during the spring and fall, we would have numerous weddings and conferences that would be booked in at our resorts, as well as retreats of other kinds. Then, throughout the winter we would also receive weekend business, which would mostly be conference and group business.

When COVID hit our property in about the middle of March, as it hit all over Ontario here, things started shutting down. Our property shut down on March 20, which was the Friday of the March break, and from then on, all of our spring business was cancelled, everything from weddings, events, conferences—we were lucky to have some postponed to later dates, but most of these events were cancelled. Then, looking ahead to summer, we started getting summer cancellations as well.

We have a large American clientele that has been coming to our resort year after year for many years. This

would constitute approximately 50% of the summer bookings. Obviously at this point they cannot get to our property, so most have cancelled. Those who haven't cancelled yet: We are expecting their cancellations to come through within the next few weeks.

Our Ontario and Canadian clientele are also cancelling. They're cancelling because we cannot offer some of the same services that they're used to. They're also cancelling for safety reasons as well: feeling uncomfortable travelling at this time. Between the period of March 20 to August 31, we basically lost 80% of our revenue. Most of our costs are fixed costs such as utilities, mortgage, equipment and supplies. All of these costs have basically remained the same, so we're still experiencing these costs but losing the bulk of our revenue, and this is the bread and butter of our business. This is where we make our money. This is our time to do so, and this has been a huge challenge for us.

Another one of our biggest hurdles, our biggest challenges, is that many of our summer leisure guests prepay for their summer stay at our property. We would offer a discount to these people. They prepay sometime between January and February. This influx of cash flow—

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

Mr. Jason Stanton: —helps our property run through the slower winter period. Now we're unable to fulfill these reservations due to the border being closed or the lack of services that we have at our property. This has put us in the challenging situation of having to refund advance deposits somewhere in the range of \$400,000 to \$600,000 while still paying our operational costs and preparing for summer business still on the books.

Saying that, the phone is ringing. We are getting some new bookings in, some new guests, but it's far from where we had originally projected. We do need help. We need help with cash flow. We could use help with utilities; rebates on hydro, propane, gas and oil would assist us with our monthly costs. Other food rebates, beverage rebates, even alcohol: This would all assist us in our costs, to allow us to provide these services to our guests. We also need to get some of our services back open so that we can offer a similar stay to a lot of our year-to-year clientele. Specifically our dining room area would be a big part of that. Having that open would allow us to market ourselves a lot better. We don't have a patio that we can use. We don't have that sort of outdoor space to offer food and beverage. So this has been a big challenge for us as well.

Our property has been through a lot of hurdles and challenges, but we are still trying to put together some sort of summer. I would appreciate any assistance and support that you can give to our property as well as to the tourism sector.

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

We'll move to our next presenter, Festival of the Sound. If you could please state your name for the record. You will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Ms. Alison Scarrow: Thank you, Chair. My name is Alison Scarrow and I'm the executive director of the Festival of the Sound. Good morning, members of the

standing committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you.

The Festival of the Sound is an internationally respected, three-week celebration of chamber music held in Parry Sound each summer for the past 40 years. A charitable non-profit, we have grown from a two-week festival held in our high school gym in 1980, to a three-week festival with over 60 events, held primarily in our summer home, the acoustically brilliant 470-seat Charles W. Stockey Centre for the Performing Arts. We have over 150 nationally and internationally renowned musicians perform with us each year. Most of them are Ontario residents. We present primarily classical music: solo, ensemble, choral and orchestral music, extending this range to jazz and other innovative genres.

Our summer home stage, the performance hall at the Stockey Centre, was designed specifically with the festival in mind. It's acoustically perfect and visually stunning. Our patrons helped raise millions of dollars for its build in 2002. This facility is run by the town of Parry Sound. We maintain a very close working relationship with its staff, partnering where we can and supporting each other.

The majority of our patrons are from southern Ontario. Others come annually from the United States, Europe and beyond. A lot of them are seasonal residents. Many are tourists. Almost all of them are 50 years of age or older. Their financial support is vital for the festival, and also for the Parry Sound area. The festival is the second-largest tourism economic generator in the area annually, adding over \$5 million to our economy. The vast majority of our budget itself goes right back into the Parry Sound area and also the province.

The festival is a bit of an anomaly in Ontario's large festival world: We have been successful. We raise 50% of our revenue primarily from ticket sales. Donations and sponsorships make up 25%, and the final 25% is from government grants. We watch every penny and we weigh every expense. Last fall, in a meeting with Minister MacLeod at a tourism round table in our region, the festival's greatest challenges were funding for marketing, and infrastructure, such as more hotels and more trains and planes to get more patrons up to Parry Sound.

As a result of COVID-19, now it's all about survival. We have no ticket revenue this summer. In early March, we were ready for our 41st season. Our brochure was printed. It was mailed out to 10,000 patrons. Distribution of it had started in the GTA, and locally as well. As the weeks passed, we held out hope for our 2020 season. We delayed our box office opening twice. On May 19, the inevitable happened, with the town's very hard decision to continue the closure of the performance hall at the Stockey Centre until September 7 at the earliest. So we are taking a sabbatical, and we hope to have a festival in 2021.

In the meantime, our cancellation means a huge loss to the local economy. We ourselves cancelled 276 nights of accommodations for our artists alone. It affects our restaurants, our shops and the businesses that we have contracts with.

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

Ms. Alison Scarrow: The trickle-down effect is that it hits our workers in Parry Sound and area. We have the third-lowest income levels in the province as it is. Provincially, our artists as well are hurting. As an organization, we had been considering complete layoffs until September. With the wage subsidy being extended to the end of August, that saved us there, so that we can focus on pivoting to a more virtual world. We are grateful to have Summer Experience grants and Canada Summer Jobs positions with their expanded parameters. Receiving our Ontario Arts Council grant and our Canadian Arts Presentation Fund grants with expanded parameters helps as well.

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We will get to the early new year and start production on our next year's season. However, if we are still in a social distancing situation, we will only be able to have 125 people in the Stockey Centre's hall. That's assuming that our patrons who are not in the age sector vulnerable to COVID are comfortable coming back to a live concert.

One answer would be live-streaming our Stockey concerts and monetizing them. However, the Stockey Centre and Parry Sound do not have stable Internet. It would take at least \$20,000 to rip up the pavement and extend fibre optic to the centre. The town of Parry Sound does not have the money to do that; neither do we.

This infrastructure and technology are vital to pivot to a virtual stage successfully. We are appreciative of the support that we've received to date. However, the festival will likely require greater government assistance in 2021 to hold our festival.

Over 40 years, we have faced challenges before, and we've met them head on. We are vital to our local economy and to the arts in Ontario and Canada. We appreciate your support and thank you for the time to speak to you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll go to our next presenter, the Anishnawbe Business Professionals Association. If you could please state your name for the record, and you can get right into your presentation.

Mr. Jason Rasevych: Jason Rasevych from Ginoogaming First Nation, representing the Anishnawbe Business Professionals Association. Before I begin, I'd like to thank the standing committee for the time today and pay the respects to the numerous traditional territories and treaty areas across Ontario.

The Anishnawbe Business Professionals Association has been working with First Nation businesses and community economic development corporations across northern Ontario in Treaty 3, 5 and 9 and the Robinson-Superior 1850 and Robinson-Huron treaties.

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to create major issues for our tourism sector. For example, across Canada, it was reported that 700 Indigenous tourism businesses are at risk of permanently closing their doors in 2020 or 2021 because of lost revenue to date as well as future predicted losses. The Indigenous tourism industry is seeing significant declines in revenue, such as 65.9%. This translates to \$555 million of the country's gross domestic product and

over 14,600 jobs being lost in the Indigenous tourism sector.

The three provinces that have been at most risk are British Columbia, Quebec and Ontario. We are monitoring the changes in region 13 in northern Ontario on a regular basis as public policy continues to evolve. Destination Northern Ontario completed a survey on some of the impacts. Some of the urban centres that are hit very hard, for example, include the city of Thunder Bay, as hotel occupancy has dropped to as low as 2%. The normal for visitors at this time of the year is usually around 70% to 75%, with a lot of those visitors making up United States clientele—at least 30% of those.

The border closure has been another barrier for the tourism industry related to the lodge industry, as 95% of that market is from the United States. The other concern is getting proper protocols and PPE in place for reopening. With lodges in northern Ontario, small float planes are difficult to maintain physical distance in and to achieve efficiencies with filling seats, with new health and safety guidelines.

Destination Canada estimates that 57% of Canadian tourism and hospitality businesses could close permanently this year. The prediction is that the US market will rebound, but we'll need some time to develop our action plans and strategies over the next few years as we pivot through the recovery and the prosper phases.

The impact on the tourism sector in Ontario is catastrophic, as we're estimating \$333 million in direct revenue and over 200 jobs in the province. Tourism is a very important economic driver for First Nations communities in northern Ontario, and with travel bans in place, it has been a challenge for many of them to stay afloat.

Related to some of the stimulus that has been announced from the federal government this year, access to emergency loans and wage subsidies is helpful in the short term but could not be seen as a one-size-fits-all strategy or a long-term approach. Also, there are shortfalls in the commercial rent assistance program that puts a burden onto some of the landlords to make the application when there should be some tenant involvement in that.

Forward-looking, our focus with the Anishnawbe Business Professional Association is looking at Indigenous-led solutions to mitigate business closures so that our tourism industry across Ontario continues to have a diverse range of authentic, high-quality, Indigenous tourism experiences, which we know from past research is in high demand globally.

As we approach the recovery phase, we'll need support from government and financial institutions—

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

Mr. Jason Rasevych: —and will need to change deferral payments to extending loan terms and refinancing the spread of repayments over a longer term.

We'll also look at government support related to tourism marketing at both the federal and provincial levels, as it needs to be enhanced to recovering and new markets. Funding programs beyond the emergency phase need to be there to support our First Nation businesses that need to adapt.

As some trends and assumptions for northern Ontario growth are in nature-based experiences, those people who want to connect with the land will lead tourism recovery globally. People want to get out, reconnect and learn to live with the environment. We are in a position in northern Ontario to attract an audience that craves nature and connection to the land and water, away from big crowds.

In the end, there will need to be support for the tourism sector to meet the new costs of doing business in this industry and to mitigate the risks related to the pandemic. We will need programs similar to the Emergency Processing Fund, which helps food producers access PPE and health protocols and modernize their facilities, processes and operations.

The earlier businesses get information about reopening, the better, because they need to ramp up. Operators need good public health safety guidelines as part of their marketing material and to help people feel more comfortable to travel, especially in remote First Nations.

We will need a strategic action plan and support for the tourism industry and our association to develop these and support our businesses over the next one to three years to recover to 2019 levels.

I thank you very much for the time this morning. Meegwetch.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. We will start with the questions now. I'll go to independent members this time. Who wants to go first? MPP Schreiner?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I really want to thank all three presenters for being here today and contributing to this conversation, which is vital.

I just wanted to start with Jason from the Anishnawbe Business Professional Association. One of the challenges we've heard about northern tourism, and which you really highlighted in your presentation, is how dependent lodges, in particular, are on US tourists and, with the border closure, the need to pivot. I'm just wondering if you have some thoughts on how we can encourage and market to more Ontarians, particularly in the south, to go to the north and enjoy nature and patronize some of these Indigenous lodges.

Mr. Jason Rasevych: Sure. There are opportunities, as I mentioned in the marketing side of the presentation regarding action items, to develop new strategies on pivoting related to domestic travel. I believe that roughly 10% of the travel in northern Ontario is domestic, within this province, and if we could look at new ways to market what is here in the north to other people and other travellers, there are major target markets that have shown interest, by research in the past, to visit northern Ontario related to ecotourism, related to glamping, and related to other activities that they could get involved in. We require that support post-COVID to continue to strategize and pivot.

There is other hospitality and accommodation support that could be provided by these lodges for business meetings and organizations that are looking at strategic planning sessions as well. However, that not being their

primary market, again, there need to be strategies around creating a second market here and looking at diversifying their product mix so that they could be supported.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Great. Jason, I'd like to do a follow-up with you and then maybe shift to Jason from Bayview Wildwood Resort. I think both of you talked about this a little bit—the challenge of accessing PPE and paying for PPE—and how the provincial government can help with both of those to help you reopen and make customers feel safe. Maybe we'll start with Jason from Anishnawbe Business, and then move to Jason from Bayview Wildwood.

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Mr. Jason Rasevych: One of the recommendations that I discussed in the presentation was a program similar to the Emergency Processing Fund, which helps food producers and the food industry access more PPE. Our tourism industry: no different issues related to servicing food in some of their hospitality and their lodges and some of their businesses. There needs to be a dedicated program that would support access to capital so that they could—

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

Mr. Jason Rasevych: They could budget for these new PPE items as well as the processes to operate their business in this modern time.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Schreiner, can you unmute yourself, please?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I was so good at this until now.

Jason from Bayview, would you like to add to that?

Mr. Jason Stanton: I think Jason hit on some great points there: definitely, the need for capital, specifically for the PPE equipment. But also, for us, the extra labour now that's going to be involved to ensure we're operating safely and responsibly—whether it be extra staff to sanitize equipment, extra staff at any recreational areas where you're watching for social distancing, or extra food and beverage staff to ensure that tables are apart to where they need to be and to ensure that you are giving that full service to all of your guests, and doing that safely and responsibly. Capital can help in numerous ways in our business, but specifically, to what you touched on there with the PPE equipment, the PPE is definitely needed and required. We did have our challenges even trying to find the equipment at the very beginning of this. It seems like there is more available now, but even having the government support us by providing some of that equipment to us in the tourism sector would go a long way.

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

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Great; thank you both for that. The government does have a PPE portal that you might want to try accessing, but I absolutely understand the need for either a grant program or a low-interest loan program to help fund those additional expenses, so thanks for highlighting that.

I don't think I have much time, so I think I'll end it there. Otherwise, you're going to be cut off in the middle of your response.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. We'll now go to the government side for their first

round. MPP Miller, before I do that, can you confirm your attendance, please?

Mr. Norman Miller: Yes, am I unmuted there? I am in Parry Sound—Muskoka.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. Okay, go ahead.

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you to all the presenters for your excellent presentations. I would like to start in Parry Sound with the Festival of the Sound. Alison, you did a great job of describing the Charles W. Stockey Centre, which probably has the best acoustics of any theatre I have ever experienced and is in a beautiful location. As a bit of an advertisement for Parry Sound: On the edge of Georgian Bay, when you come out at intermission, you see the sun setting over Georgian Bay. It's certainly super important to the Parry Sound area, as you mentioned—some \$5 million in economic activity for the area.

Obviously, you've made the tough decision to shut down for this year, and next year is even uncertain, so you're pivoting to more online and live-streaming etc. You did, at the end of your presentation, talk a bit about the challenges with the fact that fibre is really close by, but it doesn't quite make it to your location at the Stockey Centre. Can you talk about that a little bit more, please?

Ms. Alison Scarrow: We have been experiencing a lot of unstable Internet, and that actually happened this morning before I could get on. I am now using data from my phone because the Internet is out.

It is imperative for live-streaming that we have stable connection, and that is currently not available at the Stockey Centre. Fibre optic cable was laid on the street that it was on, but it ended before it hit the Stockey Centre. It's going to require up to \$20,000 to rip up the pavement and get that fibre optic cable laid.

Our alternative, at this point, is to film and upload videos. We wouldn't be a live stream at that point. We believe that what is going to be attractive to people is to be able to experience it live, hopefully, if we're actually in the theatre with other patrons, distanced, or if we're in the theatre and just playing the music. It seems to have an added thrill or appreciation that people can watch it live from the building that they know and love.

Mr. Norman Miller: Is that for next season that you're planning this?

Ms. Alison Scarrow: Right now, we are pivoting very quickly to production on Zoom and Facebook—well, maybe Facebook Live, but we're hoping to have very high-quality recordings shared this fall, prerecorded, perhaps live from other locations, such as New Zealand or Germany, and do six to eight events online this fall, just to get our feet wet and to transition to this.

We're hoping that there's some way that we could get fibre optic cable to the Stockey Centre by next spring, but as I say, that's a huge financial challenge.

Mr. Norman Miller: Yes, and a very good point. Hopefully, an organization like the Northern Ontario

Heritage Fund Corp. might be able to assist with that. I'm happy to do my part with that regard.

If I could ask a question also of Jason Stanton from Bayview Wildwood Resort, please: Jason, I'm familiar with your business as I was in a similar business for 30 years, so I know that this is probably the most challenging year you've ever experienced. I know that in the 30 years I was involved in a lodge resort—

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

Mr. Norman Miller: —we didn't have anything like this. I guess one of your asks is—because you include meals, as we did—to be able to operate your dining room in the way you've done in the past. Is that something you feel you can do safely, and have you looked how that would happen?

Mr. Jason Stanton: Yes. We believe that that is something that we could operate safely—under some restrictions, of course—in regard to occupancy levels. We're lucky on our property that we have a very large dining space with a panoramic view of Sparrow Lake. It can fit up to 250 people, where we would, on average, only have about 100 to 150 in there. So, even if there were some restrictions with regard to occupancy levels and ensuring that tables are apart, staggering meal times, we've already put a system into place—because we used to have self-serve buffets through breakfast and lunch—where it would be a situation where we would serve the guests. They would still have the options of picking and choosing what they want, but it would be more of a cafeteria style, where we would serve the guests breakfast and lunch. We would ensure that all of our staff are wearing the necessary PPE and ensuring that social distancing is taking place throughout our dining room as well.

Probably, as you know, Norm, this just adds such a unique experience to people's vacations, being in that space—our building is historic. It's over 110 years old, this building, so it has that atmosphere, that comfort feeling that when you walk into the building, when you walk into the dining room, it's part of the experience of vacationing in our resort.

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

Mr. Jason Stanton: Without it, it would be very challenging.

Mr. Norman Miller: Basically on the dining room side, you've thought about it and you just need, from the province, to be allowed to operate.

Mr. Jason Stanton: Correct.

Mr. Norman Miller: And what about other unique experiences like activities, etc.? Have you thought about how you would do those, and the business side of it as well, because in the fall it's conventions? Have you thought about that as well?

1130

Mr. Jason Stanton: Yes. When it comes to activities, definitely we've thought about it. We would run a lot of tournaments and things like that at our property. Basically, instead of condensing those tournaments into a short period of time, we would extend them into a longer period of time, giving people times to come back and take part in

those tournaments and different activities, and even doing everything online. Instead of paper program guides, everything like that, it will all be done through our website, where people can look up these items on their phones themselves and see what's going on—

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

We'll have to go to the opposition side now for their time. I'll start with MPP Mamakwa.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Good morning. Just a quick question to Jason Rasevych from the Anishnawbe Business Professional Association: I know that certainly the uniqueness of the Far North, and also most of the communities that we work with and the organizations, the companies, the tourist operations that they may have—a lot of them come from south of the border. Also, there is big caution as well from the First Nation communities with respect to opening up their communities to—there are a lot of travel restrictions and also the vulnerability of our communities. How do you try and weigh that opposing cost to it?

Mr. Jason Rasevych: Yes, that's a very good question and point. Really, the autonomy of that type of decision rests with the First Nation community. We respect and support community-driven policy related to future closure or reopening of their community related to tourists.

A lot of the First Nations communities in the north are hubs and launching points for other land use permits that the province has granted to some tourism outfitters that are operating on First Nations traditional territories. So definitely that concern is there. There is definitely travel that is happening for health care reasons that is priority travel, and there is more concern now with some communities that have cases of COVID-19 that have been positive in their communities and the concern of future spread. Where there is opportunity is in prevention as well as providing communities with the support to be able to understand the measures that could be put into place.

As the province continues to go through the phases of reopening and the regional approach, First Nation communities in the remote north are a few weeks to a month behind that as well. That further impacts the First Nation tourism business operators even greater than our non-Indigenous counterparts due to the lag in the time frame and due to First Nations not having the infrastructure, the access to health care and the PPE and other measures that could be put into place at the community level to provide them with a safer reopening. That has caused concerns, where the benefits related to the wage subsidy and the other programs that have been announced have been missing the mark for remote First Nation communities. There needs to be a stronger focus there.

We're ramping up on the information we collectively receive—

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

Mr. Jason Rasevych: —from our remote First Nation tourism operators, but the autonomy rests with the First Nations. We take direction from the elected leadership on what they would like to see as far as policy and then

supporting their local economies related to some of the operators that have been operating for a long time. Thank you.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Since the COVID-19 pandemic came, one of the things, really, with the support programs that have been in place, whether provincially or federally, is that most First Nation businesses fell through the cracks. They didn't qualify for any of the funding. How is it now with some of the changes? I know we did some advocacy on that. What are some specific asks that you have or that have been working?

Mr. Jason Rasevych: That is another correct statement as to our advocacy front on the support for Indigenous businesses related to some of the stimulus measures and access to capital. We haven't seen as strong support for First Nation operators in northern Ontario. Although there have been announcements, it has been very difficult for cash to move from the federal government to NACCA, the National Aboriginal Capital Corporations Association, and then to the AFIs, which are the aboriginal financial institutions that then divvy out these funds to some of their existing clients, who are Indigenous entrepreneurs, and new clients that they would need to bring in.

So there needs to be more support there for our AFIs, one of them being NADF, the Nishnawbe Aski Development Fund. They're being very pressured right now to respond to this crisis—

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

Mr. Jason Rasevych: —to support the Indigenous economy, with the lack of staff support, with the lack of travel and with the lack of technology—and fibre optics, as was mentioned earlier, in remote First Nations—to be able to respond to the pandemic. There needs to be stronger support there for Indigenous business.

We've seen some of the thresholds that have been released and the criteria not include our Indigenous perspective. That has been limiting, but we have been doing our role as the Anishnawbe business association to assist with sharing those messages with the program developers and the policy developers to ensure that it's not a one-size-fits-all and that it's customized to meet the Indigenous entrepreneurs in the north.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Thank you very much. That's all I have for now.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. You have 10 seconds, so I'll move to the next one.

We'll start the second round with the government side and MPP Roberts. MPP Roberts, are you there?

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Oh. Hi. Yes, sorry. Thanks, Chair.

My question is for Mr. Rasevych. Mr. Rasevych: great presentation—a lot of wonderful ideas for the committee. Our committee earlier this year had a chance to go up and visit Sioux Lookout as part of our budget consultations. MPP Mamakwa was very kind in giving us an opportunity to tour around the region and see a lot that our northern communities have to offer. That has got me thinking a lot lately about the fact that it's going to be extremely difficult for people to travel perhaps out of the country for the next

little while, so we want to figure out ways to encourage travel within our province. I think, for a lot of Ontarians, the north represents something that perhaps they haven't seen before. That would be a wonderful trip for a lot of folks in southern Ontario who haven't had that chance to go up north, to have the chance to see all the great things that you have to offer up there.

My first question is around marketing strategies for the province. Do you have any thoughts on different things that the province could be doing to encourage Ontarians to look at northern Ontario as a good place to plan a trip over the next coming weeks and months as things become a bit safer?

Mr. Jason Rasevych: Yes, definitely. There are four target markets that we've identified in northern Ontario that would be interested in travelling within the province—a lot of the staycation folks who do want to see nature, some of the mellow vacationers, some of the ecotourists, the knowledge seekers and so forth who like getting out there on the land and learning about land and culture and environment and place and so forth, and really tackling that nature deficiency that is there in some of our concrete jungles in our urban centres.

But related to your comment on the marketing, there's a lot that we could do to support that avenue, because it is an expense within the operators as an investment. A lot of the operators and the marketing companies that work with our communities are challenged for a greater budget and program. A lot of the messaging now that we're going to have to pivot to is on safety and on the transportation lanes. Transportation is going to be a major, I guess, hope in the future recovery of this. Whether it's airline travel from some of the urban centres in southern Ontario north up to Thunder Bay, up to Sioux Lookout, there will need to be an understanding of those travel costs as well as the safety in flying, as well as some of the road networks on Highway 11 and Highway 17 and some of the support that could be launched through Destination Northern Ontario and other avenues.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.
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Mr. Jason Rasevych: It all comes down to increasing that budget for the marketing spend and having a co-ordinated approach. We believe within the ABPA that our association could help lead and drive that type of momentum to share the message and go through the communication channels within the province to work collaboratively with other regions to make known what we have available in the north, to induce that consumer spending, to get people taking vacations up here in northern Ontario.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Thank you so much.

Mr. Chair, I believe MPP Piccini also has a question.

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

Mr. David Piccini: Thank you, all three of you, for your presentations—very informative.

My question was on broadband. Representing rural Ontario, I understand the importance of broadband. We

certainly hear it every day in the constituency office. It's going to be key to COVID-19, and it has just further exacerbated the need for reliable broadband.

My question to all of you is: Do you think that the federal government should be front-ending a major investment in the next few months? I mean, we don't have months to wait on this. We've got to get shovels in the ground now. Would you be supportive of the federal government taking a lead with a substantial broadband investment?

Mr. Jason Stanton: Yes, most definitely. On our property, located in Severn township, we do not have access to broadband. A few years ago, we actually invested in our own WiFi tower, in our own equipment, to provide WiFi to our guests. We pay a very large sum of money for that tower—

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

Mr. Jason Stanton: —and for all the equipment that we're leasing on a monthly basis. It would not even come close to the same WiFi speeds that people are getting in more urban areas. So definitely 100% in full support of this.

Ms. Alison Scarrow: I'm also in support of this. I would like somebody to take the lead. This has been a discussion that has been going on for quite a few years on the national level in terms of getting that infrastructure money rolling into communities. Anything that could be done to get it in would be very much appreciated. As you said, it's imperative now. The world has changed, and we need that.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Piccini, do you have any further comments?

Mr. Jason Rasevych: I have a comment.

Mr. David Piccini: You can just leave me unmuted. Over to you, Jason. Thank you.

Mr. Jason Rasevych: The broadband fibre optic issue had been an issue for Indigenous communities and Indigenous businesses prior to COVID-19. There has been some ground made with the Nishnawbe Aski Nation Bell Aliant project in 2010. However, there are still five remote—

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

Mr. Jason Rasevych: —First Nations that are—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off. We'll have to move to the opposition side now for their second round. MPP Miller, are you there? MPP Miller, Hamilton East–Stoney Creek? MPP Miller?

Mr. Paul Miller: I'm there. I'm there. I'm sorry. We had a technical problem.

I'd like to ask a question of—I believe it's Jason. In reference to travel to the north, to First Nation communities that do tourism, hunting and fishing and those types of sports in the summer, due to the international restrictions on travel and due to the border closures in the States—I'm sure it would have a huge negative impact on those businesses.

Do you feel that support from the Ontario government and the federal government in reference to marketing and to open up to the domestic personnel, people in the

province or local people, to use these facilities more and encouraging them to help these communities bounce back from this terrible COVID-19 situation we have been in?

Mr. Jason Rasevych: That is definitely a key goal and a very important item that we're going to need to move forward in discussion on how new markets are coming into some of these lodges. As was mentioned in the presentation, the lodge industry in the north, whether it's Indigenous lodges or non-Indigenous lodges, 95% of their market is the United States—not necessarily the hook-and-bullet market or the fish market, but also the loyal customers who have been coming to these communities and lodges for the last 20 or 30 years are being challenged now, this being one of the years that they didn't plan for or have this plan.

Related to Indigenous communities and what we do: MPP Mamakwa brought up a good conversation related to First Nations also being in a position to make that decision on when guests are coming to their community and coming to their traditional territories. There are First Nation operators that are interested in reopening; there are lodges that are interested in reopening within northern Ontario; and they do have plans to do that, starting at the end of the month and starting to accept some of their visitors in the region that they have been able to secure. However, in the longer term, there is going to need to be more support on the marketing front, as you mentioned, to get more people interested.

The other part of the challenge related to that is the cost. A lot of the cost related to transportation to visit some of these remote lodges—60% of the cost is in the transportation. Mainly the float plane bases are situated in either Armstrong, Nakina, Sioux Lookout, Pickle Lake or Thunder Bay.

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

Mr. Jason Rasevych: We're working with those operators to try to find ways where we could offset some of those costs related to other fuel and supply purchases that are needed in freight in the communities so we could be more economic and sustainable how we operate on the transportation side of things as well.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Further questions? No? All right.

With no further questions, we will move to the independent members now. MPP Hunter.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I want to thank all of our presenters today for all of their presentations. I wanted to go back to Jason Rasevych, who was speaking about region 13 in northern Ontario and just the work that you are doing, first of all, to understand the impact of COVID-19 and the economic shutdown that resulted on the tourism in the north. We're already well into the season.

You also mentioned the dependency on transportation. We heard a little bit about the aviation industry this morning, so I wonder if you could just speak about the needs that you see in order for your operators, first of all, to weather this summer and have the hope of coming back for future seasons—and anything that you can comment on with respect to the disruption that's happening with the transportation specific to the aviation industry.

Mr. Jason Rasevych: Yes, definitely, transportation related to float planes is going to be a challenge. A lot of these float planes that operate in the remote north carry anywhere between six to 20 guests. A majority of them that work in the north have limitations of eight seats, related to the ones that are operating in some of the tourism outfitters that work with the ABPA.

1150

When you're limited to eight seats and you have other social distancing measures—if there is a requirement to not have people seated side by side, and there are guidelines that are going to be released to operate in the airline sector. It's going to be very important for float plane operators in the north to also adhere to those guidelines to ensure safe transportation for some of those guests travelling in the north. With that being said, it is not economical to operate these float planes without full capacity. That puts the burden on the operator, which puts the burden then on the resort or the lodge and that business owner—it trickles down to a higher cost for the customer—which puts them in a tough position when it is already seen as a tough, competitive market to begin with.

When we're looking at customers who are looking to travel in for four, five, six or seven nights and they're looking to pay a price to get into the lodge safely, to have to increase that cost because of increased transportation costs due to COVID and some of the new measures that need to be put in place is going to be a challenge moving forward. If there could be some thought around programming related to offset some of these costs, that would be very supported. Whether it is some type of stimulus measure for—

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

Mr. Jason Rasevych: —the tourism operator or the transportation agent or some type of rebate that could be worked through the system, that really needs to be explored.

The other linkages are with the travel from southern Ontario to northern Ontario. We have Air Canada that is travelling into the north here, with limited flights and a higher cost. That has to be factored in. Then Porter has also delayed their plans to reopen until the end of July, or their next decision that they're going to have to make related to that. So there still is a wait-and-see approach related to those folks who want to utilize the airlines to travel in the north.

However, there could be a marketing approach to look at, utilizing the highways and staying at stops throughout the different treaty areas and related to Indigenous business and some of the other non-Indigenous business that could offer accommodations and support along the route. I really think that that marketing approach needs to focus on, as well, an intermodal strategy related to roads and what we could do to support the higher costs of airlines as well. Thank you.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you so much. I really like that marketing campaign with the stops along the way. We could uniquely brand that, working together with your communities.

Alison, I do have a couple of brief minutes, and I wanted to give you an opportunity to talk about the new model online and your readiness and your artists' readiness to embrace that, and if you see it ever being profitable.

Ms. Alison Scarrow: I would like to say that it will be profitable, but it's going to take the industry—

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

Ms. Alison Scarrow: —actually moving towards monetizing their concerts. Currently, they are not doing that. It could lead to a very negative trend if we don't start monetizing the concerts. At our level, our music, our musicians require very good sound and the ability to work together. If you're looking at even a chamber performance to upload, it takes hours and hours and hours—let alone a symphony orchestra—to be able to do that. It may be cost-prohibitive. We hope. We live in hope.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: The time, the technology and the talent—so the three Ts—have to be paid attention to here.

Ms. Alison Scarrow: Yes, definitely.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Okay. I thank all of the presenters, and I wish you all the best for the summer 2020 season. We certainly have heard you today with the presentations and the responses, so thank you.

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 presentations.

All right; looking at the time on the clock, this committee stands in recess until 1 p.m.

The committee recessed from 1155 to 1300.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Good afternoon. Welcome back. We're meeting today 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.

HAMILTON HALTON BRANT
REGIONAL TOURISM ASSOCIATION
TOWN OF NIAGARA-ON-THE-LAKE
CANADIAN ASSOCIATION
OF TOUR OPERATORS

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We'll start with our next presenters of the day. First, I would like call upon Hamilton Halton Brant Regional Tourism Association. If you could please state your name for the record, you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Ms. Maria Fortunato: Hello, my name is Maria Fortunato. I'm the executive director. Thank you for the opportunity to present on the direct impact and devastation the Ontario tourism industry has shouldered from the COVID-19 response. Our organization has pivoted its tourism development priorities to support local businesses so the double bottom line of tourism will sustain beyond the pandemic. We created an operation framework focused on "mitigation, reimagine and re-emerge" to support the reopening of our tourism sector and support

the development of Ontario as a world-class tourism destination.

Like many other parts of the province, our destination has also experienced job losses and business closures. Some examples are:

—Redback Tours was forced to cancel Hamilton waterfalls tour packages;

—Emma's Back Porch closed its doors permanently after 35 years of operation;

—Niagara Escarpment waterfalls are closed due to over-visitation tendencies and the asset managers not having infrastructure in place to adapt to social-distance requirements; and

—Indigenous tourism experiences not being open due to community closures has resulted in a 53% revenue loss, 31% job loss and a 25% business loss in those communities.

In this pandemic time frame, some businesses in our destination are demonstrating their entrepreneurial spirit and innovating their businesses:

—Grand River paddle outfitters are streamlining product offers;

—African Lion Safari is opting to revert to nostalgic early days by focusing on their drive-your-own-car through their nature reserve;

—Art Gallery of Hamilton for the first time is showcasing an impressive art collection from their vault, virtually;

—Conservation Halton has implemented new, sustainable and integrated software technology to answer the needs of timed visitation and reservation confirmations, and implemented a park pledge for the provincial park.

The opportunity today is the need to look ahead to the future of tourism and evaluate the visitor experience. We are learning from the crisis:

—anticipating new trends and consumer patterns related to visitation behaviours and expectations;

—establishing pride-of-place engagement;

—connecting with local experiences that are authentic, sustainable and friendly for small groups; and

—developing sustainability skills for tourism professionals so they can offer genuine experiences.

As we've been supporting and engaging with our regional businesses, we've learned of common challenges being faced by operators and also occurring in other regional jurisdictions. Attention and support from the provincial government in these areas will help businesses navigate reopening:

—united messages on safety and health protocols;

—washroom management;

—an industry need for clean and safe washrooms in parks, public communities, general business washrooms, restaurants and cafés, and we need to establish standardized regulations;

—support creative innovations in product and experience development;

- outdoor recreation sector: training staff on pan-provincial standardized protocols for health and safety implementation, signage and communications;

- camping infrastructure for retrofitting camping sites for RV markets, which are now of greater interest, and growing;

- parks need to reinvest in automatic gates and online booking systems to avoid personal interaction;

- timed visitation to popular nature sites;

- many tourism businesses rely on outdoor experience products to add value to their business; create a sustainability province-wide pledge to getting back to nature;

- ensure connectability to visitors and opportunities for business growth to include broadband implementation for rural communities, including First Nations; and

- support festivals and events; they are reinventing the way they feature live music and artists in the virtual sphere.

This sector is a big employer of live music and artists. With so many cancelled, there is a significant job loss. In region 2, there have been two successful implementations: Sound of Music, and in Paris, the downtown concert series.

A quote from famous popular musician Terra Lightfoot, who was in the Paris lineup, says it all: “I know that you’ll continue delivering great shows with other artists these next few weeks. It’s so important right now to have income we can count on as musicians. Honestly you are making a difference in my life and others by giving us something to fall back on as the return of attended live shows gets pushed farther and farther into the future.”

In closing, the Hamilton Halton Brant Regional Tourism Association recognizes that COVID-19 is, first and foremost, a health crisis. However, it is simultaneously an economic crisis that will have a long-lasting, devastating impact on small business operators and thousands of workers across the region.

Staying globally competitive: We need to keep an eye on the future; adapt access and policies; invest in enhancements for the new customer; and invest in product and infrastructure, capacity-building, and skills training.

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

Ms. Maria Fortunato: We are committed to working directly with government to ensure that the needs of tourism and hospitality businesses and workers are a key consideration as government rolls out economic recovery to help today, but also to support the future of Ontario’s tourism sector. Ontario, after all, is the place to grow.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. We’ll move to our next presenter, from the town of Niagara-on-the-Lake. Please state your name for the record. You will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Ms. Wendy Cheropita: My name is Wendy Cheropita. I am a councillor at the town of Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to present on behalf of my colleagues—the Lord Mayor Betty Disero, council and staff—at the town of Niagara-on-the-Lake on the direct impact and devastation that the business

community and workers have shouldered from COVID-19. We are grateful that the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs has provided this opportunity to present and consider our recommendations as you shape the short- and long-term future of the Ontario tourism industry.

We’d like to thank you for the extraordinary service you are providing the citizens of Ontario. People have been consumed with fear and uncertainty for months, but this government and all of you have responded with compassionate leadership while working in collaboration across partisan lines, with a clear demonstration of teamwork that is both impressive and welcomed.

So who are we? Niagara-on-the-Lake was the first capital of Upper Canada. The town has a population of only just over 17,000 residents, but this town attracts over three million visitors per year and drives an economic value of \$812 million and a GDP of \$3.5 billion.

The town ranks as one of the most beautiful places in the world. We’re very proud of our rich history and heritage dating back to the late 1700s. The heritage district, with its charming boutique shops, cast iron planters bursting with flowers, and horse-drawn carriages, is a magnet for visitors. There are parks galore, pristine landscapes, elegant homes, North America’s oldest golf course and miles of walking and bicycle paths. You’ll find Canada’s number one wine region here, fine craft breweries, craft distilleries, farm-picked fruits and vegetables, award-winning restaurants and, of course, the world-famous Shaw Festival Theatre.

Niagara-on-the-Lake punches way above its weight class in arts, culture and heritage. Stunning vistas and distinctive experiences are what make Niagara-on-the-Lake a sought-after paradise for the senses. Tourism is the lifeblood of this community and for thousands of small businesses and workers who rely on it to support their families. Tourism created the lifestyle both residents and visitors enjoy, but this is at great risk today. Losses could reach \$350 million, and the damage could be catastrophic without your help.

Why are we here? Our hotels have had zero occupancy for three months. The Shaw theatre will be closed until August and possibly not open for the entire season. Rent in the heritage district, for instance, is between \$100 and \$200 a square foot. Let me put that into perspective: In Toronto, the average is \$26.75 per square foot. The average rent can reach \$50,000 per month. Some 40% of merchants pay between \$40,000 and \$60,000 annually in taxes. Not surprisingly, 100% are worried or very worried about the viability of their business going into phase 2. With limited revenue and debt accumulating, our request is urgent.

The peak travel season is from May to the end of October. Revenue generated from the peak season must carry all of the businesses for the balance of the year. We are already seeing empty storefronts, and sadly, we anticipate more. The restaurants have been particularly hard hit as well. To meet physical distancing guidelines, restaurants will only be able to open to about 30% or 40% of

their seating capacity. With slim margins in the restaurant business, many will not be able to reopen. This is even after support from the municipality with patio expansion.

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With the tourism experts expecting that only—

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

Ms. Wendy Cheropita:—20% to 25% of tourists will return this season, Niagara-on-the-Lake needs your support now. Some 4,000 jobs are at risk. There could be permanent losses of 15% to 25%. Some 75% of the revenue has been lost, and tourism expenditures last year were \$2.4 billion.

Our ask is immediate financial assistance, expansion of business opportunities and consumer confidence.

Under immediate financial assistance:

—direct marketing funding delivered to destination marketing organizations;

—grants for cash flow and debt levels, including debt deferral measures and larger grant options for the tourism and hospitality sector;

—grants or tax credits for small and medium-sized enterprises and micro-businesses to assist with funding of required PPE and infrastructure upgrades related to safe opening;

—further expansion of the CERB program;

—enhanced and continued support from Ontario for the Canadian Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance program; and

—to continue to allow VQA wines and craft beverages to be sold with restaurant takeout orders.

Number two: Expand opportunities for events, theatres and concert halls:

—fair and equitable allowances for gatherings to occur; and

—theatres, concert halls and cultural facilities be open with reasonable restrictions if they can provide ticket-holder information. This would support consumer tracing.

The last is in building consumer confidence: Continue to improve testing, lab capacity and waiting lines.

A lot of employees who are being tested are putting an unnecessary burden on businesses as they pay their employees and wait for the results.

In closing, I would like to thank you for this opportunity to share the current crisis that the business community and workers in Niagara-on-the-Lake are facing. They are our key consideration at this critical time in history.

We hope you will consider our request as the government rolls out the recovery plan and develops policy during these unprecedented times. Thank you very much for your time. I appreciate being here very much.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. We'll move to the next presenter, from the Canadian Association of Tour Operators. If you could please state your name for the record. You have seven minutes for your presentation.

Unmute yourself, please.

Mr. Pierre LePage: Thank you. My name is Pierre LePage. I'm the executive director of the Canadian Association of Tour Operators. Thank you for the opportunity

to address this most relevant gathering, especially at this unprecedented time in history.

CATO is an association that represents some 40-plus brands operated by our members, most of which are based in Ontario and, by extension, the tour operator sector of the travel industry in Canada. Though many of our members are focused on outbound travel, most of them also operate tours within Canada, as well as inbound programs to Canada. They offer a broad spectrum of travel experiences to Canadians, who are some of the most travel-conscious people in the world.

The economic value to Canada and Ontario brought by tour operators and the travel industry as a whole cannot be overstated. Unfortunately, the other statement that cannot be overstated is the devastating economic impact of COVID-19 on tour operators. We were the first to be hit, so to speak, with the urgent and immediate need to repatriate hundreds of thousands of stranded Canadians in international destinations. Operators did this willingly and bore most of the cost for this, amounting to untold millions of dollars. This was quickly followed by border closings, severe restrictions and travel advisories that remain in place to this day.

These advisories are indefinite, with no indication of when they will be eased. As such, our members are not only at a standstill now but encumbered with so much uncertainty of the future that any recovery will be greatly exacerbated.

The pandemic and resulting government-imposed travel restrictions have forced tour operators to cancel their tours since mid-March until this point, and likely until sometime late summer and fall, if not further on. Many destinations will be off-line for months to come. This leaves tour operators in a financial crisis. Many clients, unable to obtain refunds, have resorted to charge-backs on their credit card purchases, generating a forced withdrawal from the tour operators' accounts.

The Canadian Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance, CECRA, has failed to help some of our members because property owners have chosen not to apply on behalf of their tenants. The industry is considered high-risk, and securing any kind of credit, even through programs such as BCAP, the Business Credit Availability Program, is difficult, exhausting and often fruitless. Many tour operators have millions, tens of millions or even hundreds of millions of dollars in hard assets but currently no cash flow, and are facing a liquidity crisis that could cripple, if not topple, the entire industry soon.

Restarting business, which is on everyone's mind now, will incur massive costs to adapt to a situation which will mandate distancing and greatly reduce capacity, with additional costs and precautions and sanitizing requirements, all with minimal or inadequate revenue to recover all of these costs. The final straw in this dismal outlook is the fact that of all industries one can name, the travel industry will be the very last one to recover, as it so depends on the trust and confidence of the consumer that they will be safe if and when they choose to travel.

In addition to all of the above, Ontario registered tour operators—and all registrants, for that matter—

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

Mr. Pierre LePage: —are and have been burdened with significant contributions into the Ontario travel fund for the purpose of protecting the consumer. These regulations and costs are administered by TICO, the Travel Industry Council of Ontario. Although contributions have been postponed for now, they have simply been delayed and are waiting for all registrants, tour operators and travel agents to come up with them later.

We urge the Ontario government to pay special attention to this vital industry, which employs over 40,000 Ontarians and provides a vital link to Ontario, Canada and the world.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. We'll start with the questions now, and we'll go to the opposition party this time. MPP Gates, and then MPP Miller.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'm going to talk to the town of Niagara-on-the-Lake for most of my presentation. I just want to say to my colleagues again that 4,000 jobs are at stake here, as well as a number of businesses.

I'll get to my questions. One of the things I've been working very hard on is trying to get funding for the Shaw. If we lose the Shaw, not only do we lose hundreds of jobs in the town but we lose a piece of this country's arts and culture. Can you tell the committee how bad things are for the Shaw and what will be required to save it? How do you see a fair and equitable reopening of entertainment and the arts, and—this is an important part of the question—is it possible to look at a 30% limit on attendance for the Shaw, similar to churches and funeral homes?

Ms. Wendy Cheropita: Thank you, Mr. Gates. Yes, the Shaw theatre is absolutely critical to the town of Niagara-on-the-Lake and to tourism. The hotels rely on it, the wine industry relies on it and all of our merchants and restaurants rely on it as well. Last year was actually the best season that the Shaw Festival has ever had. It turned a profit—we're a non-profit organization—and we were really looking forward to this season.

I see no reason why the Shaw could not open, along with other concert halls, using the restrictions of the 30%. In fact, the Shaw theatre—I have seen their recovery plan, and they are using world-class, best-class practices in hygiene and sanitation. They have a really robust plan, and they're working with global experts to be able to reopen. I think it is absolutely critical to the town of Niagara-on-the-Lake, and I would hope that that's one that you really will consider, because it seems to be sort of off in terms of the ability to be able to open in a similar fashion to churches.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Thank you. When we're talking about business in places like Queen Street, we're talking about businesses that rely on tourism. Given the average age of Niagara-on-the-Lake residents, we have to be very careful about opening too quickly, but it's a balance where we need to think about these businesses as well. What financial assistance programs from the federal and provincial government have worked? The CECRA and the

CERB: Should they be extended? What are some of the areas of financial support that haven't been addressed by the province?

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Ms. Wendy Cheropita: Great question. Certainly, we are asking to have further extension of the CERB program, because that has helped immensely. I think I mentioned in my presentation that the rents and the taxes, in the heritage district particularly, run higher than what you'd see in Toronto just because of the values and the heritage, and the importance put on heritage in the town of Niagara-on-the-Lake. They absolutely need support.

We would love to see the Ontario Canadian emergency commercial rent program continue. I'd also like to see if there is a possibility of being able to help the actual tenants, because in Niagara-on-the-Lake the majority of tenants pay the lease and the taxes and only 40% of the landlords have participated in that program, which means that the merchants are getting no support whatsoever. They're building up debts. There was one restaurant that was building up a debt of \$350 million because of no revenue over the past three months. You can't possibly survive in a situation like that.

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

Ms. Wendy Cheropita: There are a lot of individual stories. So yes, those programs are really important, as well as grants for cash flow and debt levels, support for PPE and other infrastructure improvements, to be able to create safe openings. Those are critical programs.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Thanks, Wendy. I'm going to try to get back to you, but I'm going to ask a question of the museum group as well. We have many museums in our community that are an important part of our rich history in the Niagara region, like the Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum, the Niagara Falls museum, two forts, the Willoughby museum, and many more. However, COVID has been devastating to many, and it looks to have a long-lasting impact on financial stability, but local museums in Niagara are still finding creative ways to raise money. The Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum will be hosting a drive-through pig roast next week, which I hope to participate in, enjoying social distancing.

While the federal government is providing some assistance to non-profits or charities that have lost funding opportunities—and we know that the museums are in a unique position—how could this government play an active role in ensuring the financial stability of museums in our province? That's to the museum group.

Ms. Wendy Cheropita: I have not spoken lately to the museums but, of course, they remain closed and they rely solely on donations and funding. They've been doing a really wonderful job at trying to create a digital platform, and I applaud them. The museums in Niagara-on-the-Lake have been absolutely innovative; but, of course, it's not really returning any revenue. It's just putting them into a further cash flow crunch. So support is very important for museums.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Thank you. My last question—

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

Mr. Wayne Gates: My last question is: I know yourself and many tourism operators have spoken about consumer confidence. Do you believe that the government has provided enough resources for towns like Niagara-on-the-Lake to complete appropriate levels of testing and contact tracing? It is again to Wendy.

Ms. Wendy Cheropita: In speaking with our business community, one of the issues was that in order to reopen they've had their staff tested, but many of them are waiting up to 14 days to get the results, which means they have to pay the salaries of the employees. That's putting a further burden on already burdened organizations. This includes Vintage Hotels. That is the key employer. They have, I believe, seven or eight hotels. They are incredibly important and they have also had substantial losses because of zero occupancy for three solid months. They chose to close—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off. We'll have to move to the independent members now. MPP Schreiner.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Thanks to all three presenters for coming in today. I just want to start my first question with Hamilton Halton Brant Regional Tourism Association. You talked a bit about virtual spaces for artists and how important that is. I've been meeting increasingly with people, particularly in tourism, arts and culture, around that, but also some of the challenges and additional costs associated with it. I'm just wondering if there are some ways in which government could support organizations pivoting to doing more online performance in that regard.

Ms. Maria Fortunato: Hello. Thank you for the question. What we have done as a regional tourism organization—so my geography includes the three regions of Hamilton, Halton and Brant, and also the Six Nations and Mississaugas of the Credit First Nations. We are working with all those communities.

Within our mandate as regional tourism organizations, we have an allocation of dollars that are called partnership funding dollars. What we have strategically done in my area here is work with those signature tourism events to help them pivot to some level of being able to offer experiences. With the Sound of Music, the downtown Paris Concert Series and now also with Supercrawl—who has also had to postpone their festival this year; we'll be working with them—we are supporting the cost to help them get to that platform, so providing them with some partnership dollars to do that. They're using those dollars as a way to create the platform and/or a way to also support contracting the artists to help them perform in those platforms.

I know my colleagues across the province are also supporting festivals and events that way as well.

Most recently, Celebrate Ontario also made announcements, and I do know that part of those funding dollars now—events are looking at how they can use those dollars to support their virtual platform scenarios for those where it makes sense. It isn't going to make sense for everybody.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Thank you for that. I appreciate it.

A quick question for the councillor from Niagara-on-the-Lake: Wendy, we've had a number of businesses, particularly in the Niagara region, talk about the challenges of being able to pay their property taxes, given the fact that they've been shut down for three months now. I'm assuming that must be putting a lot of pressure on you, especially given the disproportionate number of tourism businesses in the Niagara region.

Are there things that the province could be doing to support municipalities financially that in turn would support those businesses in terms of the challenges they are facing with their property tax obligations?

Ms. Wendy Cheropita: Thank you, Mike.

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

Ms. Wendy Cheropita: I think that's a very, very good question. To give you an example, a restaurant on Queen Street in the Heritage District—one restaurant—pays \$60,000 in taxes. That's, of course, their responsibility without any revenue coming in, so they're starting to borrow money. They've used up their cash flow.

Absolutely, this is something that the province really could help with, particularly in high-taxation or high-property-value areas, because it really does make a difference. The taxes are based on the property values, not on the ability to pay. I think this is one situation where I really think we have to have some serious consideration from the province for support, particularly for areas like Niagara-on-the-Lake and like our Heritage District, where the taxes are significant.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Thank you for that. I think you're going to have a lot of businesses looking for that kind of support, from what I can see.

I just want to shift really quickly, before my time is used up, to the tour operators. You talked about how critical it was—and we've heard this from others—to have public confidence and trust as we reopen. What are some things the government could do to make people feel safe to travel?

Pierre, I don't know if you or Brett, either one of you—

Mr. Pierre LePage: Thank you for the question, but I would pass that on to Brett Walker, who is our chairman, for this question.

Mr. Brett Walker: Can everyone hear me, I hope?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Yes.

Mr. Brett Walker: Mike, it's a tough question, because consumer confidence is subject to so many things. Consumer confidence is subject to what insurance may be available—all of the activities which are happening here in Ontario and around the world.

1330

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

Mr. Brett Walker: The challenge that we face right now is the fact that whatever we do, we need to work across jurisdictions with government, with private enterprise, to work together and communicate. There is no silver bullet, but we're faced with an incredible amount of uncertainty. Like many of the others who are represented

here today, we have zero revenue coming in, we employ tens of thousands of people, and, at this point, we have an indefinite timeline of when we may be able to open.

Most importantly, what we're asking for is some very basic relief, as Pierre alluded to, with regard to TICO fees. I find it appalling—Wendy mentioned this, and we're experiencing it too—that landlords are not picking up on the CECRA. That is, to me, absolutely—the fact that 40% of Niagara-on-the-Lake have—I think that's what you mentioned, Wendy. But we're finding the same thing. I think the landlords have to be held accountable. We're on the brink.

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

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I agree with you. Thanks for that, Brett.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We'll move to the government side now, and I'll start with MPP Skelly.

Ms. Donna Skelly: My question is for Maria. Nice to see you, Maria.

Beyond asking for financial assistance, which we know all businesses across Ontario are looking for from not only this level of government but all levels of government, what can Ontario do, what can we do, to help tourism organizations—whether it's the Art Gallery of Hamilton or the Hamilton Tiger-Cats or local restaurants—survive COVID and thrive beyond COVID? I'll give you examples: relaxing alcohol laws, or digitizing and expediting the licensing process. Is there something that we can do soon to assist tourism in general?

Ms. Maria Fortunato: At this time, a lot about tourism, as the minister will say, is about the double bottom line. Supporting our local communities is really critical right now. If we don't have thriving local communities and businesses that are surviving during this time to beyond the pandemic, we won't have a tourism offer in Ontario.

In Ontario, there are 13 of us—regional tourism organizations—funded by the province. What we're doing is working very closely with our industry operators to help them elevate their offers. Now that most areas are going into the reopening stage, we're trying to help them prepare for that, so working directly with them related to that, and then also around the marketing area. Right now, they need their local communities to be supporting them to buy and shop and dine. So we're really trying to encourage that confidence in the local residents and doing that through our marketing channels.

I know that we directly have worked with the art gallery, with African Lion Safari, with those individuals to help them elevate to the virtual platform, elevate the capacity of what they'll be able to manage for visitation and get them in front of consumers. That has been our focus. Marketing is the key thing right now, and really bolstering the local engagements.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Do you speak with stakeholders—and you mentioned the Art Gallery of Hamilton, of course. They were one of the first to actually offer their content online—and a big shout-out to the staff, led by Shelley Falconer [*inaudible*]. Our collection is unbelievable. We

have over \$1 billion of phenomenal art in the Art Gallery of Hamilton. She had that online pretty quickly.

We also spoke, in a round table I did recently with Minister Sarkaria—and Jason Cassis was talking about seeing if we can shut down some streets so we've got [*inaudible*] the restaurants. Sure enough, Hamilton is one of the first to do it. They're ready to roll on Friday.

These people have come up with solutions. They're the entrepreneurs and they're the people who are running the industries, and they are thinking outside the box. But I'm asking: Are you asking stakeholders if they can identify easy changes that we can implement, as I said, such as relaxing access to alcohol and wine, for example, at some of our wineries in Niagara?

Ms. Maria Fortunato: Yes, we are, and I'm doing that across the region as well. For example, with the Six Nations community—

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

Ms. Maria Fortunato: —we're directly working with them to develop offers so that when they open up the community—it's the visitor pledge idea that we're helping them to develop, so that when people go into the community they respect what the community is about. So we do definitely engage with the stakeholders. Lots of ideas I presented today and some of the ideas I provide in the written submission are direct feedback from stakeholders. So there's quite a lot.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Okay, thank you. Those are my questions.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Further questions? MPP Roberts.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: My question is for Pierre and Brett. I'm curious whether or not you guys have put some thought into proposals for various levels of government on tax incentives that might be able to be offered to Canadian consumers to encourage them to take advantage of tourism opportunities and tour packages, in your case across the country. Is that something that your organization has looked into at all?

Mr. Pierre LePage: Brett, do you want to take this or—

Mr. Brett Walker: Yes, go ahead. I was just going to say: We haven't had as much communication with government as we would like, and I think that's our big challenge right now. So, no. To answer your question in brief, no, we have not, but I'm not sure we've been given the opportunity, either. Pierre?

Mr. Pierre LePage: We have approached on several levels.

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

Mr. Pierre LePage: From the federal department, from the federal level, we've gone to the ministry of finance and, of course, the ministry of transport, because it involves a lot of carrier situations.

As far as rent is concerned, we are, of course, as mentioned before, disappointed at the uptake of the CECRA program by landlords. We just don't understand why the opportunity to collect 75% rent in order to help the

industry—all industries—is not something that landlords jump on.

This is one of the reasons why we're talking to the standing committee now. Any relief that we can receive in terms of taxation for all travel businesses within and also outbound tour operators definitely would be appreciated.

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

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Appreciate that.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): All right, so we'll start the second round now with the independent members. MPP Hunter.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I want to thank all of the presenters today. I'm wondering, actually, Pierre, if you could continue. One of the things we heard in this committee is that there will be more of a staged reopening, starting first maybe even within Ontario, and then interprovincial before international. Can you talk a little bit about how that would affect your planning with various tourist attractions in the province, and is there anything specifically that you're doing to support that?

Mr. Pierre LePage: There are a couple of areas that I want to touch on. In this particular instance, of course, we are basically held hostage by the travel restrictions. Some of these travel restrictions are actually provincial travel restrictions. You've seen the news reports of people from different provinces being mistreated in places like British Columbia or whatever that presume that any influx of people from any other region than theirs is a health threat.

From a national point of view, obviously the travel restrictions currently remain in place. One of our big issues is the fact that there is no stated potential end date. We would appreciate, just from an operational point of view, if we were told that the restrictions will be in place until—for example, in the case of the border reopening between Canada and the US, that has been extended now to July 21. That is at least a date that people can put on their calendar and start planning for beyond that with the anticipated hope that that would be the actual target date.

The fact that there currently is, in most international destinations, for example, and inbound into—and this is very important for places like Niagara-on-the-Lake etc. who depend on international customers to have the ability to at least plan on the potential reopening of international borders and allowing passengers from overseas to come. And vice versa, because of the nature of our tour operators, it means two-way travel back and forth. So that is definitely one of the big issues that we're having to face.

1340

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Okay. I appreciate that.

I'd like to move to Maria with the Hamilton Halton Brant Regional Tourism Association. How are you feeling in terms of stage 2 of the reopening and the comfort level within your area in terms of knowing what to do, proper guidelines and proper changes? I have heard in consultations that I've done that customers may not necessarily come back just because you open, and we have to do all we can to strengthen that confidence. What are you seeing?

Ms. Maria Fortunato: Thank you for the question, Ms. Hunter. We are seeing that nervousness. As of Friday, all of my region will be reopened. Initially it was Brant only, and now Hamilton and Halton. Some of the operators have been doing some preparation—

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

Ms. Maria Fortunato: —but they are nervous about who is actually going to come and purchase at their store.

One of the important things we're doing is developing local marketing campaigns to really help the local residents realize that business is now open; go and spend, enjoy, do these great things—so doing some things, presenting some curated things that they can enjoy locally, and also putting that safety message in it. So it's very important in all the marketing, moving forward, that the consumer receives that safety message. We've identified that as a priority and that is how we're hoping that that's going to support our local business operators.

In the Halton area, with Conservation Halton, we adapted their experiences. They now have timed visitation, curated visitation. They're really listening to how the consumer wants to have that experience and are really shaping those experiences. A lot of the attractions are listening, and they're doing that and they're putting it into their marketing and onto their website to explain, "We're safe, we're open, and we're going to take care of you while you're here." So that's very important to be spoken in a very consistent way.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Wendy, in the final time I have remaining, my family and I enjoy coming to Niagara-on-the-Lake, even just to walk around. It's very beautiful. What about making masks mandatory? Is that something that has been discussed in your area? What are your thoughts on that?

Ms. Wendy Cheropita: Good question, MPP Hunter. Niagara-on-the-Lake has a more elderly population, so there's lots of concern here. We know that from a consumer perspective, safety is the most important concern.

We are actually looking at the possibility of—well, we recommended to residents to wear masks whenever you go out. If you have any concern about social distancing, do so. We are looking at that possibility, because that has to be at the heart and the essence of everything we do: safety. I think that's why Ontarians are going to travel throughout Ontario: because they feel safer coming to a place that they know, that they can drive to, so yes.

There was something that was discussed earlier. I think this bottom-up approach is so important, that it be the business community, the people who are affected, that provide the greatest insights. They're all saying safety has to be number one. When there is support, it's for PPE, it's for putting regulations in place, infrastructure that's going to create this—because we could be looking at this for an extended period of time, or a whole shift to what we call the new normal, where we are focusing on things and providing environments that are unlike what they were in the past.

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

Who do we start with? MPP Roberts? The government side? MPP Roberts.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Sure, thanks. I just want to pick up on what we were talking about in the last round there. I'm just curious whether any of the presenters have given any thoughts to incentives that can be provided to Ontarians to help get them re-engaged in tourism activities. I think that during the 2008 recession, the federal government at the time did the home renovation tax credit, where Canadians who is wanted to go out and purchase renovation-type services or anything along those lines could get a tax credit, and it spurred some of that economic activity.

That's got me wondering: Is there a possibility that we could look at some sort of a tax incentive for Ontarians to encourage them to re-engage in some of the tourism industry as we start to get things going again? I'm not sure if anybody has thoughts on that, but if anybody would like to jump in, I would love to hear any ideas.

Wendy, are you putting your hand up? Excellent.

Ms. Wendy Cheropita: I thought that was a really good suggestion that you had. I think there are two parts to it. One is tax credits for small and medium-sized businesses and micro-businesses to assist with the funding of required PPE and other infrastructure changes. I think that's really important.

All the tourism operators are all going to be focused on getting Ontarians to travel in Ontario. So I think it's a great idea. There is some wonderful funding coming both from the province and from the federal government, and much of those dollars are going to be in marketing to a local market, so to start with the hyper-local and expand to a slightly larger local before you ever go beyond that. I think that incentives within that as a part of encouraging people to travel is a great idea and should be built into the plans, yes.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: I appreciate that. Maria?

Ms. Maria Fortunato: Once we get beyond the hyper-local and we're trying to build our international visitation again, then I do believe we need to be offering some rebates to that international visitor through the HST. I know that years ago we used to have that on the national side, and it is something that is being advocated again so that when we get to the international side, it's going to help build that business. I do think we need to look at that. It's more advocating to our federal government, but as a province we should all together be advocating to our federal counterparts that we should implement an international rebate program. That would encourage visitation and expenditure when they're here. That would be my suggestion.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Great. Pierre, Brett: any further thoughts there?

Mr. Pierre LePage: I just wanted to add that in terms of tax incentives, it occurs to me that not only would it be most helpful to begin with, with landlords to participate in the existing program, but in addition, municipalities and cities, towns, etc. should consider a reduction of—when I hear, for example, from Niagara-on-the-Lake, one particularly small business as an example—and this can be

extrapolated to virtually every business, including the tour operators who have to rent a lot of space and are often, in their own spaces, considering huge expenses in local taxation. Any reduction of that is absolutely necessary because all of these costs will have to be mitigated by everyone. It is an obvious situation where tour operators, for example, in order to create incentives for people—

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

Mr. Pierre LePage:—to come back, will actually be reducing their prices and giving unbelievable discounts just to get business started. It's sort of a shared responsibility.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Further questions? MPP Smith?

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

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Less than two minutes; a minute and a half.

Mr. Dave Smith: I'm going to quickly go to Maria and then hopefully jump over to Pierre for a second question.

You brought up an interesting point about the HST. There was a time in Ontario when anyone that was going out of province didn't pay the PST on any purchases in Ontario. One of the challenges that we would have with that is: That tourism sales tax helps generate the money that we use for other things. If we were to find a way that we could rebate the PST portion of the HST—I can't imagine that the federal government is going to agree to the whole amount—should it be just for international—

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

Mr. Dave Smith:—or should it be for interprovincial travel as well?

1350

Ms. Maria Fortunato: I think interprovincial travel would be excellent. Certainly, domestic travel is highly encouraged. I think that is actually going to occur even before international travel would occur, and it would encourage Canadians to enjoy their backyard. That would definitely be an incentive to consider; absolutely.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you. Pierre, if I have time for a quick question for you as well? Again, it's around the tourism side of it. We had some tourism operators—bus lines, airplanes and so on—talking about the challenges that they have. If we were to have a passport program that gave a rising tax break for the more tourist things that you did within the province, do you think that that would help solve your tour operators?

Mr. Pierre LePage: I'm sorry, could you—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry; you're out of time. Sorry about that. We'll have to move to the opposition side for their second round now. MPP Miller?

Mr. Paul Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to take this opportunity to speak about some of the many other tourism areas of this province.

Maria, I have a couple of questions about the industry as a whole and specifically about Hamilton, Halton and Brant. On May 17 last year, just 13 months ago, I made a statement to the press about the 20% cuts to the regional

tourism associations. I remember that my office reached out to your association directly, and we were able to discuss the impacts these cuts were going to have on your regional tourism. Based on your presentation, it sounds like the Hamilton Halton Brant Regional Tourism Association went into this terrible situation on its back foot already. At this point, has the government had any discussions with you and the other RTOs over the reinstatement of these funds? How many workers in your area in tourism have been negatively impacted in that region as compared to neighbouring regions?

Ms. Maria Fortunato: In terms of the funding to the regional tourism organizations, we are at the same level of funding that we were last year. However, there was a recent announcement that has been made in terms of providing additional marketing dollar support to the regional tourism organizations to support the local businesses. Certainly, that's going to help the industry in a significant way.

In terms of the employment question, is that in reference to the whole sector? I just wanted a clarification on that question.

Mr. Paul Miller: The second part of it—another MPP mentioned how many job losses were affected in his area.

Ms. Maria Fortunato: Yes.

Mr. Paul Miller: I'm sure in those areas it would be similar or larger. Would that be correct?

Ms. Maria Fortunato: Yes. In Hamilton, we had, altogether, prior to the pandemic, over 65,000 jobs in the tourism sector. That put us at 15,253 tourism-related establishments—across the region, how many businesses there were. Right now I would say that more than half are not employed in the sector. Accommodations—the occupancy rates are very low, and there aren't, like other sectors, meetings and conventions coming into our region also right now.

Mr. Paul Miller: So 65,000 is massive.

My second question: On your website, you've got, "Worth the Wait." It's a wonderful new slogan that really reinforces the success of tourism in your region. I can tell you how many phone calls I've received in my office throughout the crisis from people who were bursting at the seams to get to their trailers and RVs or simply go fishing in our areas. While we are now entering into the middle stages of the reopening, there are so many facilities that are opening under extreme pressure to make sure that the rules are enforced and the proper protections are in place for the workers at these facilities as well as their guests.

While the work is being done, I'm still hearing skepticism from some people from smaller communities that this reopening can be carried on safely. While "Worth the Wait" drives home the desire to return to normal, do local operators and community members have the confidence at this point that the wait has been long enough? If not, what can the government do to help ease these concerns?

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

Ms. Maria Fortunato: Yes, "Worth the Wait" had a double meaning. It was certainly about the safety side, but

also that, as a destination, we're worth the wait until they could come and visit us.

What we also did to support our local industry was "Show Some Local Love," so in terms of supporting the commerce hubs that were located in the various municipalities across our region. We created that in-tandem slogan to support the local economy so what was available to be purchased was being purchased at the time. That is the additional support that has been under way.

Mr. Paul Miller: Thank you. If there's any time left, I'd be happy to share it with my other colleagues.

Ms. Maria Fortunato: Absolutely.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Further questions? MPP Gates.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'll go back to Wendy. The Green Party raised a very good question around taxes for municipalities. But what wasn't raised is, in a town like Niagara-on-the-Lake, they can't run a deficit, so the help has to come from the province. I don't know of any city or town across the province of Ontario that has money right now. They're all hurting. They're all facing layoffs, so to get any kind of tax money back, it has to come from the province. But it is a good idea.

The other issue there is, low interest rates would certainly help, at 1% or 1.5%. I'm hearing that some tourist operators are paying 6.5% and 6% interest rates, which is just unacceptable in the province of Ontario, with rates at almost zero.

The question I'll give to you is: Do the seniors in Niagara-on-the-Lake believe that regulations set forth by the government have done enough to protect them?

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

Ms. Wendy Cheropita: Good question. A lot of seniors in Niagara-on-the-Lake—I have not heard that coming back. Most of the comments I've heard is that the province has actually been doing a very good job through this COVID process and that it has been a collaborative approach and that it seems to be working so far.

I think, from a town perspective—when you talk about municipalities, you bring up a very good point because municipalities, especially small ones like Niagara-on-the-Lake that have a very small population, a small number of businesses—we don't have big industry here. The municipality is absolutely stretched. Yes, this is a really difficult time, because we have to start looking at what we are going to cut, and if we're cutting anything, that's going to be services. That is something that would affect the residents and would affect the population. Predominantly, a high proportion is a retirement population, so they're living on a fixed income, so that becomes a bigger—

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

Before I go to the next presenter, I would like to do an attendance check on MPP McKenna, if you could confirm your attendance and if you are in Ontario.

Ms. Jane McKenna: Yes—MPP Jane McKenna. I'm in Burlington, Ontario, at my office.

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

CHELSEA HOTEL, TORONTO
HILTON NIAGARA FALLS/FALLSVIEW
HOTEL AND SUITES
ONTARIO MUSEUM ASSOCIATION

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Moving along to our next presenter, I would like to call upon the Chelsea Hotel, Toronto. If you could state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Robert Housez: My name is Robert Housez, general manager of the Chelsea Hotel.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very, very much for this opportunity to speak to you today on what is an obviously unprecedented and unfortunately historic time for our entire industry, the tourism industry, in Toronto and indeed in Ontario and throughout the country.

Just before launching in, I'd also like to recognize and thank the Premier and his cabinet and specifically the Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries, Lisa MacLeod, for the degree of accessibility. They've really made themselves available to our community over this time of crisis, and it's certainly very much appreciated.

If I could perhaps start with a view from 30,000 feet, just to demonstrate the magnitude of the crisis, and then I will zero in a little more specifically on the impact on my hotel, which is a good example of an individual business entity—how it's being impacted—and then perhaps how we might proceed ahead and how you may be able to help us as an industry as we push ahead.

1400

So if we look to last year—and I'm going to throw a few numbers out. I'm not going to bore you with tons of numbers. I know you've heard many, many numbers, but there are a few important ones, and this comes to us from a visitor economy impact study, which was commissioned by Tourism Toronto and the Toronto board of trade. To get the study done, they used Tourism Economics, which is a division of Oxford Economics, a very well-respected organization when it comes to this sort of work.

But last year, just to set the stage, we had a record year for visitation in Toronto. We had 28.1 million visitors that generated \$6.7 billion—that's billions—in visitor spending. That had an economic impact within our community of \$10.3 billion and, perhaps most interestingly, generated \$1.8 billion of tax for the three levels of government within the province and, very, very importantly, especially in light of what's happening to my team right now, supported 70,000 jobs in the tourism sector.

Now we fast-forward to this year, and obviously things are extremely different. Who really knows how the year will end? But once again, Tourism Economics has taken a bold stab at forecasting, and they see visitor spending reducing to \$3.7 billion this year. That's a \$6.6-billion loss

in economic impact compared to last year, and is really quite devastating.

Let's perhaps leave the big numbers, as I said, because that is the 30,000-foot level. Let me get a little more granular for you and talk about the Chelsea story.

The Chelsea Hotel, for those who aren't familiar with the property, is Canada's largest hotel by room count. We're just 10 rooms shy of 1,600 rooms, coming in at 1,590. We have 615 terrific hospitality professionals who work with us here at the Chelsea. In 2019, the hotel ran 78%, but perhaps in a term—

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

Mr. Robert Housez:—that makes more sense, 452,573 occupied rooms had a revenue of \$96 million. Now, if we take a look to this year, we are running, right this month, an occupancy of 8%. We'll finish the month with about 3,800 occupied rooms. Compared to last year, we ran 91.3% in the month of June: 43,554 rooms. So we're about 40,000 rooms off. Most importantly, 93% of my team—that's 577 employees—are currently laid off with no work and no immediate frame as to when they might be able to come back.

Who is staying with us, even to get the 8%? We've have reached out and accommodated front-line medical workers, those who might not feel they've got time to get home after a long shift in the ER or at the hospitals. We've reached out to patients' families—patients who are critically ill and may not be able to get out of the hospital at this time, but their families would like to be somewhat close to them. They come stay with us because of our proximity to hospitals.

We've also had the opportunity to work with various community organizations. One I'll just bring to light was with our Indigenous partners, where we sheltered victims of spousal abuse who did not feel safe staying at their home during this time. We also worked very closely with fire, police and EMS and put people like that up.

We feel that we've done our part, and we're happy to do that part—good Lord; without that we would sit very close to empty. But we cannot go on indefinitely with only some of our revenue streams operating—

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

Mr. Robert Housez:—and this sort of gets into the asks of where we feel you can help us and, indeed, the entire hotel industry in Toronto. Hotels can sell food and beverages on a takeout basis, but they cannot have anyone sitting in their restaurants. We think it's high time that we look at changing that. We also feel, as many of you are probably aware, that there's a significant revenue stream that comes from the meeting business. That is totally shut down right now. But we do feel that there's a time when we can safely conduct smaller meetings, and we need your help to move ahead with this.

So let me just quickly touch base on the first of the two: food and beverage—

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

We'll have to move to the next presenter, from Hilton Hotels, Niagara Falls. If you could please state your name

for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Giovanni Pellegrino: All right. Good afternoon. Thank you, Chair. My name is Giovanni Pellegrino. Most people know me as John. I'm the vice-president of construction and development and technology at Hilton/Fallsview in Niagara Falls.

I want to thank the members of the committee for this opportunity to speak with you today, and I want to take this opportunity to thank everyone in government for your handling of the COVID pandemic in Ontario. While I have you, I want to recognize Minister MacLeod's hard work for tourism. Her visibility and willingness to help us have been evident in Niagara Falls. So I thank you, Minister MacLeod.

My message to you today, on behalf of the people I represent, is quite simple: We need you to help us so we can help ourselves. The COVID-19 pandemic has not only brought to a grinding halt the steady stream of tourists and patrons to our establishment and attractions, but its worst impact is that it has put in jeopardy the plans we put in motion that would have brought the Fallsview area to the next level.

We have a new casino operator recently completed with the 5,000-seat Niagara Falls Entertainment Centre. This was predicated on the OLG's commitment that there would be 200 A-list shows in our town every year. Our company, after having invested close to \$100 million to get the theatre built and to enhance our property, was on the verge of the next phase of our aggressive investment plan. The plan includes the construction of a 1,200-room iconic hotel adjacent to the casino. We believe that, along with the NFEC theatre, this would have brought a world-class casino entertainment/resort destination to the Falls.

Outside analysts had indicated to us that with no cost to the taxpayer, the Ontario government, through the OLG, would have realized a sizable share of the \$180 million of incremental gaming revenue that our planned development would have brought. This is not to mention the 1,200 new permanent hospitality jobs in our area and nearly 2.5 million construction work hours that would have been required to build this facility. In addition, we were making really good headway working with your government and Minister Sarkaria to finally break through 10 years of red tape to link this destination to a tasteful agri-tourism complex that would have overlooked the lake towards Toronto and would have included a winery, restaurant and amphitheatre, all nestled in a vineyard and adjacent to a golf course.

All of these plans have unfortunately stalled. The same could be said for many of the plans of other stakeholders in Niagara Falls who were gearing up for unprecedented growth stemming from the million-visitor uptick that the theatre alone was going to bring to Niagara Falls. We can all budget for a bad year; we've had them before. But no one could budget for a year where revenue drops almost 100%.

In Niagara Falls, we're very optimistic. As we begin to turn the corner—and I know we need to do this cautiously—our willingness to continue to build Niagara hasn't

been affected by this pandemic. What has been affected is our balance sheets and our ability to secure the financing we're going to need to continue to build Niagara.

I want to be clear: We're not looking for handouts and we're not looking for subsidies. We're of the opinion and we're quite content that you're using taxpayer dollars to help individuals and families ride out the storm and keeping hard-working Ontarians out of financial hardship. We know that this is going to benefit all of us in the long run, and we're mindful that almost 1,000 of these people were our employees prior to COVID. We're simply asking the government to work with us to find those creative ways to encourage government ministries and agencies to partner with the private sector.

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

Mr. Giovanni Pellegrino: We're asking you to share with us the borrowing risk. This can be in the form of government backstops that would help us secure the financing we need to keep on building. We want you to consider participating with us in leases for our spaces that can benefit you, like room blocks, parking garages, conference centres, and all the multi-use spaces we have available. We'd like you to consider some rent relief for the lands we lease from crown corporations or parks for parking and attractions, like our zip line.

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By partnering with us, we know we're asking you to share in the risk, but we also believe you'll reap the direct share of the proceeds from ensuing growth at no cost to taxpayers while helping us prop up our pro forma balance sheets for lenders with long-term government-backed partnerships.

We also need you to follow through with your commitments to remove red tape so that we can build efficiently and in a financially viable way.

Minister Sarkaria, thank you for continuing to ask us for this input, but now words need to finally turn it into action.

This is an opportunity for this government that's open for business to really partner with business. In the words of Mayor Jim Diodati, it's a time to plan, not a time to panic. I think you have heard me today: We have a plan. We were set to rebuild this industry even before COVID hit. We were shifting to a new generation. Any market that doesn't take advantage of this forced reset is going to miss the opportunity to get ahead. In the case of Niagara Falls, as a casino and tourist market, the opportunity we see before us is to chart a path to a more secure future with a world-class, 24-hour, multi-experiential destination like no other.

To recap our asks, we would like you to partner with the private sector by sharing the borrowing risk with private stakeholders; by leasing from us spaces and services in our facilities; by providing temporary relief for the lands we lease from you and your agencies; and by continuing to eliminate red tape.

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

Mr. Giovanni Pellegrino: If we do this together, we are steadfast in our belief that we, the Ontario government and the private sector, will come out of this stronger, better

and more financially sound than ever. Like I said at the beginning, we believe that if we build it they will come. But to do that, to get there, we'll need you to help us so that we can help ourselves.

I thank you for your time, and with time to spare, I give back the floor.

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

Now we'll move to our next presenter, from the Ontario Museum Association. If you could please state your name for the record, you will have seven minutes for the presentation.

Ms. Marie Lalonde: Thank you. I hope you can hear me.

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

Ms. Marie Lalonde: All right. My name is Marie Lalonde; I'm executive director of the Ontario Museum Association. I would like to thank you very much, committee members and other MPPs, for the opportunity to present today. I'd like to also express the sincere appreciation of our organization and our members for the leadership that has been provided by the government during this unprecedented pandemic. Thank you for your interest and your work in supporting our province during this crisis.

As you consider financial support to Ontario communities across the province, we'd like to remind you that museums can play a key role in recovery. Museums contribute to both the economic and the social bottom line. We're tracking, with COVID-19, at least \$20 billion in lost economic activity, a figure that was brought forward by the C.D. Howe Institute. Tourism is fourth in the seven hardest-hit sectors. The estimates are that 350,000 jobs are lost in this sector primarily. It's suggested that it will not be until 2024 that tourism spending will recover to previous levels.

The OMA, the Ontario Museum Association, is the sector association that represents 700 museums, large and small, in every city and town across this province in urban, rural, northern, east and west Ontario. As you know, Ontario does not have a provincial museum; it has community museums that hold the collection for the people of Ontario. It is recognized in the Ontario Heritage Act. The museum sector contributes to the cultural GDP of \$26.7 billion and to the tourism GDP of \$34.1 billion. They are vital tourism assets. They welcome 19.4 million visitors annually, and they support education, the economy, culture and the community landscape across the province.

We welcomed, pre-pandemic, 15% more visitors in person during the last five-year period. We would like to bring to your attention that these contributions are now at risk.

The pandemic struck right on the cusp of the really busy summer season, which sees 40% of visitor spending in Ontario. Museums across the province are currently closed. Last week we did an informal poll, and 72% of the museums were undecided on whether or not they could reopen. They're closed to the public. It's affecting the admissions, the museum programs, sales of any goods and

services, donations, memberships and fundraising. The majority expect no revenue, and this has been the case since mid-March.

This loss is estimated at \$44 million per month for Ontario museums. They have to earn revenue, and 74% of our community museums have less than three months' worth of reserve funds.

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

Ms. Marie Lalonde: This is a major issue: financial pressures, laid-off staff, cancellation of summer season camps, and so on. Seasonal museums may not be able to reopen. There was an early distribution of operating funding to museums, but it funds 166 of the 700 museums. Non-profit museums are ineligible for the FedDev Regional Relief and Recovery Fund, and the majority is not eligible for the Ontario Arts Council.

The recommendations of the OMA are to have an Ontario museums relief fund. It's a dedicated fund that could address the immediate and significant impact on museums. We'd like to recommend incentives and tax credits to encourage private sector donations. We'd like to see property tax exemptions across the province; this is not consistently applied. And we'd like to see coverage of core operating costs and eliminating and reducing matching fund requirements where possible.

We also recommend a digital response fund. Museums have been engaging the public during the confinement, supporting the education system during school closures, and developing online and social media activities. They're challenged by digital skills shortages, minimal resources and limited digital infrastructure. Some 75% of tourists plan their visits online. We see that museums received 93.5 million online visits; that's three visits per second. They're doing this, and we should be enhanced and enabled to continue this.

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

Ms. Marie Lalonde: We recommend that employment programs and income support measures be considered. We also add that in these difficult times of anti-racism issues and as part of the very broad ecosystem of the culture, sport and tourism industry, museums should be supported in their role as learning and educational organizations. When the world is ready to come back to Ontario with staycations and local tourists, museums want to be ready to welcome them. Merci.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. We'll start with the questions now. We'll go to the government side this time. MPP Rasheed.

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Sorry, Chair. I think MPP Skelly is the one who's going first.

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

Ms. Donna Skelly: My question is for Giovanni Pellegrino—I love your name, by the way. I just love saying that name.

You were mentioning something that really is music to my ears. You referenced Minister Sarkaria's work recently with literally thousands of businesses in every sector across every region in Ontario. He has met with them, asking them to bring examples of obstacles that have acted

as barriers to their own growth. What I'm hoping you can provide is a little bit more—well, actually a lot more, detail. You said that it's time that, if we truly want to partner with business, we have to act on this. Is it possible to expand on the points that you raised in your presentation?

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Mr. Giovanni Pellegrino: Yes, thank you. Absolutely. Particularly with our winery development, we're in an area where we're governed by so many different layers. By that I mean the region, the municipality, the provincial government, the Niagara Escarpment Commission, and the greenbelt. There are just so many organizations that I understand are looking at the environmental sensitivity of some of this development, which is fair. But after going through the studies, after hiring consultants, after paying exorbitant fees and trying to do things correctly and follow all the rules, there seems to always be another stumbling block and another piece of paper and another government organization. When we put through an environmental assessment study, we use our own consultants, then the government uses theirs, and then other interested parties use theirs. It just takes forever.

When we met with Mr. Sarkaria, what we wanted to try to see is: We have a big development and we're sensitive to all of these things and we do all of the legwork and we present it well and it's financially viable and it creates jobs and it actually enhances the environment of the area we're developing—for example, from a soybean field to a beautiful winery—the fact that it's monetized and the fact that there's a financial benefit shouldn't be a stumbling block.

To me, that's the biggest issue with red tape: Ten years to develop something that everyone believes in, including many politicians and many municipal organizations, is way too long. I don't know if that answers your question, but that's one of the specific areas where we're facing issues with red tape.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Okay. So we're already talking about—again, we have heard this many times—red tape navigating the application and the licensing process when we are building something. Can you give me other examples? This is something that we have to work on. It's even more difficult in the Niagara region because you have the Niagara escarpment and you have conservation authorities, and then you have municipalities, the regional government and the province. It's just one level of authority and restriction after another. That's one example; please provide another.

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

Mr. Giovanni Pellegrino: Another area where we face challenges as well is that we've got a wonderful facility here and we want to develop it. To do that, as I said in my presentation, we need many partners to come in.

There's the casino across from us that is managed by the OLG. They provided the operation of that casino to a service provider through an RFP, and that service provider also manages the theatre. Maybe in an effort to make things less complicated and privatized, what it has actually done for us is, when we want to, for example, build a

building that connects to their building and create an integrated resort feel, we don't know who to speak to anymore because the operator is off trying to make their own money and the OLG is trying to work with that partner. If we want to come in, we find ourselves having to speak to the region, the municipality, the provincial government, the operator and the OLG. Sometimes it would be nice if there was a platform or a way of presenting these plans, and then the information on all these plans—this information is shared with everyone, and not left up to us to try to find who we need to involve.

That happens a lot. Even in the winery project on this development, and on many other things, you always seem to miss someone who needed to know and had a say. I guess, to me, eliminating red tape is—we have a good provincial government. They're open for business. Let's govern and let's make some decisions where they should be made. All of these other organizations, if we have done our homework—

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

Mr. Giovanni Pellegrino: —they should be able to follow the lead of the top level of government that's in a position to make that decision.

Ms. Donna Skelly: In other words, if I can put words in your mouth, it's almost as if it's one shop or a window that you can access and let government notify whoever has to be notified. We're doing that in the agricultural sector, but you're suggesting that it could be—in many ways, it is the agricultural sector with wineries. But you're saying, "Let's take this to different businesses as well," and that would help expedite the process.

Mr. Giovanni Pellegrino: I absolutely agree. It's one window, and there should be mechanisms within the organization that we're looking for approval from to disseminate that information where it needs to go. That onus should not be on us. It's too costly, and too many organizations and too many groups and too many interests are asking for the same thing but in a slightly different way.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Okay. Thank you. That's our time, but thank you for those. And you have sent those in a letter of proposal? Have you submitted that, as well, in writing?

Mr. Giovanni Pellegrino: We have a development plan that has been submitted to several of the MPPs.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Your recommendations, what you mentioned in your comments—

Mr. Giovanni Pellegrino: I will submit them in writing.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. We'll move to the opposition side now. I'll start with MPP Gretzky, and then MPPs Miller and Gates.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: My question is going to be directed to Ms. Lalonde about our museums. Here in Windsor, we have many museums that are deeply tied to the history specifically of our area. Just to name a few, to highlight a few, there are the Chimczuk Museum, the Maison François Baby House and the Duff-Baby House, which are tied to the Battle of Windsor in 1838 during the Patriot War; the Maison François Baby House was also

briefly occupied by the Americans in 1812. We have the Canadian Transportation Museum and Heritage Village, which is very closely tied to the fact that we are a large auto-sector area—the capital, for now.

The John R. Park Homestead, the Amherstburg Freedom Museum, the John Freeman Walls Historic Site and Underground Railroad Museum, the Canadian Historical Aircraft Association Museum, the Park House Museum: Those are just a few that we have, whether it's specifically in my riding or across Windsor and Essex county. Every single one of those is deeply tied to our community.

I'm going to share some information that was sent to me specifically from the Amherstburg Freedom Museum. For those who aren't familiar, the Freedom Museum is dedicated to the history of slavery, the slaves who came here from the US seeking freedom, and the good, the bad and the ugly that came out of slavery and eventually emancipation.

Mary-Katherine Whalen, who is the curator and administrator for the Amherstburg Freedom Museum, highlighted these points for me. They had to close the museum on March 17 to the public, so they have lost three months. Some 13 tour and school groups were cancelled, which was approximately \$2,000 in revenue; to some, that doesn't seem like a lot, but to a small community museum, that is huge. They've lost approximately \$18,000 in fundraising revenue due to the cancellations of in-person events, which means they had to scale back future fundraising events and avoid gatherings in person, which has led to a loss of audience and other revenue. They have had to postpone programming that would have brought in new people to the museum. She says, "Compared to last year, we lost a visitor traffic audience of approximately 600 people." They're projecting a loss of upwards of 1,300 people at least if they have to remain closed until August. They have not been able to engage summer employees and part-time staff.

Very significant to our area is, with the border being closed, we have lost a significant number of American visitors as well. I know that there are other regions across the province where we are border towns, and that has also greatly impacted our museums. I think it's important to point out that not only do we draw people from outside of our communities and outside of our country; when they do come, they stay at our hotels, so that is impacting our hospitality industry as well. They visit our casino, which is also deeply impacted.

Ms. Lalonde, you had mentioned removing matching fund requirements. I'm wondering if you could build on that a little more and talk about what that would look like to these museums—the small community museums and the larger museums—on a go-forward basis as you try to recover from this pandemic.

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

Ms. Marie Lalonde: The culture tourist spends \$7.7 billion a year. That's in Ontario. The program that currently funds community museums is on hold in terms of being reviewed and enhanced and addressed with standards that

are more contemporary. So currently, as I was mentioning, there is no relief funding for our community museums. While there are welcome and significant investments in tourism—Destination Ontario, regional tourism organizations—the benefit which will come to museums is not direct. It is not their bottom line. Museums are also not eligible for Ontario Arts Council funding. There's currently no provincial source of relief for community museums.

I was fortunate to be invited to sit on the panel for festivals and events and local community attractions, and it was clear to us that while, of course, there's an approach that recognizes the ecosystem, museums unfortunately are not yet fully considered and supported in their work in this way. We expect them to provide safe spaces and to welcome visitors from home and abroad. Museums are the reason that visitors will come and then stay at a hotel. It's very important for us to think of how they can be supported.

The matching funding at this current time is particularly for the Young Canada Works programs—

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

Ms. Marie Lalonde: —that allows for interns to be hired. Most museums this summer, frankly, are unable to hire the seasonal staff because they cannot; they simply don't have the money for the matching funding. That's part of our challenge.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: As a quick follow-up: As you and I had both mentioned with our museums, especially our small community museums, there is a drastic decrease in funding and fundraising, and it's very difficult during this time for them to even maintain levels they had, so there is a threat that we are going to lose some. As I pointed out, in my area, with the deep history around the freeing of slaves and them coming to the Underground Railroad that runs through my riding, there's significant history in that.

We also talked about how museums play a key role in educating, providing jobs and then feeding other sectors such as the hospitality—

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.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you to all of the presenters. I'm going to take advantage of the fact that we have two hotel organizations in different parts of the province to talk about something that I haven't really heard from the discussions at this point in terms of capacity and your expectations of whether we have too many, based on what the demand is likely to be, or too few. What is your sense of capacity for the areas? I'll start with the Chelsea Hotel in Toronto with Robert.

Mr. Robert Housez: Thank you, MPP Hunter. I really, I guess, can speak to Toronto. I won't try and speak to capacity in other areas. But I believe there's adequate capacity within the city currently. We have come off record years over the last three successive years, and we have always had the capacity to meet that demand.

I think the important thing to recognize is, as we start to return back to normal, one of the drivers that pushes that capacity is the meeting side of the business. That, in the

hoteliers' opinion, would probably be the very last segment of our market mix to come back. We expect that we'll get much more visitation from locals with pent-up demand and frustrations from being locked up well before we see the big meetings come back.

I think that, historically, there's been enough capacity. Certainly in the short-term moving forward, I think there will be enough capacity. We would love to push those boundaries to get to a point where we had a real serious issue with that, because that would mean that all our employees are back working and the state of our industry would be healthy once again.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Okay. And John?

Mr. Giovanni Pellegrino: Sure. Our experience in Niagara Falls is slightly different. The history of Niagara Falls is, it would shut down in the winter and reopen in the summer. Today, New Year's Eve is the busiest night of the year in Niagara Falls, and that's in the winter.

Capacity has always been an issue, especially for what I call the new generation, the new customer. This is why we believe we need more capacity and we need to build a world-class destination. It's very difficult to get a room here any day of the summer, spring and fall months. And on those festive days in the wintertime, it's very difficult to get a room here. We've always had a capacity issue.

We also believe that we make our money when people want our product, so it comes down to having enough product available when the people come to town. We'll live with a day or two where we don't have big occupancy, and then we'll sell out the next three nights. That's fantastic. But you need that. You need to provide the inventory in order to accommodate that capacity.

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

Mr. Giovanni Pellegrino: Again, COVID came upon us; it will leave. People will want to get out and celebrate and, you know what, I'll even venture to say they'll want to hug once in a while. So we're confident. We just want to build a better destination, get to that next level. We were going there anyway. I think now it's even more important that we go to that next level.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Robert, you mentioned the employees. What's happening with them at this stage? You talked about how you can't plan for zero revenue, so what is happening? I can understand that the building will be there, but the people may not.

Mr. Robert Housez: Right. If you look at it currently, as I said, we're running an occupancy of 8%. It only stands to reason that I need a handful of employees to service the demands of our guests in the building at that level. Clearly, that's not a profitable level to operate at. The reality is that all those employees right now are, unfortunately, laid off, and because I don't have a crystal ball—none of us do—I don't have a definitive return-to-work date for them. We certainly hope it's going to be sooner rather than later.

One of the things that we do believe, to make sure that we are properly positioned as we start to transition into those better times, is to make sure that hotels are able to operate, taking advantage of all their revenue streams. Currently, we can certainly do that if we can sell a room

night, but we're not able to operate our food and beverage outlets in a normal way.

We believe that we've got the expertise and the ability to respect any sort of social distancing requirement, any food delivery requirement—

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

Mr. Robert Housez:—and still operate those outlets. As I mentioned previously, we also need help on the meeting side. That's a very significant part of many hotels' operations. Both of those sectors of hotels return employees back to work. Anything that we can do on that front would certainly not only help those employees but would help the overall profitability of our operations.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you. I really appreciate that and your describing what is needed. I do have to say, at the Chelsea—I had relatives who used to bring their kids for that great big slide each and every year, and we used to have a really good time. Hopefully, families will come back again to both of your properties.

Of course, my favourite would be the museums. I'm sorry I didn't get to ask you questions, but in Scarborough—Guildwood, there are lots of museums as well that are cherished by the community and by the volunteers who go to them to care for the artifacts, so thank you.

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The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. We'll go to the second round now, and I'll start—

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Sorry. Before that, we need to do an attendance check. MPP Blais, if you could please confirm your attendance.

Can you unmute yourself?

Mr. Stephen Blais: Yes. MPP Blais from Orléans, Ontario.

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

We'll start the second round with the official opposition, and I'll go to MPP Miller this time. MPP Paul Miller.

Are you there, sir? MPP Miller? Okay. We'll go to MPP Gates, then, in the meantime.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Thank you very much. My question would be to Giovanni. Do you believe it would be helpful for your business to have access to government-backed low-interest-rate loans with local lenders, like the credit union, to help with liquidation and so businesses have the ability to cover immediate and short-term debt and obligations?

Mr. Giovanni Pellegrino: That's a tricky one, because the way we feel, we've had a good run in Niagara Falls. We've been able to afford our own development, and we haven't had to rely too heavily on what I would call smaller loans for different purposes. Going forward, it may be the case.

I talk more about government backstops and partnerships simply because the magnitude of borrowing that's required to bring to fruition what we're proposing is almost too big for some banks. I would not say no to any type of assistance, but we have our eye on the bigger prize, simply because we think it's required. The level financing

required for that type of development doesn't really lend itself to smaller credit unions or local lending.

Mr. Wayne Gates: All right. Business owners in Niagara Falls, including big property owners in Niagara Falls, are telling me that a big expense for closed businesses is the ongoing property taxes. Municipalities are probably not in a financial position to run a deficit, because they can't. Do you think there is a role for the province to play here, and do you think it would be helpful for tourist operators and owners to halt payments, not defer them?

And to your point, just in case I don't get another question, I believe, like you, that when COVID-19 is—when we find a cure, Niagara Falls is going to be busy. There are going to be lots of opportunities; lots of opportunities for your organization to continue to grow with the entertainment complex, with the casino. You've done a wonderful job down there, by the way. It's unfortunate that we can't open the entertainment complex.

So I wanted to at least say that. I have no concerns, quite frankly. Tourists are coming back to Niagara Falls and Niagara-on-the-Lake and all of the other stuff that's in my riding, so I just wanted to do that.

But maybe on the fact about property taxes, do you need some help on property taxes? Because that's what the other big operators are telling us.

Mr. Giovanni Pellegrino: I agree with that. I think that any type of relief on ongoing expenses is certainly beneficial. You said the right thing. Deferral is a big thing, because if we need to skip a couple of property tax payments just to have to pay double that amount a few months from now, it might not necessarily help us. But certainly some relief on those ongoing expenses, now that we're at zero revenue, would potentially permit us to invest in the things that will continue to build Niagara rather than have to just keep the thing on life support.

And I will add, Mr. Gates, that I hope the narrative changes a little bit and we don't always talk about a cure, because I think prevention in itself is a cure. I'll agree with Rob from the Chelsea; I think we're smart enough now that we know about this disease to take the measures that we need to keep everybody safe. I think the progressive reopening, allowing people maybe wearing masks in public or making sure our staff protects our patrons and themselves, can work just as well as a cure as long as we do it right and we tell people that it's safe to go out there. That's just how we see things here.

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

Mr. Wayne Gates: Would you be in favour of a continuation—sorry, am I good?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Miller has a question as well.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Okay. All right. Thank you. Thanks, John.

Mr. Giovanni Pellegrino: Thank you.

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

Mr. Paul Miller: Okay. Thank you. My question is to Marie. As a long-time re-enactor, Marie, and participant in the War of 1812 and Battle of Stoney Creek re-

enactments, I know that beyond the cultural and economic value of the festivities there's also a significant educational component. From guided tours of Battlefield House throughout the school year to the big event in June, children from all over the region get a chance to witness our shared heritage and gain a better understanding of our past. Weaving flax into linen or making candles is part of that understanding. Where we came from and knowing how hard life would have been back in those days: These are lessons that may only be properly understood through participation and interaction.

With the youth of today being deprived of educational experiences like this, do you think the government should be adapting their curriculum and teaching methods to ensure that this knowledge remains available?

What tools are now available to try to recreate what is currently being lost without these museum-focused events?

Are you aware of any discussions about lost gate revenues for the historical events?

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

Mr. Paul Miller: Is there any talk of enhanced transfer payments directly to the municipalities to assist in these losses?

Ms. Marie Lalonde: Thank you for the questions, MPP Miller. Yes, I think these are parts of the events that are really essential and really draw a lot of tourists, and frankly also contribute to and support the education curriculum. It's clear that museums "pivoted"—the favourite word of everyone these days—to offer some online experiences during this pandemic.

What also has come to mind is the importance of providing some support for the rescaling and being able to provide rich experiences that are both online as well as then supported with an in-person component and experience of our history, of our pride of place, etc. That's why some of these festivals and events will currently be eligible for some funding from the province. However, the community—

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. I'll go to MPP Blais.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to start with the gentleman from Niagara. Thank you, everyone, for your presentations.

You mentioned that you were hoping for the government to help take some of the risk on the expansion project. I'm wondering if you could elaborate on your idea a little bit.

Mr. Giovanni Pellegrino: Sure. It's not uncommon, traditionally, when the government and private sector go into a partnership like a P3, that the government's role is not necessarily to actually fund anything. The government's role is there to simply backstop those loans if people in that partnership run into a financial situation.

Our balance sheets, unfortunately, will be gravely impacted by COVID-19, and when we go to a lender and try to borrow money, even though we've got assets and

even though we've got history and things are coming along, the risk is going to be high for a lot of these lenders. So I think it's a great role for government to play. Help us with that risk, come in, backstop portions of the loans or the entire project. We become partners in this, and it's a way to move forward and to continue to invest. That's the best example I can give you: a backstop.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Sure. I appreciate that. If that were to happen, say, tomorrow, when would you envision making further progress on your particular project and then having it come to completion?

Mr. Giovanni Pellegrino: Tomorrow. This project has been in the pipeline for a long time. As I explained, that theatre, which we invested heavily in—and we've prepared our property for visitors—was really just a precursor to the rest of the development.

With an extra million people here—that's 200 A-list shows every year—we're going to need more inventory, but we also owe them a better experience. The last thing we want is for people to come here, go to a show and go home. Niagara Falls won't benefit from the visitor. We need to give them hotel rooms. We need to give them entertainment space. We need to give them a wonderful experience, like they do in Vegas, like they do in many areas around the world. More and more, you can see that people are not just building casinos; they're building casinos with theatres and family areas and fine dining areas.

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So the real answer is, yesterday. But because of COVID-19, maybe we'll have to wait till tomorrow.

Mr. Stephen Blais: MPP Hunter asked about supply, and I believe you said that you need more supply in Niagara. Have you or the board of trade or anyone done an analysis of exactly how much supply is needed?

Mr. Giovanni Pellegrino: We have, and we've seen many studies. But I'll just go back to our experience.

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

Mr. Giovanni Pellegrino: There are many, many days and nights in Niagara Falls when you can't get a room. It has benefited us because it has put upward pressure on the rate. There are many studies out there, but you don't need a study to know that if there are a million more people coming to your town and there are already many nights when you're at 100% capacity, you need to provide more supply.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Further questions? Mr. Blais.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Marie, thank you for your presentation on museums.

In Ottawa, we're fortunate to have several small, local museums. Many of them are municipally owned. In the east end of Ottawa, we have the Cumberland Heritage Village Museum. It's similar to Upper Canada Village. It's a living museum based on the 1920s and 1930s.

There were some previous questions about expanding opportunities through virtual visits and integrating into curriculum changes, and I'm wondering how you would envision that happening.

Ms. Marie Lalonde: Thank you for the question.

Clearly, during this time and even before, museums were integrating various learning experiences and, frankly, experiences in general to support the curriculum. For example, there have been virtual tours. There are all sorts of different engagements possible online. You can visit, and you can even have museums being able to plan some activities based on some of the artifacts, suggesting collections etc. Museums have always had the—

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

Ms. Marie Lalonde:—benefit to be available for individuals of all ages. Somebody who is into research and family history will get some benefit from it; students and all generations can attend. They're always on someone's itinerary. People enjoy visiting them. They're safe places. But they've been neglected in terms of support.

We hope that they're part of the solution. We're going to see people staying at home, staycations. If we want to provide the room—because many of these museums have large spaces and can accommodate.

Mr. Stephen Blais: You mentioned staycations. I imagine that you see museums playing a critical role in that local tourism—providing supports for families, opportunities for families.

Ms. Marie Lalonde: Of those 19 million visits, 55% are from Ontario.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We'll move to the government side for their second round now. MPP McKenna.

Ms. Jane McKenna: Thank you so much, everybody, for coming on today. It's nice to see you, John. I appreciate all of your feedback.

I also want to echo about Minister MacLeod and all the hard work she has done, with your guidance—everybody on the phone. She has been phenomenal, by having round tables, and she has been very, very heartfelt and thoughtful, listening to everybody about what we can do to make things better.

I'm blessed to be the MPP for Burlington, but for a very short time, as a youngster, I lived in Niagara-on-the-Lake, on Queen Street. So I absolutely love Niagara and I think it's a wonderful opportunity with travel outside of Ontario severely restricted for the summer.

I just want to ask you this question, and please accept my apologies if someone else already asked this: How do you think the government and tourism stakeholders can work together to build local demand for the world-renowned attractions we have in Ontario? Anyone can answer.

Ms. Marie Lalonde: I'm happy to reiterate that I think from all the conversations—and I'll also state that the OMA has had conferences at both hotels that are on this call, so I think we're acutely aware of the interdependency and interconnectedness of our sector.

I think we would like to see—this is primarily for museums—that museums be helped along to continue, but most importantly, be able to provide the authentic and absolutely quality experiences that they can. When people go to the Niagara Parks Commission, they visit Laura

Secord, they visit the homestead, they visit the Mackenzie Printery etc. It's part of the full experience. So having that, if you will, coordinated aspect and remembering what's the tide that floats all boats is important.

Mr. Giovanni Pellegrino: Thank you, Ms. McKenna. I couldn't agree with you more, Marie. Ontario has beautiful landscapes, great museums and a wonderful culture. It should be well coordinated.

I think Minister MacLeod is doing the right thing. She is putting it on the map and she is letting people know how important tourism and culture are to the fabric of Ontario. This needs to continue and it needs to be supported, because it will come back. And do you know what? It's within our power to bring it back; it's within our power to do that. Thank you.

Mr. Robert Housez: Maybe I can just echo the words of Marie and Giovanni. First of all, I want to reinforce the thanks to the government for being as accessible and open and willing to listen as they have been.

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

Mr. Robert Housez: We're in a problem for the long term. We would hope that we can continue to count on the government to take a long-term view of this and work with us to win back tourists to our province.

Ms. Jane McKenna: Thank you for those quick responses. I can say we're all in this together and we all are going to work extremely hard to support all of you. Thank you for all your hard work and your continued success moving on with all the wonderful things you've done up to this point.

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

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: My question is to Rob here. Rob, you have mentioned a few times that due to the circumstances right now, things are definitely not the same as they were pre-pandemic. But from a consumer or a customer perspective as a hotel, what actions are you taking to make sure that you gain the confidence of the individuals who are coming to stay at your hotel—keeping in mind that our government is doing everything in our power, given this pandemic, to make sure that we give the confidence to Ontarians and, hopefully once things open, people coming to Ontario that hotels like yours are safe and individuals can confidently stay there?

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

Mr. Robert Housez: Thank you, MPP Rasheed. It's interesting. The hotels were designated as essential services right from the outset of the pandemic. We've got a track record of showing that we've been able to work through the worst of it and keep our guests safe.

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We all understand the importance, for our continued success as well as for society's success, of respecting social-distancing guidelines, of revamping how we service our food and beverage outlets, and of taking a look at how we do meetings with reduced numbers.

We are professionals. The success of our hotels depends on us respecting those guidelines. I know that here at this hotel, but I know equally for other hotels in

Toronto, we've already thought this out and we're very confident that we should be able to move ahead on the meeting front, move ahead with our outlets and be in a good position to move ahead as we come out the other side of the pandemic.

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

Before we move on to our next group of presenters, I need to do an attendance check on MPP Hatfield, if you could please confirm your attendance and if you're present in Ontario. Can you unmute yourself, please? We can't hear you.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Hey, I'm here.

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

Mr. Percy Hatfield: All right, thank you.

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

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Yes. I'm in Windsor, Ontario.

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

JW MARRIOTT THE ROSSEAU MUSKOKA
UNIFOR LOCAL 444
ONTARIO HARNESS HORSE
ASSOCIATION

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We'll move to our next presenter, JW Marriott The Rosseau Muskoka. State your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Ms. Leah Leslie: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. My name is Leah Leslie. I'm the director of sales and marketing for JW Marriott The Rosseau Muskoka in Muskoka Lakes, Ontario. I am here physically at the resort. I'm also the chair of the Muskoka Tourism Marketing Agency, our local destination marketing organization.

Today, I will approach this deputation from the perspective of the business operation, focusing on the impact to JW Marriott because I can be very specific about that. But please keep in mind that the impact has been similar for most tourism businesses in our region, so this will be a reflection of the position that many members of Muskoka Tourism find themselves in as well. Shall I begin, Mr. Chair?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Yes.

Ms. Leah Leslie: I'll start with a brief overview of JW Marriott The Rosseau Muskoka and the business environment in our area, then I'll share some of the specific effects that COVID-19 has had on our business and on tourism in general here, and finally, some suggestions on ways that we think the Ontario government could assist.

JW Marriott The Rosseau Muskoka is a luxury resort and conference centre two hours north of Toronto in a spectacularly scenic but fairly remote location on Lake Rosseau. From a tourism perspective, Muskoka is a year-round destination, but the destination is severely seasonal, with demand that exceeds capacity in summer and

capacity that exceeds demand in winter. JW Marriott, like most tourism operators in Muskoka, makes money between mid-May and mid-October and loses money for the other seven months of the year. Many tourism businesses close completely in winter. However, JW Marriott remains open year-round, providing employment for more than 100 people year-round and about 300 in summer.

Profit margin is very slim in the resort business at the best of times due to the high cost of staffing, variable occupancy, supplies, services, and the maintenance of the physical plant, not to mention investment in the asset itself. For example, JW Marriott has 26 acres of land, four swimming pools and five hot tubs, and operates its own water treatment, wastewater treatment and backup generating station. It's like a little municipality of its own. It's not in a town and it's not close to a town of any size, so there is limited community support for the business.

COVID-19 came at the worst possible time, right at the time of year when things are starting to improve, after several winter months of extremely low revenue. At this point, we are at the eight-month mark of continuous and staggering losses. Some of the issues we had before COVID-19 have been amplified by the crisis. We urgently need to get back to addressing those fundamental issues in order to achieve recovery.

Our primary challenges as a resort prior to COVID-19 were related mostly to being in a rural location: not enough residents in the area to staff the resort at any level, the main reason for this being low population density in the immediate area and long distances to travel to work, resulting in a shortage of affordable housing, especially in summer, no public transportation, and inadequate child care services, especially for businesses that operate with non-traditional hours.

There are some questions we'd like to ask the Ontario government that will reveal opportunities to assist with recovery, I hope. Meetings, conferences and group events are a huge part of the mix of business that supports not only the resorts but all the businesses around us. Groups, meetings, conventions, weddings: This represents fully half our business year-round—

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

Ms. Leah Leslie:—and, at this time of year, two thirds of our business, March through June.

A new issue that we did not anticipate and we don't have the tools to deal with is guidance of how to operate groups, meetings and events. There wasn't any mention in phase 2 about that segment, so it would be very helpful to have more specifics the next time we get some guidelines from the government—how to operate, what the limitations are, what the expectations are—so that the industry is operating with everybody approaching this consistently.

Another question we have: What is the plan to help getting people back to work? So far, the programs are federal, the Ontario supportive program, the infectious disease emergency leave, and six weeks after the state of emergency, so we're wondering what kind of support there might be for employers who don't have roles any more for people and yet have to pay severance. The Employment

Standards Act is going to present a challenge financially for long-standing employees whose roles have been eliminated due to the pandemic.

We're suggesting perhaps a government incentive program to encourage people to get back to work. It's a fine balance, having people who work hourly and whose jobs are partly back but not entirely back. If the resort hires them back, we can't give them enough hours to support their lifestyle even if it's modest but they do give up the CERB at the same time. So that's a question.

We need help advocating the federal government by pushing them to open up opportunities for businesses to hire temporary foreign workers. This might sound like a contradiction because I just mentioned how people are unemployed, but because of the challenges I mentioned earlier, it's very difficult for us to staff the resort. Temporary foreign workers have enabled us to operate in recent years. It was a terrible blow when the federal government ended that program, and, as it started to return, a tremendous help to us and now suddenly those people are gone again. So we are not able to find the workers to do the jobs, to deliver the programs that tourism needs to survive in Muskoka, and we need help in making sure that those temporary foreign workers can confirm.

Several businesses, seasonal businesses especially, would benefit from some financial support—

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

Ms. Leah Leslie: Am I done?

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

Interjection: Thirty seconds.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Oh, 30 seconds. Sorry, yes.

Ms. Leah Leslie: Oh, okay. A couple more short ones: Help us get people back to work; advocate on our behalf with other levels of government; the temporary foreign worker program; clear guidance on groups and meetings; help us promote the destination; and more public health inspectors so we can get our pools inspected more quickly and open.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. We'll move to our next presenter, from Unifor Local 444. If you could please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Dave Cassidy: Thank you. I'm Dave Cassidy, president of Unifor Local 444. Thank you for allowing me this time.

The COVID-19 crisis has all but completely shut down Canada's gaming industry, at least in terms of physical bricks and mortar operations. The overall hospitality and gaming sector has been one of the first hit and amongst the worst hit by the economic shutdown following the pandemic.

According to the Canadian Gaming Association, in a 72-hour period, almost all of the 114 casinos in Canada closed down, along with more than 200 permanent bingo halls and community gaming centres. Approximately 2,300 workers at Caesars Windsor are members of my

local, and the casino employs hundreds more workers who are either in management or non-unionized. Caesars Windsor is the second-largest employer in Windsor and Essex, and the jobs at the casino support thousands more in the community. We know all too well that when the casino is thriving and busy, members, their families and communities prosper.

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It's important to recognize that gaming jobs are not what you might picture when you think of a service job. The national average hourly wage, excluding overtime, for gaming workers in 2018 was \$21.85 an hour, and gaming jobs are significantly more likely to be unionized compared to other work in the service sector. We estimate that about 25% of all gaming workers in Canada belong to a union, and that number is significantly higher for large flagship gaming operations like Caesars Windsor. That means gaming jobs are more likely to be good jobs with fair wages, decent benefits, job security and health and safety protections.

The gaming industry includes more than just gambling operations. Hotels, restaurants, theatres, conference centres, tourist attractions and the full supply chain associated with these operations have felt the disastrous impacts of the COVID-19 crisis. Our members are out of work—they're worried about how long, and they're worried about what will happen when they eventually return to work.

Provinces are at different stages of their pandemic response and reopening plans, but even as formal government restrictions are lifted, the gaming sector will only fully recover when customers feel safe as they patronize casinos, racetracks, bingo halls and other related operations. The gaming sector may take several years to fully recover from the COVID-19 crisis. All the stakeholders in the sector will have to work together to develop and implement health and safety plans to keep workers and customers safe.

I'm pleased to say that we've been working in close—
Failure of sound system.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We can't hear you. Mr. Cassidy, can you hear us? I think there are some technical problems on your end.

We'll move to the next presenter, and then we'll come back to Mr. Cassidy.

Our next presenter is the Ontario Harness Horse Association. Please state your name for the record. You will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Jim Whelan: Good afternoon. My name is Jim Whelan. I'm president of the Ontario Harness Horse Association. My general manager is Brian Tropea, and he will be doing the presentation on our behalf.

Mr. Brian Tropea: The Ontario Harness Horse Association is referred to as OHHA. OHHA was established in 1962 to represent participants in the standardbred racing industry. Grooms, breeders, trainers, drivers and owners rely on OHHA to make formal submissions to governments at all levels to ensure that their concerns are heard.

OHHA has members from all across Ontario, participating in all aspects of the industry.

Horse breeding and racing is a multi-billion dollar industry in Ontario and employs approximately 35,000 people. Horse racing touches all three pillars of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport. It also has linkages to the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and the Ministry of the Attorney General.

When we talk about culture—horse racing is over 250 years old. There's documentation of the first horse races being conducted 100 years before Confederation. Racing has survived through two world wars and the Great Depression.

Ontario is known to produce world-class athletes, and horses are imported and exported to countries around the world, like Britain, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, United States and others. Some of the greatest racehorses in our history were bred, owned, trained and driven by Ontarians. Ontario has often been looked at by other jurisdictions as a world leader, and successful programs like the abandoned Slots at Racetracks Program, which was beneficial to both the government and the racing industry, have been copied with great success in many jurisdictions in the United States.

Horse breeding, training and racing is a team sport. From the owner, the broodmare sires and the resulting offspring—the owner is comparable to the owner of a sports team. That team requires caretakers, trainers, vets, vet assistants, blacksmiths, massage therapists, chiropractors, dentists, agricultural product producers for grain and hay, horse transporters and many others.

The successful owner in the horse racing industry is the owner who surrounds themselves with the best supporting service providers, all of which are tremendously important to the success of the horse and therefore the team. Horses are bred and trained to compete and, based on bloodlines, confirmation and training, an owner can increase the probability of success by assembling a team that excels in all of those areas. As a sport which is an athletic endeavour, there is no question that horse racing requires two athletes: the horse and the driver or, in the case of thoroughbred or quarter horse racing, the jockey.

Often when a racing team comes to operate in Ontario, most if not all of the support team are residents of Ontario, providing much-needed employment in the rural areas of our province. Ontario farmers supply the grains and forage, and local professionals offer the health care services that horses require. There is an obvious positive spinoff effect on the local economies.

When we consider tourism, horse racing attracts fans and participants from around the world. When foreign horses race in Ontario, they're often resident in the province for months at a time. When those horses compete in races in Ontario, often their foreign owners travel to Ontario to witness the race live. There's nothing that compares to the live racing experience with a horse that you've owned and developed and watching it compete.

Unfortunately with COVID-19, racing was completely shut down on March 19 of this year. While caring for the horses was determined to be an essential service, our members were required to tend to the animals on a daily basis. Some trainers decided to lay off their horses and some caretakers were temporarily laid off. As well, since those horses were not training, they also required less care from blacksmiths, veterinarians and other essential service providers, ultimately reducing the income from those that practise in those professions.

Ultimately, what drives the entire industry is prize money, or what we refer to as “purse money.” Without the ability to race for purse money, owners were still required to pay for the training and boarding of race horses but had no mechanism to earn funds to offset those costs. Because of the funding model for horse racing in Ontario, purse money is guaranteed at a certain level, and because of this, the industry was able to—

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

Mr. Brian Tropea:—use some of those allocated funds to assist the owners during this period. The assistance covered only a portion of the costs incurred by the owners, but it was certainly appreciated and helped weather difficult times.

Now that racing has been given the go-ahead to resume, we are operating in a different environment. Horse racing is being conducted across Ontario but without fans. That includes those foreign owners that might have attended during normal times. Racing receives a substantial amount of revenue through wagering on the races. Wagering has been available to wager online for decades, but was offered as a convenience and was never supposed to replace the wagers that occur live at the racetracks. In fact, the live wager is the most profitable wager for the racing industry because you eliminate a lot of the costs that go with the online product.

Now all tracks are solely dependent on the online experience, and many tracks are trying to catch up to offer an entertainment experience online that could compare with the live experience at the track. While most of the smaller racetracks in Ontario have a limited budget to upgrade their product, this is an area where the ministry could assist in sharing some of those costs and ensuring that Ontario racing products are amongst the best in the industry.

OHHA believes that the racing industry and our racetrack operators have demonstrated that they can offer racing in a safe, responsible manner while still being mindful of the need to practise social distancing and good personal hygiene. As the next step to reopening the racing industry, OHHA believes that participants in the industry should now be allowed to attend the races and that fans can return in due time. OHHA proposes that all individuals licensed to participate in racing by the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario, should now be granted access to the grounds of the raceways on race days, providing that they respect the individual racetrack’s COVID protocols.

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

Mr. Brian Tropea: This would ensure that there’s a robust contact tracing system as every individual would have their AGCO licence recorded upon entry to the facility. Through those licences, individuals could be identified and contacted without delay.

OHHA appreciates that these are very trying times and that everyone must proceed with continued caution. We thank everyone who has worked at getting business in Ontario back and running, and we’re thankful to be back racing horses. There’s no truer saying than, “You don’t miss something until it’s gone.”

Mr. Jim Whelan: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. Now we go back to Unifor Local 444. You can start from where you left off. You will have four minutes.

Mr. Dave Cassidy: Thank you. Sorry; I’m on my phone here, and I don’t know what happened.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): No problem.

Mr. Dave Cassidy: I appreciate it. Just picking up: The gaming sector could take several years to fully recover from the COVID-19 crisis. All stakeholders in the sector will have to work together to develop and implement health and safety plans to keep workers and customers safe. I’m pleased to say that we’ve been working in close conjunction with Caesars Windsor management on this front, and I’m confident that we all share the same goals when it comes to health and safety concerns at the casino. Just as importantly, there will be a need to effectively communicate these health and safety plans to assure the public that gaming operations are safe and relatively low-risk.

Workers in the gaming sector face a number of serious challenges. In the midst of the full-quarantine stage of the pandemic, the collapse of the industry and ensuing loss of employment is the most obvious negative outcome. The union has been working hard with the employers across Canada to negotiate the extension of benefits coverage for laid-off workers, and there is more work to do to ensure that this happens. I know that at Caesars Windsor, we have this in place as of today.

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In addition, we specifically recognize the urgent need for essential drug coverage for gaming sector workers and others who have lost workplace coverage due to the extended layoffs. We’ve been fighting to make sure government support programs address this critical need. This includes the introduction of a universal pharmacare program, something Unifor has been campaigning for for a long, long time.

I’ll note that on June 1, the provincial government announced a regulatory change to the Employment Standards Act where non-unionized employees who have had their hours reduced or eliminated because of the pandemic will be deemed to be on the infectious disease emergency leave rather than being on temporary layoff. While these non-union employees will have some job protections while on this leave, like a right to return to their job, it is very likely that many will not have a job to go back to for a long time. Some will eventually go back—but being on temporary layoff—and eventually be terminated.

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

Mr. Dave Cassidy: Reopening the sector will take time and will require significant changes to the operations in order to provide needed protections for workers and customers alike. New procedures could be required to address issues like customer contact, contact with gaming accessories—cards, chips, tokens—safe handling of currency and dealer rotations to allow for adequate hand washing. It will be more important than ever for employers, the union, rank-and-file members and joint health and safety committees to work together to develop sound risk-based health and safety programs in our workplaces.

I'd like to take a few moments in closing to highlight some other issues that have yet to be addressed and some things that could have been handled more effectively as the crisis developed. With schools, daycares and camps closed, we saw very quickly that child care is an economic issue as much as it is a human rights issue. It is critical that the federal and provincial governments work together to develop and implement a universal child care program to provide high-quality, affordable public child care, allowing more members of the workforce to return to work and provide for their families.

Supports for laid-off workers should have come faster. While this was largely a federal issue, we know that all levels of government have been working together closely, and it's worth reiterating that many working families in Ontario and beyond were left in an unbelievably precarious—

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

Mr. Dave Cassidy: —financial position when the economy collapsed.

Further, workers in specific sectors, like gaming, will need additional and extended supports, like the CERB and the CEWS program, since they face extended closures and loss of employment as their sectors face a longer ramp-up time for recovery. This applies to provincial supports as well. Not all sectors have been affected equally, and we need a sector-specific approach to develop reopening and support strategies. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. We'll start with the questions now—

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Before that, I need to do an attendance check. MPP Ke, if you can confirm your attendance and if you're present in Ontario.

Mr. Vincent Ke: Yes, I'm in Ontario, in North York.

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

Mr. Aris Babikian: Yes, I am in Toronto.

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

Okay, we'll start with the independent members now. MPP Hunter.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I want to thank all of the presenters. I'm going to start off with you, Dave, because you seem to be on a roll. I want you to talk more about the effects on workers. I'm wondering, are you working with the Ministry of Labour on these new safe standards that you believe are required for worker protection? Is there

engagement happening, any tables happening where labour is collaborating with government on these new standards? Can you just let us know?

Mr. Dave Cassidy: Can you hear me?

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Yes.

Mr. Dave Cassidy: Thanks for the question. Actually, yes, I've reached out to the office of the Ministry of Labour because we have a lot of issues. I also represent 6,500 members at FCA Windsor, who are—we are losing 1,500 jobs next month in Windsor and Essex county. So all of the safety standards right up from our national down through the provincial governments are engaged—with the employer, by the way—on safe protocols in all of our workplaces. That engagement is happening. We have brought experts in out of the field. I think they call them—not epidemiologists. I'm not sure of the exact term. They are coming in and looking at the infectious parts of what happens in the gaming sector—and I have that also in the manufacturing sector, working as well to make sure that people are safe. We're taking that task on.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I'm happy to hear that, and the detail you've provided on things like handling money, handling the equipment. It's all about protecting those workers.

Could you speak a bit more on your concern about whether or not those jobs will be there? You talked about how the classification may be putting some workers' job security at risk. Can you expand on that a little bit or reiterate it, just so we get it here at this committee?

Mr. Dave Cassidy: The biggest issue—and I'll speak very specifically about Caesars—is, will we be able to have shows? With the social distancing, will we be able to bring in great acts? We have world-class acts that come in here, at Windsor. We have a wonderful buffet restaurant. As we go through these classifications, I don't know if we're going to have—what is the uptake for the actual patrons coming back?

As you know, even at the provincial level—I've been working on a file with others for about 10 years on single sports betting, which will bring more attraction over. We need to make sure we get those numbers—because right now it looks like about 40% capacity in our casinos. Gamblers will always find a way to gamble; we all know that. But I'm concerned that if we are limited on how we open and what those capacities are, that could be problematic—

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

Mr. Dave Cassidy: —moving forward.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I support your stance on universal child care or making sure child care is a factor of the economic recovery and not an afterthought. You can't recover the economy without taking care of child care, and I think that has come out very loud and clear in this.

In the time that I have remaining, I want to speak to the situation at JW Marriott and the uniqueness of your location. You talked about how this is not just a three-month issue, but for seasonal businesses such as this particular resort, it's actually an eight-month-long issue that you have, and it's affecting your ability to operate, in

terms of the staff. I'm not sure if supplies are part of that. Can you talk about the uniqueness of the challenges that you're facing at this resort? That's for Leah, from JW Marriott.

Ms. Leah Leslie: It's not a totally unique situation—most of the tourism businesses in Muskoka are experiencing the same thing—but because we are 20 minutes away from the nearest community, we have no population from which to draw for our employees, and even the population that is in the area is limited.

Actually, Mr. Cassidy's comments about child care hit home here. It's very difficult for someone who is making even \$20 an hour to travel an hour to work and pay for the travel costs and arrange child care that extends an hour before and an hour after their shift, particularly if they're not working a regular daytime weekday shift. So that's a big part of it—transportation, housing, all of those things, in any rural environment, I think, but particularly when you're in a remote location, which is our resort's strength and its curse.

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

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I just want to reiterate some of the concerns. You talked about the desire for temporary foreign workers to meet some of that labour shortage gap that you would have, and obviously housing would be part of that, and then the public health inspectors needing to—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off. We'll have to move to the government side for their time now. I'll start with MPP Miller, Parry Sound—Muskoka.

Mr. Norman Miller: Hello.

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

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you, Chair, and thank you to all the presenters for your presentations.

I would like to ask questions of Leah from JW Marriott on Lake Rosseau. I usually end up at your property when there's some large convention going there and I'm doing my job as MPP to bring greetings to whatever that convention happens to be, although I did have the pleasure of attending a family wedding there last year. I got to be a tourist and spend the weekend. It is a beautiful spot and very significant for the economy in that, as you know, you run year-round, although you did talk about how the summer season is the most important season by far in terms of revenue.

I guess in terms of getting back to normal with summer quickly approaching, being able to operate your dining room in a more normal fashion I would think would be very important. The other part, as we approach the fall, is being able to do convention business as well. On those two topics, do you feel that you will be able to, when given the opportunity to be able to do so safely for both sort of more traditional dining inside and also some sort of convention type of business?

Ms. Leah Leslie: Thanks very much, Mr. Miller. Thank you so much for the work that you're doing for tourism. We all appreciate it very much.

Yes, we're ready and we do have the benefit of Marriott International behind us, because Marriott delivered a really comprehensive protocol for operation under these new circumstances. We were able to simply adopt that, put it into practice and then we will be audited. We have that really strong foundation of a well-planned, easy-to-execute—well, relatively easy—system.

In fact, those measures are already in place, so we are ready. We're more than ready to get started. Our team is well trained, and that training continues. We're equipped to deliver the service that we need to. Really, there's been a lot of work done, but we're very fortunate to have the benefit of the Marriott Foundation underneath it all.

Mr. Norman Miller: From the perspective of what the government could do, one of the things they could do is let you run a dining room in a traditional manner and let you do your business?

Ms. Leah Leslie: Absolutely. The restaurant portion of our business is a very, very slim profit margin, but it supports the experience. We make our money in rooms, but we attract our guests in every other way. The activities, the restaurants, the meetings, the conferences, the weddings: Those things where we don't make the profit but we deliver the experience allow us to earn the profit in the guest rooms. That whole mixture comes out at about a 5% overall profit margin over the course of a year.

Mr. Norman Miller: I was at Deerhurst last week and it was their first weekend of being open. They limited their capacity to 25% so that they could get everything right.

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

Mr. Norman Miller: But they seemed to indicate that demand for leisure travel is pretty good. Are you finding reasonable demand with summer fast approaching?

Ms. Leah Leslie: We're seeing really, really strong demand for July and August. In June, we didn't have to limit our capacity to 25% at first, because it just happened naturally; even lower, in fact. But the wheels are starting to turn, and we are really seeing some momentum. In fact, we're pacing ahead for this summer compared to last year.

So yes, I think there's pent-up demand. I think that what the Ontario government is doing now with the RTOs—I heard we just got \$350,000 for RTO 12, and I know it's spread around all the RTOs, but that hyper-local tourism marketing is going to be really helpful to get us going, to acquaint our local people with the product, reacquaint them and to make them ambassadors for when we're ready to go out and get the international market again.

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you. I know my colleagues have questions, so I'll pass it on to them. Thank you, Leah.

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

Mr. Dave Smith: My question is for Jim Whelan. It's good to see you again, Jim. As you know, Kawartha Downs is just south of Peterborough, maybe a stone's throw away from my office. Looking at harness racing itself, it's one of the few competition sports where you can actually have the competition and adhere to social distancing.

If you recall, back in the early 2000s when we had the hockey strike—the lockout back then—that’s when ESPN and TSN started picking up the World Series of Poker. Do you think that there could be an opportunity then for the smaller tracks to have their content broadcast on things like TSN, Sportsnet, ESPN and so on and pick up a whole new audience that they wouldn’t have had otherwise?

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

Mr. Jim Whelan: Hello, Dave. It’s great to see you again and talk to you, and all you guys, Percy, Lisa, Norm, everybody. We miss you at all our events.

Specifically, Dave, TSN has picked us up on Thursday nights and we have two hours of live racing on TSN for thoroughbred and standardbred racing. So I know there’s huge opportunity for us to do that. I’d just like to speak to that. Percy, certainly, helped [*inaudible*] and he’s been a great supporter to us. Percy’s got a history of growing up around Windsor and horse racing; a great fan, Percy Hatfield. And Norm, also, is familiar with our racing.

We’re one of the most labour-intensive industries in agriculture in Ontario and Canada because you can’t automate the horse care. They’re athletes, and they have to be cared for seven days a week. So jobs are very important to our industry.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off. We’ll have to move to the opposition members for their time. I’ll start with MPP Hatfield and then MPP Miller.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Can you hear me okay?

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

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Thank you. I’d like to go back to Jim Whelan and Brian Tropea, if I could. Hi, guys.

I want you, if you would, to let the committee members know—you talked about the equipment that would have to be upgraded at some of the tracks. If we can use Leamington, for an example—a small track, about 13 race dates a year—what would Leamington need technologically in order to compete during a COVID-19 epidemic? What kind of upgrades? What would we expect for a small track such as Leamington?

Mr. Jim Whelan: Percy, thank you very much. It’s great to see you, and thanks so much for all your help over the years.

We have all the technology in place. We have high-definition cameras and the technology to send that signal anywhere throughout the world, literally. It’s all done through Woodbine Entertainment Group, WAG, for those that aren’t familiar with the term. Leamington has the ability to send their signal anywhere in the world and certainly throughout Ontario. It’s just a matter of whether Woodbine Entertainment, WAG, would accept their product and put it out there for people to bid on it.

As you know, Leamington, being a small track, had the highest per capita bet of any province in Ontario in the last four years. They do an exceptional job of putting on a live show and entertainment.

Like I say, horse racing is one of the most labour-intensive industries left in agriculture. Jobs are very important and horse racing creates a lot of jobs for odd-

skill labour. A lot of our people aren’t skilled to work in other industries. It provides a great economy for the province. These people work in looking after horses because it’s their passion and love. It’s a chosen profession. It’s not for the great hours and pay they get, but they love it, and it makes them very productive people in society. Horse racing in that aspect, and to the agricultural industry, is very, very important.

We have the technology to do all that, that you’re referring to.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Okay, good. Thank you.

Brian, were you going to add something?

Mr. Brian Tropea: Yes, I was just going to add that we can all send our signal out; what the racetracks need to do is up their game a little bit. There needs to be something in between races. Currently, most tracks send out their live race and a replay, but there needs to be an entertainment aspect now to keep somebody engaged for two or two and a half hours while the races are going on. That is going to require a few extra cameras and a few extra personnel.

Based on the current funding model for the industry, all those small racetracks basically have a set amount in their budget and there’s no extra money for them to do these types of things. If there could be some extra money through tourism that could go to some of those smaller racetracks to assist in the funding of upgrading the product that we send out, I think it would be extremely helpful for those smaller racetracks.

Also, if the ministry could help in spreading the word about live racing in the province, I think that that would be helpful as well.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Thank you. I’m going to share my time with the member for Windsor West, Ms. Gretzky.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes left. MPP Gretzky? MPP Gretzky, are you there? Okay. We’ll go to MPP Miller, then—Paul Miller.

1540

Mr. Paul Miller: Hi. I’m directing my question to Jim and Brian. How are you doing, guys?

Mr. Jim Whelan: Paul, it’s great to see you.

Mr. Paul Miller: How are you doing?

Mr. Jim Whelan: Good, good. You look great.

Mr. Paul Miller: I know, Jim, there have been problems with purse disbursement amounts and also the number of racing dates throughout the harness racing industry in our province. I’m well aware of the problem you have with Woodbine, where they’re changing over to more gambling situations, casino type of situations, and kind of pushing the harness racing out. Especially with COVID-19, that’s going to have an additional negative impact on the racing industry in the province.

Are the purses based partially on gate receipts, and does a percentage of the purse money go to the racer? That’s one question. Obviously, if you don’t have enough people in the stands, that could have a negative impact on, of course, the wagers. Moving forward, do you and Brian think that some investment in the industry—serious investment in the industry—could bring us back to a level pre-COVID, pre-downturn in the industry as a whole, to a

point where it would become lucrative again and bring back our good history in the industry and jobs, and help our economy come back even faster?

Mr. Jim Whelan: Yes, the answer is absolutely. I mean, right now—horse racing was always self-sustaining in Canada.

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

Mr. Jim Whelan: We're funded by people who bet on races. A percentage of the bet went to fund the purses and the racetracks, and the same with the Slots at Racetracks Program. If you went to a racetrack and you played the games there, machines, a portion of that went to fund the racetrack. So it was never taxpayers' money. Right now in this new program, we're on a subsidy. It doesn't matter how much they bet; if the bets were to quadruple in Ontario, our purses don't improve any, so we're limited. There's nothing built into this long-term funding program to account for inflation, so our purses can only go down.

There's lots of options for our industry to improve. As you know, Paul, our industry is one of the most labour-intensive parts of agriculture. You cannot automate horse care. They're athletes and have to be cared for seven days a week. They have to be fed, watered and cared for, and they have to be exercised. It's a very labour-intensive industry. But there are many options to provide for and re-establish horse racing to what it was, at no cost to the government. That's the amazing thing.

Mr. Paul Miller: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off. We'll start the second round with the government side. I'll go back to MPP Smith.

Mr. Dave Smith: Jim, I'm going to come back to you again on it. The reason I'm going to hit you again on this one is I look at the CFL. They had huge popularity in the 1970s and 1980s, and then they went to blacking out a lot of their games if the stadium wasn't sold out. They had a significant drop in their viewership and their gate sales as a result of it. It's taken them probably 20 years to recover from that now.

I take boxing as another example. Boxing is probably a closer example to horse racing because it's the same type of set-up, where the amount of money that's spent gambling on boxing has been huge; but boxing went to pay-per-view, and again, we lost a whole generation of boxing fans.

What we're seeing right now, what I'm hearing on boxing, is that the boxing fans are my age or older, and I'm 50. So they have started—Bob Arum in particular—a program now where he's got *Boxing After Dark*, he's got boxing going on, and they're doing it at the MGM. At the moment, there are no fans at it, but it's broadcast every Tuesday and Thursday. What he said in an interview was that they're trying to rebuild that viewership base. They were short-sighted in doing it by pay-per-view all of the time. Yes, they made big, big money on the big-name boxers, but they lost a generation of boxing fans and they don't have the same number of big-name people coming up from behind.

So I'm wondering: Is this really an opportunity to change the whole layout of how horse racing is and go to more of that content on television that generates additional revenue for you, and can then also increase the purses and build from that grassroots up so you've got a young base of people who are excited about watching horse racing? Let's face facts: There are some races that are very exciting to watch.

Mr. Jim Whelan: The simple answer is absolutely yes. The love and passion for horses and horse racing is always going to be part of the industry here and part of our culture.

We can modify ourselves. We can race 24 hours a day. In Windsor—and Percy would remember this—we had a post time at 12 o'clock at night to accommodate the Hong Kong market. The horsemen will do anything—race at any time of the day and night—to maximize the parimutuel handle.

The problem in Ontario now is, if the betting was to quadruple, we do not benefit as horse people. We're on a fixed subsidy that can only decline. The big problem for you guys as politicians—and we talk regularly—is that people presume that if racetracks are functional and being looked after, then the industry is. Racetracks are simply the stage for the performance.

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

Mr. Jim Whelan: All the talent—the actors, horses, breeding, training and the work that goes into developing a horse and putting them on the racetrack to race—that's where all the huge investment in the province is: \$2.6 billion annually into the Ontario economy. That's where that comes from, for a couple of minutes of race time on a racetrack. People have to realize that there's a huge investment that goes into providing horses.

We became a global leader in horse racing. Our horses can be exported all over the world. We have the best-quality horses of all breeds: thoroughbreds, quarter horses and standardbreds. We can ship them all over the world and there's a great market for them. There is still a huge potential; it just has to be managed by horse people.

What has just happened in the past since 2012, and with the OLG sole-sourcing the horse racing to Woodbine Entertainment, to a bunch of individuals who don't understand the industry and have no vested interest in it, is the people—the breeder associations, the owners and the trainers—have no say whatsoever in the industry. It's run by a group that doesn't understand horse racing. If that can be modified very, very easily to turn this industry back into what it was—Ontario was a global leader. In Ontario, we competed with the US. It's not like Canada versus US. Some 65% of our racing was done in Ontario. With a country that has roughly 40 million people, we were competing with a country that has over 300 million people. We were very, very competitive here in Ontario, and still are.

These people hung on—myself included; I'm a fifth-generation horse person and a farmer—because of the passion and love for horses and the industry. A lot of our people are not employable in other industries, and it's a huge, labour-intensive industry. They do it for the passion

and love of horses and competing, not for the great wages we get or the benefits.

So what you're saying is easily doable.

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

Mr. Jim Whelan: I always say that if the government is willing to do it, it can be done. If the government doesn't want to do it, you're kind of wasting your time. What you're talking about can easily be done if there's a willingness by the government to do it.

Mr. Dave Smith: Just as an anecdotal comment here: If any of the other members on here were curious whether or not people are watching this online, I just got a text message saying, "Stop talking about horse racing and start talking about car racing. Cars are faster." Car racing doesn't give that same level of excitement as horse racing does.

Mr. Jim Whelan: No, and there's not nearly the economic impact.

Speaking of that, the CFL was looking for \$150 million to support their industry.

I think they just got millions for car racing for Montreal for one race a year, to keep car racing going in Montreal. So you've got to put everything into perspective.

We're a huge, huge agricultural industry. Horses are livestock. They have to be housed in barns and raised in paddocks.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. We'll have to move to the opposition side for their second round. I'll start with MPP Gretzky.

1550

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I'm going to switch gears. I have some questions for Mr. Cassidy from Local 444. I want to start out by pointing out that Mr. Cassidy mentioned that we are about to lose an entire shift at FCA, the Windsor assembly plant—1,500 workers. But that's not where it stops. We've already lost a full shift at TRW, one of the parts suppliers—and tons of losses at Nemaak.

Mr. Cassidy and other local labour leaders and their members reached out to the government by phone and email numerous times. Those calls were not returned. Those emails were not returned. Thousands of people in my community are now going to be out of work during a pandemic. So I really hope that the government takes this conversation to heart and does something to save the jobs and support the people at the casino—and the FCA workers, before it's too late. We still have time to save that shift.

Mr. Cassidy, you talked about the 2,300 members of Unifor who work at the casino and the hundreds of others who are not unionized and are in various positions at the casino. They're the second-largest employer. I'm wondering if you can talk about what a return to work would look like. We're talking about opening up the economy more and getting more people back to work. What would that look like? What conversations have taken place around safety precautions for the workers and for the people who would come into the casino?

Maybe you can also talk about single sports betting. My colleague the MP for Windsor West, and the former NDP MP for Windsor–Tecumseh, Joe Comartin, both tabled

bills around single sports betting. Hopefully, we will be moving forward very quickly with that, federally. What does it look like? What is the provincial government's role in ensuring that we are moving toward single sports betting? And maybe you can talk about the economic impacts and the revenue generation—the economic impacts for the workers, for our municipality directly and even for the province, when it comes to the jobs at the casino?

Mr. Dave Cassidy: Thank you for the question, Mrs. Gretzky.

The casino workers—we have been engaged, as I've said. I know the casino, the employer, is engaged with other providers throughout the province—with the OLG, the AGCO and the government—relative to a return-to-work process. We meet a couple of times a week to figure out the processes. They are going to have processes in place for the employees. It will be an app on their phone, actually. There will be a test that says whether or not they have any symptoms, and then they're going to put the pyrometer to their forehead and do the infrared scan that says they are okay with their temperature, to make sure, as people are coming in.

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

Mr. Dave Cassidy: Okay. We have social distancing at the tables. If there are usually six people at a table, they're looking to go down to three to four, with glass in between all of them, and face shields. There's tons of PPE. Right now, we have about 70,000 masks on-site, because we are hoping for a ramp-up—I'll just lob a date, July 15. I don't know where I pulled that from, but maybe it will put a bug in people's ear that we can do it safely. So that's the one around the measures in place.

First and foremost, the employer knows people—so in the gaming industry, they know where their gamblers are; they track their gamblers, and because of the surveillance they have, they can open safely. If somebody did come in and was infected by COVID-19, they would be able to track that back through surveillance, through knowing where the people are playing the games.

They're very good at following rules. One thing about the gaming sector: They follow the rules that are implemented.

Thank you for the question on the single sports betting as it pertains to the province. As everybody knows, it's about a \$14-billion underground world right now. As I said, we've been working on this file for about 10 years. We now have all the major sports commissioners that are supporting it, because potentially if they open up in the summer without people in the stands, then they will need to have generated revenue through that, which would be a great opportunity for the single sports betting. In our casino alone, it would be between 100 and 150 jobs if a sports book came in. We're at a disadvantage already because we have it—

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

Mr. Dave Cassidy:—in Michigan and we also have it in New York that has passed it. So this is something that we're really working hard on with the feds.

But provincially, where it could really help us out is through the OLG. It would be no problem doing this. I think that there's a potential to generate even into bars and restaurants, that they would be allowed to have that opportunity in bars and restaurants as far as doing the betting, because today I can bet in a bar and restaurant—the unfortunate part, I use my phone—but it's offshore and it's illegal monies.

One last thing to potentially look at—we talk about the horse racing—is the historical racing tied to that single sports betting. Historical racing is something that could generate monies inside the actual race facilities that would help bring people there as well for the horse industry. That's another one that could be tied to the single sports betting in the province that would allow—

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 Blais?

Mr. Stephen Blais: Just some questions to start, and thank you, everyone, for your presentations.

For the harness racing association: As a municipal councillor, I represented a largely rural area, many horse farms. Obviously with Rideau Carleton Raceway in Ottawa, the harness racing is very familiar territory in our region. I agree that there is enormous spinoff from the industry: farriers, blacksmiths, vets, everything that you mentioned in your presentation. Has the association ever done an economic analysis of what that spinoff is, either provincially or region by region?

Mr. Jim Whelan: The answer to that is absolutely yes. We've had Dr. Brinkman from the University of Guelph. We have an industry association that's called Ontario Racing now. It used to be called OHRIA, the Ontario Horse Racing Industry Association. In the early 1990s or 1980s, they were supposed to do these studies. We did a few ourselves because they weren't doing them.

But yes, it's amazing the impact as our purse has increased to \$100 million in the first two years of the Slots at Racetracks Program. People bought farms and they upgraded the farms, myself included. They built new barns, bought breeding stock, and we built fences. We reinvested all our money in the industry with the hope that this was the long-term program. It created a lot of jobs and a lot of economy for the province of Ontario. We had people coming here literally from all over the world, from Europe, from Australia and New Zealand. They bought property and established breeding farms and racing farms and so on.

So that was the intention—and myself included. I'm typical; I'm from a five-generation family of horse breeders and racers. That's all I've done since I finished school, is breed, train and race horses. As long as I felt there was an opportunity to pay my bills, I would reinvest money; as long as I felt there was an opportunity to earn money to pay my bills, basically, my mortgage and—

Mr. Stephen Blais: Sure.

Mr. Jim Whelan: So we reinvested in assets, literally. That is something that's good for the economy and good for the province. It creates jobs for municipalities and for the whole province of Ontario.

Mr. Stephen Blais: I appreciate that. If you could dig up that analysis and share it, that would I think be very helpful as we move forward.

You mentioned bringing racing back without fans, essentially, and there were some comments about putting it on TSN or putting it on the Internet etc. What would the industry need from government in order to do that? Is it a technology investment? Is it just cash to hire a provider? What would you need?

Mr. Jim Whelan: It doesn't require even a lot of cash. The technology is there. We have the technology. We have the infrastructure in place, so HPI, horse racing interactive betting. TSN is a great promotional thing at this point, but you can go on several sites any day of the week on your computer or on your phone—

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

Mr. Jim Whelan: —and you can bet on races from all over the world. So you can bet on all the races in Ontario or across Canada, and the revenue should go back. But under the new formula in Ontario, the revenue from betting does not go back into horse racing. We're on a complete subsidy. Like I say, there's no incentive for a racetrack to promote racing right now. That model has to be changed if the industry is going to sustain itself and grow. It's not complicated. It may sound complicated, but it's not.

1600

Mr. Stephen Blais: That's a fair point.

Dave, you mentioned that you felt that some of the government supports were slow, and I definitely agree that they were.

I'm wondering if there are one or two things, in terms of supporting employees, that the provincial government could do into the summer and the fall as we progress through this. What would you prioritize as the most important place to invest to support your employees?

Mr. Dave Cassidy: As we go into September, how are we reopening the schools? That's coupled with child care. I'm not saying that teachers are babysitters, but it puts a big burden on a lot of people which—we have a lot of people in our industries who can't return to work because of the child care issues from schools being closed. So child care and schools would be the number one priority to focus on. Provincially, that's where I think most of the focus needs to be, to see how we can get the economy rolling, which will bring people etc. It's all coupled there. I think the schools are key as we go into the fall.

Mr. Stephen Blais: I appreciate that.

I don't have any more questions, Mr. Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Any further questions from any of our members? Seeing none, that concludes our time. Thank you to all three presenters for your presentations and for your time.

Moving along to—before we do that, I need to do an attendance check.

MPP Stiles, can you confirm your attendance and if you're present in Ontario?

Ms. Marit Stiles: Hi. Yes, I'm here.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Yes, I am.

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

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Just to let all the delegates know, as well as all the witnesses: We have MPP Stan Cho and MPP Catherine Fife in the committee room with us.

SUNFEST LONDON COMMITTEE
FOR CROSS CULTURAL ARTS

HOT DOCS

GOLF CANADA

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We'll move to our next presenter from Sunfest London Committee for Cross Cultural Arts. Please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Alfredo Caxaj: Good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to speak about the relevance of the arts and culture sector and the importance of its role in our economy and in the social and cultural life of Ontario communities.

My name is Alfredo Caxaj. I'm the executive artistic director for Sunfest London Committee for Cross Cultural Arts Inc., a not-for-profit arts organization based in London, Ontario.

Sunfest is an international festival which, for the past 25 years, has been bringing the world to London in one of Canada's most culturally diverse, unique and remarkable lineups of national and international talent and artistic excellence in these [*inaudible*], the visual arts [*inaudible*].

As an admission-free event, Sunfest is perhaps the most inclusive and accessible festival of its kind. It has become well established as a premier tourist attraction for London and the southwestern Ontario region, with a global reputation, acclaimed by prestigious publications and national and international networks.

Support from the government of Ontario and other funders has allowed Sunfest to not only grow the number of visitors it attracts year over year, but also to diversify its funding through a good number of corporate sponsors and community partners, including lead corporate sponsor TD. The festival is also supported by hundreds of London volunteers of all ages, cultures and abilities, who donate thousands of hours of their time to run the event.

Sunfest has brought together thousands of people, regardless of their race, language, gender and socio-economic status, into the most inclusive and culturally diverse environment, which makes it one of the most beautiful expressions of community in our city. Arts and culture are essential in the livelihood of our communities. A community without art and culture is simply a community without a soul.

Several weeks ago, the Ontario Arts Council undertook a survey to gather high-level indicators of the early impacts of COVID-19 on our sector, and the results are

unprecedented, with many organizations functioning with reduced staff and facing incredible challenges for their survival. Some of the key highlights of the survey are:

—the anticipated loss of revenue up to the end of June 2020 due to COVID-19 for these Ontario arts organizations, combined to a total of \$128 million;

—close to three quarters of the responding organizations confirmed that they will have to take some action relating to staff/personnel decisions by the end of June if the current situation continues, including such actions as laying off employees, reducing or suspending employee hours and/or reducing hours or suspending or cancelling contracts of self-employed artists or independent contractors; and

—almost 90% of the responding organizations have cancelled or postponed festivals, performances, exhibitions, screenings, readings or other events due to COVID-19.

It is clear that this situation will have devastating impacts on Ontario's arts sector and tourism, both immediate and over a long period of time. Also, these impacts will be felt by the most vulnerable arts organizations as well as the most well established.

In our particular case, during the last edition of our festival in 2019, we did an in-depth economic impact assessment, conducted in partnership with Tourism London by Paradigm Consulting Group, a highly respected and experienced agency in the festivals and events sector. The study showed that in 2019, Sunfest generated \$4.5 million in economic activity for the province, including \$3.5 million in the city of London.

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

Mr. Alfredo Caxaj: The study estimated that visitors to the 2019 Sunfest purchased over 3,490 hotel room nights, not including the festival's artistic guests. This represents a \$2.5-million boost to the provincial GDP and \$390,000 in provincial tax revenues, revenues that this particular year will not be generated as a result of the postponement of the festival.

A study done by Statistics Canada in 2017 indicates that Ontario's arts and cultural sector represents \$26.7 billion, or 3.5% of the province's GDP, and almost 300,378 jobs. This industry perspective measures all of the cultural sector's output, including both cultural and un-cultural products, such as food and beverage services.

It is well recognized that art adds enormous value to the cultural, social and economic vitality of our communities, and enhances the quality of life for its residents and visitors. Festivals are crucial investments and economic drivers, and play a fundamental role in bringing communities together and stimulating tourism. While some financial support from the different levels of government has assisted individuals, businesses and organizations during this difficult time, we believe it is important to keep the levels of funding to support organizations during this transitional period until we return to some kind of normality.

For instance, the Celebrate Ontario program was cut 50% this year. It affected tens of festivals that did not

receive funds, including us, despite the fact that over 25 consecutive years, our festival has made a major economic impact in our city and region and consistently, every year, has increased its number of tourists.

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

Mr. Alfredo Caxaj: Dear members of the committee, today, more than ever before, we need stabilized funding models that will ensure our survival, which in turn fuels the tourism sector, hotels, motels, restaurants etc. Many organizations are already closing their doors or don't see themselves surviving past the end of the summer. Additionally, restaurants are already announcing that they are closing and they depend largely on reservations, made before going to festivals, theatres and many other performances and events.

1610

I sincerely thank you for listening, and I hope this presentation will contribute to the—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. The time is up now. We'll move to our next presenter, from Hot Docs. Please state your name for the record. You will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Chris McDonald: My name is Chris McDonald. I'm the Hot Docs president. I'm joined here by Brett Hendrie, who will speak in a moment. He is our executive director.

Hot Docs is the second-largest film festival in North America in terms of attendance. We anticipated a quarter of a million people in our cinemas across Toronto this past April, but we were forced to pivot to an online version, which Brett will talk about.

In addition, we're the largest documentary marketplace in North America. We attract 3,000 delegates annually from around the world, and the films that are financed at our festival have screened on television and VOD platforms and festivals all around the world.

Each year, Hot Docs attracts the world's leading broadcasters—Netflix, Amazon, BBC, HBO, National Geographic—and they are included amongst the 400-plus buyers, financiers and decision-makers who attend our festival in person every year, which is obviously wonderful for Ontario producers because they know that once a year, in their own backyard, all the leading players and potential buyers for their products are in our province.

Each year, we also feature the Docs For Schools program, which we were able to adapt for COVID-19. It's a robust program that services over 400 schools across Ontario. We provide in-school screenings to over 125 students, for free, and we hire teachers to write study guides so that teachers can use the film and the guide as part of their curriculum.

Our annual provincial economic impact was \$58 million in 2019.

Finally, something we're very proud to crow about is that eight years ago we opened the world's first documentary-focused cinema in Toronto. For those of you who are familiar with what was the Bloor Cinema at Bloor and Bathurst, it is now the Hot Docs Ted Rogers Cinema, the largest cinema in Toronto, with 750 seats. Just before

we closed, we were attracting almost 800 attendants a day—open 364 days a year. So not only were we successful in opening the world's first documentary-focused cinema, but it was enormously successful.

I want to thank Minister MacLeod and her team, who have been terrific champions throughout this difficult time, as have Stan Cho, Minister Lecce and Finance Minister Phillips, who found time to speak with us prior to the pandemic.

We are provided, thankfully, with support from Celebrate Ontario, Ontario Creates and the Ontario Arts Council.

We were fortunate, again, to have Minister MacLeod visit the cinema just prior to the closing, where she spoke to a packed house and her dedication to our sector was noted.

With that, I will pass it over to my colleague Brett.

Mr. Brett Hendrie: Thanks, Chris. I just wanted to speak a little bit about our pivot to digital. Hot Docs decided to—

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

Mr. Brett Hendrie: Thank you—go digital early, which led to a great transition in our online market. We organized over 2,000 business-to-business meetings between local producers and major global players such as Netflix, HBO, BBC, Arte and others that Chris mentioned, and we hosted over 17,000 views on our Doc Shop, a leading B2B platform.

In partnership with our major partners—Scotiabank, Rogers, Bell Media and Netflix—we brought our public-facing program online and premiered over 140 local and international films to Ontario audiences.

We worked with local service providers to develop a best-in-class digital festival that has provided filmmakers with a secure high-quality platform to showcase their new films, provided new revenue streams to local filmmakers and offered audiences some of the most important elements of the festival experience, including Q and As, free screenings for students across the province and social media engagement—all helping to shine a global spotlight on Ontario as a leader for digital innovation.

We see our responsibility as an economic driver in the sector to do what we can, in partnership with the province, to help the industry recover and drive tourism back to Ontario once it's safe to do so. COVID may have altered our programming schedule, but our digital uptake during this time has proven that Hot Docs and the province remain well positioned to continue serving as a major provider of economic impact within the documentary sector and the tourism sector.

Our cinema has become a landmark in the city and this province, and we're prepared to adapt to any new social distancing and health measure guidelines the province deems necessary. We look forward to partnering with others in the sector and with the province to grow our economic impact so it can be even greater next year, and to support all of the local businesses in and around the cinema and everybody who visits us during the festival.

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

Mr. Brett Hendrie: And I'm done. Thank you very much for your time.

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

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

Mr. Bryan Crawford: Good afternoon. My name is Bryan Crawford, tournament director for the RBC Canadian Open. I actually have a presentation prepared that I will share with everyone; it's also been shared on the online platform, so you should have it in your files for later reference.

I'll talk to you today about the impacts to the RBC Canadian Open and the CP Women's Open, our two professional championships for the RBC Canadian Open. I'll lightly touch on the impacts to the golf sector as a whole, as golf tourism is a massive industry here in Canada. I'll move throughout the presentation relatively quickly, but I'll leave that for all of you to review, if you so choose, later on.

Before I get started, thank you very much for including us and Golf Canada as part of today's meeting.

Very quickly, a little bit of a high-level overview of golf in Canada, for those of you who aren't that familiar: Over 5.7 million Canadians golf on a regular basis. That's more than three outings a year. The number of people that play once a year: This number is over double. That's about 16 million rounds for that 5.7 million people that play. We have 2,300 facilities here in Canada, which is third most in the world and number one per capita in the world. The vast majority of those facilities are for public use.

Working for Golf Canada: We're the national sport federation for the sport. This is actually our 125th anniversary this year. We do everything from governing the sport to running the professional championships. We have about 65 full-time employees. We work with Sport Canada and the Olympic committee and all of our member partners and clubs and so forth throughout the year to deliver golf. In addition to the professional championships, we run amateur events as well, about 30 a year, national championships of various age categories for men and women, [inaudible] and those sorts of things, junior programs, member services and so forth. We manage one of the largest Halls of Fame for golf memorabilia in the world. We have a foundation that has been in business since 1977.

The impact of golf in Canada: We're a \$14.3-billion business here in Canada in terms of contributions to the GDP, so 300,000 jobs across the country, 40% of which are actually summer students, summer positions. About \$2.2 billion in tax revenue is generated by the golf industry. On top of that is hundreds of thousands of hectares of green space across the country that are managed both in golf courses and in unmanaged wildlife habitat that's connected to those courses. On a yearly basis, well over half a billion dollars is generated through charitable outings in golf, so that's about 37,000 events a year that use golf as a platform for raising money. In total, \$2.5 billion is generated in golf-related tourism within

Canada. That's both domestic and international golf tourism, of which—this is a great picture of the Muskokas, and we have pictures from other hotbeds.

The biggest part of what Golf Canada does and certainly what gets the most attention are the professional championships: the RBC Canadian Open for men and the CP Women's Open for women. This is a picture from last year of the men's championship in Hamilton, Ontario, at the Hamilton Golf and Country Club. For those who aren't familiar with it, it's the third-oldest tournament in the world. This would have been the 111th playing this year, so next year will be our 111th playing. It's our national open, but it's also the only event on the PGA Tour, which is the professional tour for golf. We've been in Ontario 92 times, in the GTA specifically, so we are an Ontario-based event; 30 times at Glen Abbey, but we've moved around Ontario quite a bit over the years.

1620

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

Mr. Bryan Crawford: It is more than just an event for golf; it is a sport and entertainment property that covers food, music and entertainment with about 120,000 attendees over the course of the week. The economic impact of the event is over \$82 million, and over \$2 million is raised directly for charity and community organizations that we work with.

The women's event is very similar, a little bit smaller scale overall. We are in Ontario every other year. This event switches between east and west. This event raises over \$2 million a year for charity as well. CP raised for the SickKids Hospital this past year. About half of the attendees that attend the men's event attend this one as well. The economic impact is \$30 million and, as I mentioned, over \$2.2 million goes to charity and community impact.

The impact of COVID-19, number one, has been the cancellation of all of our events, which I mentioned earlier: loss of junior programming, membership attrition, national team development, investment incomes and just the organizational and growth strategy. In total, our loss will be about \$4.1 million, about \$1.3 million of which will be from the Canadian Open and the women's CP Canadian Open. This has been very well-controlled compared to what it could be, and certainly we have some tremendous parties to thank for that.

Some of the other impacts to the golf industry as a whole, beyond just Golf Canada and our own programming, are losses to courses themselves, those 2,300 courses across the country, from greens fee reductions; cancellations of banquets and events, where they depend on food and beverage sales and those sorts of things; the tourism industry of golf, of course; manufacturers of apparel, equipment; golf philanthropy that I mentioned before. That's \$500 million basically gone this season. Other events that we don't run: The Shaw Charity Classic in Calgary drives a tremendous amount of business there; Mackenzie Tour events, which do take place—we've had several here—in Ontario; obviously hotel rooms and tourism, those sorts of pieces as well.

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

Mr. Bryan Crawford: And really a halt in the growth of the membership, development of new facilities; a number of new facility projects that were on the books for this coming year have been halted or in some way impacted.

That's a really quick, really high-level overview of Golf Canada and our professional championship events from a tourism perspective. We work very closely with Celebrate Ontario, and not so much with Sport Hosting as we're a regular Ontario event, so not one that would apply for that. Thank you very much for your time, and hopefully I got a few seconds in under the wire.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. We'll start with the questions now, and we'll start with the opposition side. MPP Kernaghan.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to ask a question to Alfredo from Sunfest. As a lifetime Londoner, I know how much Sunfest means to our city. I understand you laid out some of the economic impact that London will face as a result of COVID-19 and Sunfest being cancelled this year, but could you also remind the committee about the economic impacts on the province's GDP as well as the loss of tax revenues?

You should unmute, Alfredo.

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

Mr. Alfredo Caxaj: Okay, sorry. Thanks so much. As I said, just to remind you, Sunfest generated last year \$4.5 million in economic activity for the province, including \$3.5 million in the city of London. Also, the study estimated that visitors to the 2019 festival purchased 3,480 hotel room nights, not including the festival artists as guests. This also represents a \$2.1-million boost to provincial GDP and \$390,000 in provincial tax revenues. Obviously, with the postponement and the festival cancellation, those revenues are not going to be generated.

This study, again, was done in conjunction with London Tourism. It was done by Paradigm Agency, which is one of the most credible agencies in delivering these kinds of studies in Ontario.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Thank you. I was wondering, as well, if you could speak about any of Sunfest's plans to go virtual this year. Some of the questions will be: What are the challenges of going from an in-person festival to an online one? Has the provincial government made the proper investments for you to go virtual this year? How could the government help you?

Mr. Alfredo Caxaj: We were a little surprised by the results of the Celebrate Ontario program, because for almost 10 or 12 consecutive years, we've been recipients of this.

At the time that we postponed the physical festival, we lost close to half a million dollars right there. We're going to the virtual state of things right now, and obviously many of us are trying to adapt to these new environments. Usually we are into the live music, and going virtually is a different feel. We'll be doing a segment, virtually, for the

festival, but of course it's difficult to generate the same kind of revenues that we usually have during the festival.

At this moment, our main concern is that when Celebrate Ontario—

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

Mr. Alfredo Caxaj: Granted, there are many other organizations in the province and a lot of them were also denied. Most of the funds, this time, are actually going to be used by many institutions in this transitional period, because we don't really know when live music or mass gatherings are going to be allowed. At this moment, it is so crucial for us to continue getting that kind of support from the Ontario government so that we can prepare ourselves when things return to some kind of normalcy.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Thank you. I'd like to turn it over to MPP Stiles.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Hi. I'm MPP Marit Stiles from Davenport, which is next door to the riding where the Hot Docs Cinema is located. I am a frequent visitor to that cinema, and I appreciate it a great deal.

I want to thank you very much, Hot Docs, for being here and for everything that you've done for the industry in Ontario and across Canada. I want to know what supports you are looking for that you need right now to continue to survive and, ultimately, to thrive in Ontario.

Mr. Chris McDonald: Brett, did you want to answer that one?

Mr. Brett Hendrie: Sure. For us—

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

Mr. Brett Hendrie:—one of the most important things is to maintain the current level of funding across programs like the Ontario Arts Council, Ontario Creates and Celebrate Ontario. We've been really pleased to see the flexibility from the funders to adapt to the new digital environment. That flexibility has been really helpful.

I'm sure that as we go forward and open up the cinema and are evaluating how we do that, we'll have more to share as well. That flexibility to allocate digital costs has been really great.

Ms. Marit Stiles: You talked a lot about the enormous contribution that—and I have to say that as a marketplace for documentary filmmakers in Canada, I think Hot Docs has been transformational. It has been massive. It's not—

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

We have to move to the independent members now for their time. MPP Schreiner.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Thanks to all three presenters for your excellent contributions to this discussion. I'm from Guelph. I've been consulting a lot with artists and festival organizations in Guelph, and how COVID has affected them, and over and over again, people have talked about the importance of Celebrate Ontario funding and OAC funding to help the transition to move online.

1630

I want to ask both Alfredo and the two gentlemen from Hot Docs about this. I'll start with you, Alfredo. Could you maybe just talk a bit about the costs associated with

moving online and how important funding support is to help with that transition?

You'll have to unmute yourself.

Mr. Alfredo Caxaj: Thank you for the question. As I said, nobody expects this radical change in our activities. For us, it was taking us a while to get to that position. For us to figure out how we're going to be able to continue working on that, digitally speaking, that's when we see the tremendous need of flexibility in grants, and also—which, by the way, some of the granting agencies have been very flexible on that. For example, with the festival, funds like Celebrate Ontario were so crucial at this particular moment in helping us to do that particular transition because, as I said, we don't really know when exactly we're going to go back to mass gatherings, events and stuff like that.

I guess one of the main goals of Celebrate Ontario, in this particularly, was to support that kind of transition for many groups, while they are moving to the digital platform and, in the meantime, waiting for when eventually we return to some kind of a normality.

At this moment, it is challenging because it's a new world for us in terms of finding the sources, the right sources of revenues, how we can generate revenues. It's so different than going into the park, asking people for donations. We know that there is money there, but going digital is a different, total experience, not only for us but for many institutions that are going into this field. That's the main challenge at this moment. We're still trying to figure out how we're going to survive if we continue doing this programming, digitally speaking.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Yes, I know; it's not an easy transition, but unfortunately a necessary one, given the current situation.

I don't know if either Brett or Chris want to talk about Hot Docs's transition and how government support can help along those lines as well?

Mr. Brett Hendrie: Sure. I'll say that, in terms of your question, in terms of some of the costs associated with it, for us, the challenge was that we were presenting copyrighted films, and it's really important to filmmakers and rights holders that they're presented in a secure way.

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

Mr. Brett Hendrie: These aren't films we can put up on YouTube or Facebook, so we had to build a special platform that could deliver them securely to audiences and give that high-quality experience. We're very fortunate that in Ontario there are some great service providers who really know the space and are doing some innovative work. Actually, some of the work that they've done with Hot Docs as sort of a guinea pig is leading to business opportunities for them in other provinces and globally as well. But it has definitely been a major learning curve for everybody.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I have a bit of remaining time. Just again to Hot Docs: What's it going to be like to reopen theatre space in a COVID world? What's it going to take to do that safely?

Mr. Brett Hendrie: Chris, do you want to take that one?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Unmute yourself, please.

Mr. Chris McDonald: Sorry about that.

Obviously, we'll be looking towards the city and the province for guidelines around reopening. I think one of the biggest challenges is going to be—as I said, we've got a large cinema, which works to our advantage, I suppose, but if you're looking at 25% capacity, that's maybe 150 or 200 people. So the economics of that will be a bit more of a challenge, as will the additional staff required to keep the space clean and safe, which will also reduce the number of screenings that we're able to do every day. But we'll figure it out.

I also wanted to say, Alfredo, if we can be of any help at all in talking about how we were able to transition, we're happy to help, both Brett and I. You can find our contact information on the website.

I'm also really happy to have the opportunity—

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

Mr. Chris McDonald: —to wear a shirt with a collar for the first time in three months. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Further questions?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: To Bryan from Golf Canada: How is physical distancing going on the links now that they've been open for a couple of weeks?

Mr. Bryan Crawford: Our sport is certainly lucky and well positioned within the realities of COVID-19. Obviously, having 150 to 300 acres to participate on lends itself well to physical distancing. I think that most of the member clubs we work with have transitioned fairly well. It's impactful not being able to put as many people through on tee times as they would before, and not being able to have food and beverage services. Those sorts of things are certainly impactful. But at the same time, in a way, the golf industry has had an opportunity to thrive in that there has been a lack of other things—

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

We'll have to move to the government side for their time now. MPP Cho.

Mr. Stan Cho: Thanks, everybody, for being here this afternoon, albeit virtually. I have two questions for Hot Docs, but before I get there, I just want to let our friend from Golf Canada know that, after politics, I will be going for my tour card. Watch out for that—it's not going to happen.

Anyway, to my friends at Hot Docs: It's great to see you again, Chris. Hi, Brett. I know these have certainly been challenging times for your organization.

Chris, when we last met at Hot Docs, you were talking about the renos that you had planned, the expansion, and I'm wondering what has happened to that.

Mr. Chris McDonald: We have raised about \$8 million privately, and we have a \$24-million application in to ICIP. We were told there might be decisions coming down at the end of spring, which is next week. We're excited

about expanding the space. It might be an ideal time to do so, but we're still waiting to hear.

We have a lot of support. We have a very large community—over 10,000 members and, as I said, 800 people a day coming into our space. We're looking forward to being able to grow our footprint and continuing to showcase great films from Ontario, Canada and around the world.

Thanks for your help.

Mr. Stan Cho: It's my pleasure. I'm a big fan of Hot Docs. I'm a little bummed that I never got to see *The Biggest Little Farm*. I was looking at your website and I couldn't find it there, so I'll have to take a rain check on that particular documentary.

My second question is about attracting markets outside the greater Toronto area. We spoke about this in person—some of the online strategies, how you envisioned that helping reach out to broader markets. Now, here we are, in a time when you've been able to use technology to your benefit. I'm wondering if you've been able to reach other markets. And outside of some of the fiscal challenges, what are some of the other challenges or barriers that you faced in trying to reach those broader markets through technology during this pandemic?

Mr. Chris McDonald: For the festival films, we introduced a geoblock for Ontario alone, simply because it was a friendly thing to do for our sister festivals across the country. We continue to see high numbers from people 100 kilometres outside the GTA, and it actually does represent an opportunity for us to grow some of our programs that are—we do a lot of lectures, author events and other in-person events that are non-film-based. So that experiment we were forced into has also come with a bit of opportunity, because we can now reach an international audience. We'll continue to exploit that as best we can and continue to grow our numbers and our supporters.

Mr. Stan Cho: That's great, Chris. Any time you need to reach out for some of those ideas on how the government can help, you know how to get a hold of me.

I think my colleague MPP Miller has some questions.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Miller, Parry Sound–Muskoka.

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you to all the presenters. I would like to ask a question of Bryan Crawford from Golf Canada.

Thank you for featuring my riding of Parry Sound–Muskoka and the Bigwin Island golf course in your presentation. There are a lot of beautiful courses around Parry Sound–Muskoka. I was certainly hearing from lots of the golf course owners, prior to being able to open, stating that they would be able to open safely, and I think they have demonstrated that they have been able to open safely. The courses seem pretty busy as well, with the nice weather and probably people looking for something to do. But I would think the place that golf would be hurt would be in some of their tournament business, some of the revenues from food services and also, I guess—

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

1640

Mr. Norman Miller:—the big tournaments. The PGA is starting up again. What's going to be happening with your Canadian Open in the next year?

Mr. Bryan Crawford: Thank you very much. Absolutely. The RBC Canadian Open was cancelled back in early April, I want to say—it's hard to remember when we cancelled it and when we actually announced it. It would have actually taken place last week, which was our tournament date. We've essentially tried to shift all of our plans for this year forward to next year. We'll return to the course that we were to play, which is St. George's in Etobicoke, next year. We've kind of bumped everything ahead a year.

The biggest challenge for us is obviously the unknown. It's not only a golf tournament that has 120,000 people attend it, but it's two nights of concerts. We'd have 15,000 people a night at those concerts. We do a massive food festival that brings local restaurants on-site, and so forth. So not knowing what the environment is going to look like will make that a challenging year to prepare. Having support from Celebrate Ontario this year, we've been able to maintain every one of our positions on staff and keep people in place for the long term. Those sorts of things are important.

Likewise with the women's event when it returns to Ontario—now it will be a year later; not next year but the year after, because it will stay out West for the year that it was supposed to take place this year. Those sorts of events are the hardest-hit, no question about that.

Mr. Norman Miller: Any other particular supports from the provincial government that you're looking for? Sorry, I may have been muted. Any other provincial supports you're looking for?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Mr. Crawford, can you hear us?

Mr. Bryan Crawford: Sorry. I think perhaps my end was breaking up, but I missed the question.

Mr. Norman Miller: I was just wondering if there were any other provincial supports—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Sorry; I apologize. The time has come up now.

We'll have to move to the independent members for their second round. Who wants to start first? MPP Blais.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'll just follow up on MPP Miller's question. Mr. Crawford, beyond the Celebrate Ontario support, is there anything else the provincial government could do, either for the tournament or the golf industry overall, to help through the summer and into next year?

Mr. Bryan Crawford: Certainly, from a professional events perspective, and our events in general, having funding provided this year allowing us to try to weather the storm, I think, as some of the other presenters have mentioned, and keeping funding in place next year, because I think that will be the biggest challenge that—our events in 2019—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Your voice is cutting out. Mr. Crawford? Can you hear us? Sorry, your voice is breaking down. Mr. Crawford?

MPP Blais, do you want to direct your question to someone else, for now?

Mr. Stephen Blais: Yes. Sorry, there's a delay, I think, at least on my end, Mr. Chair. Most of my questions were for Mr. Crawford, so if Mr. Schreiner has any questions, I'm happy to yield time to him.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Further questions? MPP Schreiner.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I wanted to go back to Alfredo, if we have a minute, to talk a little bit about the Celebrate Ontario grant and just how important that funding is to your organization, and maybe just highlight the importance to the performers as well, because I know there's a lot of concern about the trickle-down effects to festival cancellations and shifting online, the trickle-down effects it's had on performers.

Mr. Alfredo Caxaj: Yes, certainly it's a chain of events here. Celebrate Ontario has played a crucial role in the work we did in the last 10 years, because we were granted for all those years. Even this past year, as I mentioned, we went into the venture of doing an economic impact report, because that was one of the fundamental pieces that was required by the program, not necessarily openly, but we just thought there was an incredible support for that.

In terms of the artists, yes, it is. We want to move into the digital field now, but at this moment it is really almost impossible to pay the artists. I owe the same kinds of fees for the artists that we usually pay them when they come and perform at the festival.

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

Mr. Alfredo Caxaj: At this moment, because everyone is navigating these difficult waters, both performers and presenters are trying to get some kind of compromise where we basically support each other. Of course, you put in perspective all of our contractors like PA sound companies, tents, all other kinds of suppliers that, practically, now they couldn't do any particular revenues for the season. So it is a chain of events. And of course, for us, it's so fundamental to continue treating the artists in the most respectful way. But without specific fans, it will be a very challenging thing to do from now on. So that's why I think funding like Celebrate Ontario for our festival is going to help us tremendously in supporting our ongoing activities. We will continue to do digital things during the rest of the year, but again, we'll find that challenge of paying, especially, the performers in the way that they deserve to be paid.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Great. Thank you for that. Thank you, Chair. No further questions.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Blais, do you want to ask any questions to Mr. Crawford, since he's back?

Mr. Stephen Blais: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Crawford, you were saying that the Celebrate Ontario funding, and continued funding to keep the event

structure in place into next year, was obviously very important. In the next year, as we look to the future beyond Celebrate Ontario funding, is there anything else that the provincial government can do to help the tournament or help the industry in more broad terms?

Mr. Bryan Crawford: Yes, I mean, nothing on the industry front, but I'll speak in my area of expertise and the tournaments. And sorry for—apparently maybe helping me with a better Internet connection would be something that I need support with.

One of the challenging things for us as a tournament—we are fairly Ontario-based, as I said; 92 times in our 111-year history.

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

Mr. Bryan Crawford: And we're not an event that is eligible for Ontario Sport Hosting support because it traditionally is targeted at events that don't come to Ontario on a regular basis, and it also tends away from professional events. The reality is our event has dozens and dozens of amateurs that play. It's the first opportunity for most Canadian amateurs before they become professionals. We have dozens of amateur tournaments that are directly tied to our organization's qualification system.

That would be a program that's a big piece of work, but if there was ever an opportunity to expand the eligibility criteria for that, I think our economic impact and our sport impact speaks for itself. It should be an event that's given consideration when it comes to support from Ontario Sport Hosting, as an example—likewise with our women's event.

Mr. Stephen Blais: I appreciate that. What was the name of the program? You skipped out when the name—

Mr. Bryan Crawford: It's Ontario Sport Hosting.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Ontario Sport Hosting—thank you very much.

Mr. Bryan Crawford: They're also critical because they're tied in to the federal government as well—

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

MPP Roberts, can you unmute yourself, please?

1650

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Oh, there we go. Sorry, it kept saying that I couldn't unmute myself because of the host. But here I am. Perfect.

My question is actually for both Bryan and Alfredo. Earlier today, I was asking some questions about different incentives that we can look at to get Ontarians involved in the tourism sector again and engaging in different activities. I recall that a little while ago the federal government had a program—they had a children's arts tax credit and a children's fitness tax credit to try to get parents to sign up their kids for activities, get them active, get them involved in arts and culture. I wonder if that's something that might be worthwhile looking at, at the provincial level, once things start to become safer, to get parents to get their kids back involved, in this case perhaps in some of the great arts and cultural activities happening with Alfredo's organization, or alternatively, with golf.

I remember that my favourite summer camp as a kid was golf camp. I remember many summers participating in that, and I'm sure my parents would have appreciated having something to support that activity.

I'm curious if you both—maybe Bryan first and then Alfredo—could provide any thoughts on whether your organization might be interested in a program like that, which would incentivize more participation.

Mr. Bryan Crawford: Absolutely. My family had young children, and we took part in that program as well.

I worked in a number of NSFs in Canada and Canada Basketball. I worked in athletics in university sports as well. So I think that program was a great one.

That program doesn't just need to be for kids; there are plenty of adults who need incentives to go out and participate.

Our sport does have some barriers when it—
Failure of sound system.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Again, we have lost you, Mr. Crawford.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Perhaps we can bring Alfredo in, and if Bryan rejoins us, we can get him to continue.

Mr. Alfredo Caxaj: Absolutely. Thank you for the question.

As a matter of fact, the Ontario Arts Council has some programs particularly designed for outreach to the schools, and especially young kids. When you apply to the Ontario Arts Council, you qualify for one particular program and not necessarily do you have access to others.

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

Mr. Alfredo Caxaj: This past November, we applied to the Ontario Trillium Foundation precisely to do this kind of program, where we could bring issues of cultural diversity, discrimination, racism, all those things, in a very artistic way—to develop those kinds of programs. I think those are definitely beautiful alternatives at this moment that we will have to explore. As far as I know, there's not a specific program at this moment that exists as such, but it's something that perhaps the government could be implementing to help institutions like us to continue developing these programs.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: I appreciate that.

I don't see that Bryan has rejoined us, so I wonder, Hot Docs, if you want to weigh in on this as well, whether your organization has thought of any ways the government could help in terms of incentivizing people to get more involved and come back out to enjoy the great offerings that your organization, your theatre provides.

Mr. Chris McDonald: Brett, did you want to take this one?

Mr. Brett Hendrie: I know that Minister MacLeod and her team have started looking at tourism campaigns to re-engage tourists and visitors to come to the province. I'm reminded that Hot Docs was severely impacted by SARS back in 2003, and the province worked with the city—

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

Mr. Brett Hendrie: —to develop a robust international tourism marketing campaign. That was really critical for us to recover—as well as many other events. So to the

extent that the government and the ministries are looking at umbrella campaigns to bring people back to cinemas and events and festivals and golf tournaments, we are fully in support of that and we'd love to participate.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Great. Bryan, I see you've rejoined us. We have less than a minute left, but if you have any thoughts—we lost you quite early on in the answer.

Mr. Bryan Crawford: The answer is 100% yes. Any programs to incentivize youth participation, but also adult participation as well, is absolutely a really clever, interesting way to get people out and participating, and certainly, I'd say, something we'd be fully supportive of—of course—here in the province of Ontario.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. Before we go to the opposition, I need to do an attendance check.

MPP Lindo, if you could please confirm your attendance and if present in Ontario. MPP Lindo? All right. We'll come back to that.

So we'll go to the opposition for their time now. MPP Stiles.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Thank you. Sorry, I got cut off earlier. This is a new system and we're figuring it out. That was very, very fast. Anyway, a lot of questions I had already been asked. I did want to confirm, because you cut out when you were talking about where this \$4-million grant application—I'm wondering if you can tell me, again, where that application is in the process and to whom you applied.

Also, I wonder if you could speak briefly—I was starting to say that the world of a documentary filmmaker is a tough road and you provide an amazing marketplace. I'm just wondering if you have a sense, as well, of where things are in the production industry right now, in Canada or in Ontario specifically, and how filmmakers in the documentary world are managing?

Mr. Chris McDonald: Thank you very much. It was a \$24-million application. ICIP is the acronym, the international cultural infrastructure—not international, but infrastructure program. It's a joint provincial-federal infrastructure support; \$800 million, I believe, in Ontario.

I'm sorry, the second part of the question was—oh, yes, productions. I don't believe any productions—there were rumors that productions were going to start in July, as early as July, but I don't think that has been confirmed yet in Ontario.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Just very briefly, because I know my colleague has another question, but are you hearing from filmmakers? My sense is they're struggling. In my own community, I know many documentary filmmakers who already struggled. I wonder if you could comment on the kinds of supports that should be in place for folks in that industry.

Mr. Chris McDonald: Absolutely. Supports from Ontario Arts Council are critical. It's one of the more difficult occupations—documentary filmmaking and film-making in general. They're going through a particularly tough time. At the same time, there are more folks who are

staying at home consuming media, and documentaries have become so much more popular over the years that we are in a bit of a sweet spot—certainly in a bit of a renaissance—and Canadians are renowned for having one of the most robust documentary industries in the world. But it's certainly not a good time to be a documentary filmmaker.

I'll add that Hot Docs distributes over \$800,000 a year in grants and equity investments to Canadian and international filmmakers, including a \$1-million fund for African filmmakers and \$1 million over five years for francophone, Indigenous and deaf filmmakers in Canada, so we've come up with a lot of ways to actually support the industry and have distributed over \$10 million to date, and are looking to grow that as much as possible to support the industry.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Further questions? MPP Kernaghan, please.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Alfredo, I find it curious that Sunfest did not receive Celebrate Ontario funding.

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

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Pardon me?

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

1700

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Thank you.

In years past, Sunfest received Celebrate Ontario funding. This year it was turned down for its application. I was looking at the program objectives for Celebrate Ontario, which are:

- to increase tourist visits and spending;
- to grow tourism attendance;
- strong community and regional economic development focus;
- confirmed tourism, business and community partnerships that encourage increased spending and overnight stays in the host community.

Were you given any explanation or detailed response as to why your Celebrate Ontario application was turned down?

Mr. Alfredo Caxaj: We had a short debrief with the program officer in the region precisely to find out. The very first answer was, "Well, we didn't have enough funds because the program was cut 50%." I said, "But that's not how the assessment works. We need to hear exactly where we failed as an applicant."

After being successful for 10 or 11 years consecutively, and then adding the economic impact report—in many, many instances they were asking for one of those. We were feeling so strong about this particular year, precisely because we have all the documents and all the supporting materials. Really, the answers were very vague in terms of the statistics, and nothing against the contents of the application itself and its mandate, the vision, the artistic content and stuff like that—it's just about the statistics that were reflected in the report.

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

Mr. Alfredo Caxaj: They told us that they didn't even look at the economic impact report. It was very dismaying for us to hear that, because for this particular kind of a

program, that's a fundamental piece when you want to really demonstrate that you are creating an economic impact in the region—and this is exactly what we did. So it was very dismaying to hear that there was no real explanation or justification as to why we couldn't receive the funds.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: It would make more sense that if Celebrate Ontario's funding was cut in half, then perhaps your grant would be cut in half. But to receive zero funding is rather curious, isn't it?

Mr. Alfredo Caxaj: Absolutely.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Thank you very much for your presentation today, Alfredo.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you to all three presenters for your time and for your presentations.

Before we move on to our next presenters, I need to do an attendance check on MPP Lindo.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Hi there. I'm calling in from Kitchener.

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

BLACK FEATHER, THE WILDERNESS
ADVENTURE COMPANY

MULTICULTURAL THEATRE SPACE

CANADIAN ELITE BASKETBALL LEAGUE

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Moving along to our next presenter: Black Feather, the Wilderness Adventure Company. Please state your name. You will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Ms. Wendy Grater: I am Wendy Grater. I have seven minutes?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Yes.

Ms. Wendy Grater: Perfect. I have a PowerPoint presentation I would like to present.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Yes, absolutely.

Ms. Wendy Grater: Black Feather has been in business since 1976 here in Ontario. We offer small group wilderness adventures by canoe, sea kayak, hiking or cross-country skiing. We have wilderness adventures that go in the Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut, British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec. We have over 120 departures per summer season, from three days to 21 days in length. We also wholesale through the winter, with sea kayaking trips in Baja, Mexico. Each winter, we send over 100 clients to Baja.

Our clients come from international, about 10%; USA, around 20%; and Canada, about 70%. We hire over 50 qualified guides to work as employees over the summer season. That's from the end of April through to September. We contribute significantly to all the economies in the different locales that we go to.

We are registrants of the Travel Industry Council of Ontario, and as such, our operations and our accounting procedures must follow their guidelines.

For the past five years, our gross income has ranged between \$2.3 and \$2.9 million, and 90% of this income is

generated by our local trips in Canada from May to September. We accept 25% deposits from clients throughout the year, which go into TICO-compliant trust accounts.

The COVID-19 pandemic has severely affected our operations this year. Starting toward the end of February, our bookings to Baja, Mexico were impacted, and due to the uncertainty of travel and government advisories, we had to cancel all the remaining trips for the winter to Baja and refund clients' payments. This totalled about US\$6,200, or about C\$8,000. Some of these clients have elected to defer their deposits to trips next year.

By March, it became obvious that we'd be unable to operate our floe edge trips, which take place near Pond Inlet, Nunavut. We had to refund our clients, totalling about \$100,000.

Through April and May, we contacted all of our clients who had already booked trips for this season, and developed guidelines and policies. And by the end of May, we were cancelling our trips in the Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut, and had our Ontario and Quebec trips on hold.

Just to give you a bit of an overview of our actual finances: On March 1, 2019, the balance in our trust account was \$104,000, and on June 15, 2019, it was \$1.65 million. This year, in our Canadian trust account, March 1 was \$416,988 and June 15 was \$287,000.

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

Ms. Wendy Grater: So there was a significant change in accounts of about \$1.3 million due to COVID-19. We've refunded about \$213,000 to people.

A comparison of employees: Last year, we had 29 people employed at this time of the year; this year, five.

In summer this year, we'll be operating select trips in Ontario and Quebec. And we anticipate our gross income to be between \$125,000 and \$150,000, compared to last year, which would have been 10 times, 100 times that.

Our operating costs account for about 65% of our fee, administration about 30%, and profits between 5% and 10%. So this year we'll have quite a small profit, potentially, going into the fall.

As shown in the last slide, some of our challenges for the fall and winter will be that the profits will be very low. We don't anticipate being able to off-sell any of our Baja trips for the period of October to December, reducing the income even more.

As per the TICO guidelines, all our deposits for 2021 go into a trust account which can't be accessed until the trip has taken place, so we really have no access to those, which results in a cash flow crunch.

With the help of various government COVID-19-related financial initiatives, I anticipate being able to operate until approximately December of this year. After that, we'll have to rely on our line of credit to get through until we can access funds from the trust accounts later.

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

Ms. Wendy Grater: Some challenges, looking downstream: If interprovincial travel is not opened up to the

North, or if international travel is not allowed, or if there's a reoccurrence of COVID-19 which affects next summer, there will be significant problems. Consumer expectation that the tourism operator is responsible for a complete refund is difficult. Insurance is very difficult.

All in all, I think that Ontario and Canada's tourism industry and operators need to continue to be supported through the next operating season—particularly help with costs associated with marketing, overhead, personnel and infrastructure.

That's my presentation.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. Moving along to our next presenter, from the Multicultural Theatre Space: Please state your name for the record. You will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Ms. Pam Patel: Thank you for having me here this evening. My name is Pam Patel. I'm the artistic director of MT Space, a theatre company based in Waterloo region.

1710

One of our major projects, and probably our highest-profile event, is Impact, an international, interdisciplinary theatre festival that occurs biannually. Our last festival was this past September, in 2019. Impact is a six-day festival that brings cutting-edge work from around the globe, across the country and locally to various stages in Kitchener, Ontario.

But I'm not here to speak specifically about Impact; I'm here to talk about the present and future of arts and culture.

As we near the possibility of being able to open our doors again and explore opportunities for presenting live art, we need to also look at how we can build a resilient sector; how approaches to reopening and providing relief funding can actually be proactive instead of reactive; how these measures can support training, hiring, job creation and retention, while also incurring a transformative impact on the sector.

We have faced, and still face, many challenges. Like so many other organizations, we're attempting to provide more activity, employ more artists and engage more of our community members with essentially the amount of funding that we had 10 years ago from the Ontario Arts Council. Now, in the face of a pandemic, we also face the threat of becoming further marginalized and having to rebuild from the ground up. We're also so embedded in the tourism sector, if you consider alone our festival partners, visiting and expenditures within our communities. But when it comes to the local economy, we employ hundreds of artists and technicians who, while they may have temporary solutions to income right now, are faced with an existential crisis and seek to return to work as soon as possible.

As uncertain as things may seem right now, I'm hoping to go ahead with our policies and plans because we need to get folks employed and working again, including artists and technicians. Now that we're in stage 2 of reopening, I'd like to offer some points of consideration for the kind of support that is needed now and that will affect the sector in the mid to long term.

As I understand it, digital events and arts offerings are currently ineligible activities under funding opportunities like OCAF and Celebrate Ontario. Given our circumstances, I would urge you to reconsider this criteria as we can still encourage local spending through paywalls, which would help us to, in turn, pay fees to our artists, but also support our small business partners by redirecting online traffic to shops and services that have online offerings and delivery.

It's also important to recognize that the digital solutions we're using now have been in use for a long time by those working in disability arts. If we're to increase accessibility to our ongoing events even after our doors have reopened, then there needs to be support and incentive to maintain these digital services, such as live-streaming. This is going to require an upfront investment that assists us with attaining the expertise, training and equipment necessary to implement these services at an acceptable level, but also to embed them in our ongoing operations—the way that we treat all other technical aspects of our events and activities. I feel this is also in line with the requirements of the AODA.

There's also a dire need for mentorship and training in our industry, especially now, as some of us face having to rebuild our teams and work on job retention within our own communities. There would be a significant short- and long-term impact on the sector if there were access to training and mentorship funds in the fields of arts management, production management, festival producing and similar fields, particularly for Black, Indigenous and folks of colour. While there's funding available to mentor and support emerging artists, we need to complement and match this with the support for the expertise required to build and sustain infrastructure. While there are a handful of existing programs like this at Canadian universities, these programs don't do enough—

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

Ms. Pam Patel: Thank you—to set up graduating students to succeed in these fields, resulting in extreme turnover at several companies and festivals. On-the-job training is going to help address this gap.

It's great to see that the OAC is working on COVID-19 relief funding. I won't be the first or the last to advocate for an increase to the OAC in general to keep the arts sector sustainable and in a position to respond to uncertainty moving forward.

With what has come to light over the past couple of weeks, I see an opportunity to support and expand anti-racism efforts, which, for organizations like ours, is at the heart of what we do. Since 2004, we've been identifying gaps in our own arts community and mentoring Black, Indigenous and artists of colour in theatre—including things like grant writing, producing support and commissioning work. Any relief and new funding needs to take into consideration and factor in supporting racialized, Indigenous and Black-led organizations and initiatives. This is an opportunity to address things while in a position to rebuild infrastructure.

Funding models, including Celebrate Ontario and OCAF, need to adapt to support anti-racism events and

activities, including non-mainstream methods of marketing, outreach and engaging audiences. They also need to acknowledge alternate business models that have been proven to be successful. The empty spaces funding model does not depend on ticket sales. We attract large audiences, but we barely sell out our shows, and as odd as it sounds, that saved us during this pandemic. We rely on investments and donations to sustain us. This serves our growth as a resilient organization that can continue to serve the community and also the bulk of our audiences who are newcomers, refugees, immigrants and low-income families. It also supports developing our own methodology and ways of—

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

Ms. Pam Patel: Thank you. I'm not saying this is the only way to do things, but it is what's worked for us and helped us thrive, and needs to be considered just as viable as all the other models that exist.

Of course, I will reiterate what you probably heard from several other organizations, which is that assistance with costs and human resources are required to develop and install new health and safety protocols, and practical support to meet additional and ongoing health and safety demands. Support from tourism is going to be key in helping to revive and rebuild our sector, but also encourage the general public to support our work again. Ticket subsidies for our audiences would help to encourage outings and experiences that still provide income for our artists, while also supporting local shops and restaurants that are open. This would be of course for performances that we're currently considering in the [*inaudible*] or drive-by theatre.

Finally, seeing a clear message from the provincial government acknowledging the resilience and importance of our sector would be incredibly meaningful. Championing the arts on this level is also really needed. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Okay. We'll move to our next presenter from the Canadian Elite Basketball League. If you could please state your name for the record. You will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Mike Morreale: Good afternoon to everyone. My name is Mike Morreale, and I am the commissioner and chief executive officer of the Canadian Elite Basketball League or the CEBL. I'm here on behalf of not only our 70-plus staff across our seven teams and our league office, but also our 150 players, support staff and coaches that make up the basketball side of the CEBL.

For those of you who aren't aware of us, we launched in 2019 to great success, starting with six teams across the country and growing to seven teams in this off-season, adding Ottawa to the mix. We are the only official men's division professional partner of Canada Basketball, which is the national governing body for basketball in this country, and we are very proud of that relationship, as well as our relationship with the U Sports programs across the country.

The league was really designed as a way to not only develop the next stages of our professional athletes, but also to showcase those athletes who have had to leave Canada to play professionally overseas in Europe and otherwise. Basketball has certainly been on a tremendous rise as of late. The NBA reports that basketball participation in Canada grew a remarkable 15% in the past year alone, to over 1.3 million players—the bulk of those, of course, residing right here in Ontario.

Basketball is the most inclusive sport in Canada, drawing fans and participants young and old, male and female, urban and rural, and representing a diversity of backgrounds and cultures as rich as the country itself. Basketball is the fastest-growing sport in Canada and the most participated-in sport amongst youth aged 12 to 17. It is considered the coolest sport amongst 18- to 24-year-olds and the first choice of sport for newcomers to Canada. Basketball has definitely reached its golden age.

While basketball and all sports rightfully take a back seat to the realities of daily life, the impact of COVID-19 on our business has been somewhat tremendous. We were anticipated to start our second season in May, running right through to mid-August. That, of course, has been delayed, and we are now in a situation of no revenue streams whatsoever since the early part of March.

Until return to sport can resume, our revenue streams have halted. They are based primarily on both ticket and sponsorship sales. With the health and safety of our players, fans and staff being the highest priority, we understand the live sport experience has to adapt to represent our new reality.

With this reality in mind, we are incredibly pleased to see the recent announcements from the government expressing the province's commitment to boosting domestic tourism through immediate medium- and long-term strategic priorities to position Ontario as a premier visitor destination in the world. As part of the government's vision for tourism, and as we continue to battle the pandemic and beyond, as of Monday, we have announced the league's intention to deliver a 2020 tournament format this summer, in collaboration with Canada Basketball, Ontario Basketball and our partners at the CBC. We are asking for a one-time grant of \$350,000, which was submitted to the Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries. The CEBL believes we can inject much-needed economic stimulus into the province and deliver premium entertainment, while upholding the highest health and safety standards. This proposal, which has been shared with Minister MacLeod, facilitates a creative return-to-play scenario to ensure that sports fans have access to the entertainment they crave this summer.

1720

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

Mr. Mike Morreale: The proposed basketball spectacular is to be executed in the form of a tournament in St. Catharines, Ontario, between July 25 and August 9. All games will be broadcast on CBC, both domestically as well as internationally, to places all over the world. It is no surprise that areas like Niagara and St. Catharines, and the

Meridian Centre in particular, face a lot of hurdles with the pandemic. This, of course, will be a fan-less experience, so it does add additional costs to our already overburdened cost load, but it is my desire to get our players back to the courts as quickly as possible and get them paid. Many of our players have already experienced a loss of income and a loss of playing time because of what has happened in different parts of the world with their playing careers.

It's also important to note that the Niagara region, St. Catharines and the Meridian Centre will play host to the Canada summer games next year, in 2021. We feel that our proposal of return to play will provide a great stimulus to not only the region from a tourism perspective, but for those facilities from a safe-to-return-to-play perspective as well.

We ask the government to consider a couple of things:

- to create a designated fund to encourage professional and amateur return-to-sport scenarios in the province;

- the CEBL will require a one-time grant totalling \$350,000; and

- dedicate a portion of Ontario's domestic tourism partnership between Destination Ontario and Destination Canada to support creative return-to-sport scenario marketing efforts utilizing our expansive reach, not only within Canada but also internationally.

Because of the way we're structured as a single-entity ownership, we are very nimble in how we can react. Most importantly, we mandate that 70% of our players be Canadian. To date, we are now at well over 80% of Canadians signed to our rosters.

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

Mr. Mike Morreale: We are really excited about the opportunity that has been presented to the province. We would like to continue that dialogue not only with the province, but the federal government and the city of St. Catharines. And we totally understand that all plans must conform to the reopening measures and protocols taken by the provincial health ministers throughout the coming weeks. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. We'll start with the questions now. We'll go to the government side this time. MPP Miller, Parry Sound—Muskoka.

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you to all of the presenters for your excellent presentations.

I would like to ask a couple of questions of Wendy from Black Feather, an excellent and important Parry Sound-based business that operates all over the place. The positive from your presentation that I saw, in terms of dealing with COVID-19, was that 70% of your business is from Canada. I would think that one of the challenges going forward would be how people get to where the starting point is of whatever the trip might be, as air flights etc. are constrained by COVID-19. Are you looking at pivoting to more trips in Ontario and Quebec? I would think it's the sort of thing that once you're on the trip, you could do pretty safely with the correct protocols in effect.

Ms. Wendy Grater: We have pivoted, totally. We have increased our Ontario-Quebec offerings. We just put

out a new electronic brochure to our 10,000 [*inaudible*] email list and are anticipating offering more this summer. That being said, it will still be significantly less than what is normal because people have backed out. There will be more people coming now that Ontario has come into phase 2, which is really positive.

We can do things very safely. We've spent a lot of time researching and developing a COVID-19 protocol for all of our trips, our van shuttles and all of that sort of thing, so we're confident we can put a good program out there.

My biggest concern, actually—for myself and, I think, for many small tourism businesses that are in the outdoor adventure field—is going into the next year, because we can survive going through this summer but then there's a long time before the next season begins, because it is very summer-oriented. As you know, Norm, living here in Parry Sound, not that much happens in the winter other than snowmobiling. So yes, that, I think, speaking for a number of us in this area and in this field, is our biggest concern.

Mr. Norman Miller: Yes, I would agree with you. I think that some of the projections of when air flight may be fully back—it's not even next year; it's a while off.

Ms. Wendy Grater: It's a lot.

Mr. Norman Miller: Helping your business do better, not necessarily COVID-related—I recall that you said you were in an uncompetitive position because you are treated like a travel agent, I believe, whereas if you were to operate out of BC, you would not be constrained. Is that TICO, that you're required to be a part of?

Ms. Wendy Grater: Exactly. So this is—

Mr. Norman Miller: Could you use this platform to explain how if you didn't have to do that, that would improve your prospects?

Ms. Wendy Grater: Until two years ago we were deemed a “tour operator,” and that meant that we did not have to be a part of TICO, the Travel Industry Council of Ontario. But it was determined that as well as a tour operator, we are a travel agent, even though we don't sell airfare. But because we run, say, a van shuttle that's longer than 40 kilometres, we are now told that we are a travel agent in booking these. So that means, as I said in my presentation, our deposits go into this trust account that we have no access to until after the trip takes place. At least 30% to 40% of our expenses take place prior to the trip happening, so all of the planning, the purchasing of equipment, the purchasing of food and all of that for these trips we have to do—

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

Ms. Wendy Grater: Yes—basically on whatever money is in the bank from last year.

Mr. Norman Miller: And that puts you at a competitive disadvantage. If you were, say, located out—

Ms. Wendy Grater: It does. I was actually considering trying to move our office out of Ontario to a jurisdiction that did not have such a difficult thing. Unfortunately, we are kind of like a square peg trying to fit into a round hole. I can understand that for a travel agent, but for a business like ours, it makes it very difficult.

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you. I will pass it on to my colleagues now.

Ms. Wendy Grater: Sure.

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

Ms. Donna Skelly: We are not going to have much time, so I'm going to ask that I get to continue this in the next round of questioning, but I want to say hi to Mike. Mike Morreale is a friend, a long-time friend. He's also a hometown hero. For those of you who don't know about Mike's background, he played in the CFL for 12 years, with Toronto and with the Hamilton Ti-Cats. We're very proud of him, and very proud of the initiative that you're now involved in.

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

Ms. Donna Skelly: And I know that I'd like to hear much more about it. I wish that we were chatting under different circumstances. But, Mike, the ask: Have you gone to the feds for funding, and are they providing any funding?

You will have to unmute yourself again.

Mr. Mike Morreale: All right. Thank you, Donna. It's great to see you again, virtually. We have approached the feds. We have asked for a loan, a repayable loan in the amount of \$5 million to \$8 million: \$5 million if we don't play; \$8 million if we do. That, really, is just money to float us. As you can probably imagine, we are basically a start-up, so our business plan did not account for a total loss of revenue and not having that ability to have cash flow. We are not expecting a handout of any sort; we are just looking for a loan. Unfortunately, we don't apply under the federal subsidies that are presently in place, as a start-up, and we don't have—

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

We'll have to move to the opposition now for their time of questioning. MPP Lindo.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: I'm going to actually start with Pam. Hi, Pam. It's very nice to see you. I have two questions for you. I will ask them together, and then you can do what you need to do.

The first question is something that came up in some of the earlier hearings. We are hearing that there are historic issues for people of colour—Black, brown, Indigenous folks—to be successful in accessing some of the provincial arts grants. I'm wondering if you can speak a little bit about some of those issues.

1730

You made very, very clear in your presentation the return on investment. Investing in the arts—not just right now while we're thinking about getting you through COVID-19, but in general—for the economy, is huge. You gave examples of the employees you have. You're hiring folks to do the work with you in all of your artistic endeavours—the mentorship opportunities so that we can keep getting people into the field and getting them the skills they need.

I'm wondering if you can also speak to why it is so important, as we're talking about this new normal, to invest in the arts, with clarity around the need for digital

platforms, not just during COVID-19 but now—whatever this new normal is going to be.

Ms. Pam Patel: Thank you so much for those questions. The first one I'll address as succinctly as I can—because I feel like that's a whole history lesson.

What happened at the federal level was that there was new investment in the Canada Council and Canadian Heritage. In a nutshell, the two entities got together and looked at organizations across the board, and they chose specific organizations that have been operating on a shoe-string budget. Most of them were working in disability arts or racialized organizations, and they chose them to leap-frog. They significantly bumped up their operating budgets so that they could at least catch up to some of the larger institutions that had been really well-supported. That hasn't happened at the provincial level yet, and that's just due to the limited resources the Ontario Arts Council has.

What folks don't recognize is that MT Space, for example—and there are so many like us, especially in Toronto—we're not just a company that's putting on theatre. That's not our only mandate. We're also mandated to train artists, to nurture artists, to support grant-writing, to support teaching artists about the system; to support this whole network that isn't maybe written explicitly in our mandate, but it's just what we have to do in order to achieve the art that we do. So there are a whole lot of expenses. We're trying to serve an entire community that extends way beyond just audiences. So that's just the tip of the iceberg, really.

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

Ms. Pam Patel: Thank you. The other question about the digital platforms: Something that we're not recognizing, as I mentioned already, is that disability arts have been using these platforms for a really long time. If we're truly going to be an inclusive and accessible art form, then we need to start embedding that, and that requires equipment, and that requires expertise that can't just be fulfilled by production managers and technicians. Until there's a vaccine available, I think that's the only way we can serve the most vulnerable populations.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Further questions? MPP Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much, Pam, for appearing before us today. I want to thank you for helping so many artists in Waterloo region navigate the complexity of the arts community. It has been quite something.

MPP Lindo touched on my question, which was around accessibility and moving to a digital platform, and how the government could be supportive of that financially. What we've been hearing is that some direct financial support for arts, for tourism, for cultural organizations to retool and redesign—do you see that as something that would be helpful for MT Space?

Ms. Pam Patel: Yes, 100%. A few weeks ago, during lockdown, I had a conversation with staff from OCAF just to see if anything had shifted there. I was told that while digital offerings wouldn't make us ineligible—digital offerings are not supported by funding that's currently

available through OCAF and Celebrate Ontario. That just brings me—

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

Ms. Pam Patel: —back to my point of, we can find the ways. We can find the ways to support local spending. We just need to have those in place if we're going to really shift.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Just one final point, because in the next session our critic will take the question set: How important is timing and around urgency? Because that is something that this committee is going to be struggling with on a go-forward basis. How urgent is it for the government to act quickly on this file?

Ms. Pam Patel: Well, I will say this: If we have the investment ASAP, up front, then we can start working this into our plans. We can start getting the training, we can start acquiring the equipment, and it's actually going to result in us having more of a chance at being self-sustaining, instead of receiving this funding down the road or receiving it even spread out, in a way. Obviously, you have to talk about sustainability, but like I said, artists want to be and need to be back out and working—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off. We'll have to move to the independent members for their time now. MPP Schreiner.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Thanks, all three presenters, for fantastic presentations and for being a part of the conversation. Pam, I just wanted to say that a lot of us in Guelph come over to Kitchener, and I'm a big fan of the Impact festival. Thank you for the great work that you do.

I've had a lot of artists talk about the fact that the Ontario Arts Council grants and Celebrate Ontario grants don't support digital—and you were really touching on it in your answer to MPPs Lindo and Fife, but maybe just the importance of the urgency of shifting the criteria of those grants to allow for digital to support artists.

Ms. Pam Patel: Yes, to allow for digital, and also I'm just going to sneak in here the anti-racism effort—

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Absolutely.

Ms. Pam Patel: —and while I do have the floor, I'm going to mention that we've always received Celebrate Ontario and OCAF funding for Impact, except for Impact 19, and we have yet to receive an explanation for why. We never had a debrief about that. I was pretty heavy on the anti-racism, inclusivity, diversity front. I wonder if that had anything to do with it.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Thanks for bringing that up. I think that's definitely an issue that we should explore, especially now, given how much the conversation around Black Lives Matter and the whole movement around systemic racism—I think it just highlights even more the importance of the work you do, so I think it's certainly something this committee can follow up on.

I want to quickly shift gears to Mike for a second and just say that I'm a Nighthawks season ticket holder, and Cam does a great job of representing the Nighthawks in Guelph. We were disappointed when we heard that St. Catharines was the selection; we were hoping for the

Sleeman Centre. But I'm sure that MPP Stevens will be happy about St. Catharines.

I wanted to ask, really quickly, because it's tough in your second year, you're just getting started—and by the way, the on-the-court product last year was fantastic. How important is the grant from the province and the loan from the federal government that you've applied to for the league to just even surviving, especially since it's in its infancy?

Mr. Mike Morreale: Thank you, first of all, for being a season ticket holder. That's fantastic. I appreciate that.

It's rather important. I don't want to sound dire, because we do have an owner that has, obviously, invested a significant amount of money into making this happen, all for the greater good. The ask of the federal government is simply to help us have more cash flow to survive. It allows us to stick to our business plan as much as we possibly can and to have available cash flow.

The specific ask for Ontario is for that specific event itself. So the event itself is going to cost us approximately \$1.2 million. That does not include our staff—

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

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: —that are obviously employed by us. This is just specific to the event. Our players make up over 50% of those costs—which is fine by me; I think they should be paid what they deserve—and the remainder of that, pretty much all of it, is going to be left in the Niagara region.

If you look at just our accommodations alone, they're about \$200,000, and that doesn't include having to feed all the players, 100-plus players, and coaches etc., the use of the facility and all that stuff. So it is maybe a significant ask of this group, but I think that we can show value in tremendous ways. It also helps us get people back to being employed, back to making money and hopefully back to extending careers, so they can play and encourage young people and amateur athletes that there is a safe return to sport. Even though they may have to wait for it, at least we can present a viable option.

1740

Mr. Mike Schreiner: So just to be clear, the grant is to be able to have the tournament in St. Catharines itself, and then the loan is for more league-wide cash flow.

Mr. Mike Morreale: Yes. The grant is specific to this tournament. It will cost us, I would say, \$5 million to \$6 million this year just to survive. We don't have any money—obviously, not what we anticipated. We anticipated revenues of \$8 million to \$10 million, so it's a significant drop.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Great. Thanks, Mike.

Mr. Mike Morreale: Thank you.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: That's probably all of my time, so thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Further questions? You still have a minute. MPP Hunter or MPP Blais?

Mr. Stephen Blais: Thanks, Mike, you mentioned that the majority of your players are Canadian, but do any of them play overseas or down south in other alternative

leagues off-set from your schedule? Is there concern about their ability to re-enter for the tournament?

Mr. Mike Morreale: Yes. So the answer is, yes, they do play elsewhere. We specifically play in the summer-time to accommodate our best players returning from overseas. The beauty, I guess, in hindsight, is all of them are back in Canada for the most part because of what happened. They got back ahead of time. So 95% of our players are here. I think that we're bringing in approximately 16 or 17 international players.

The concern we have now is not bringing them over the border as essential workers, because they qualify; it's dealing with the quarantine issue, which we have protocols and plans in place for. Obviously, public safety is a priority. We are dealing with the chief medical officer in Niagara, Dr. Hirji, so he's well aware of what is happening, as is the province itself. But generally speaking, that's a pretty small amount of players that would come over. The issue we have is the work permit issue, and that's what is taking some time.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. We'll move to the opposition members now. MPP Miller.

Can you unmute yourself, please?

Mr. Paul Miller: Yes, I can hear you. You got me?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Yes.

Mr. Paul Miller: Hi, thank you. My question is to Mike Morreale. Hi, Mike. It's good to see a fellow Stoney Creek there. I remember standing in the stands near your dad when you were at Cardinal Newman high school, then on to the Marauders and then the Cats. It's great to see you.

Mike, as a new league, much like any other business, you expect to go a few years in the red. At the best of times, it's difficult for start-ups to gain a proper foothold. Can you outline what your league's five-year business plan looked like before COVID-19? Are you looking at some of the protocols that the NBA are putting in place? How much do your teams rely on gate proceeds? If you're playing to an empty house, how long can you and the franchise survive without financial support from public or private investors?

Mr. Mike Morreale: Thank you very much. It's good to see you. Thanks for the memories; those are good ones.

Great questions. We are a gate-driven league. There's no doubt about that. I would say upwards of 75% to 80% of our revenues come from the gate. The remainder come from a combination of sponsorships and merchandise, so we are highly gate-driven.

We couldn't survive more than this season, let's say. We couldn't continue into 2021 and think that we could sink in additional money. We've put in \$15 million to date to operate, to get up and running. We knew that we would not make money in our first three years. It's not a surprise. But to have no revenues coming in is obviously something we did not expect. So it is very much, like I mentioned before, a start-up.

We know that there is some runway here and there is some proof of concept. As you continue to go, you will hit those milestones. So we anticipated getting into break-

even positions for some of our teams this year, and then going into year three, the expectation that we would do that as well. We're very unlike other leagues. We have very small operating costs. It is 25 times less than some of the more comparable teams. So, operationally, we can manage it; we just can't manage it for a long period of time without any revenues coming in.

Mr. Paul Miller: Yes, good. We have a connection to the Tiger-Cats in my family too. My dad's cousin and his best friend were their trainers for 25 years: Scotty Wright and Jimmie Simpson.

Mr. Mike Morreale: Oh yes, for sure.

Mr. Paul Miller: Pinky Lewis too was a good friend of the family.

Mr. Mike Morreale: Yes, legends.

Mr. Paul Miller: Anyway, my next question: Since the Raptors's victory, basketball has gone forward with its popularity. Has the basketball community, both fans and the amateur provincial sports organizations, reached out to you with offers of support and guidance through your inaugural years?

Mr. Mike Morreale: We do have an excellent relationship with Canada Basketball and the PTSOs across the country. The issue is, they are not flush with cash. As a matter of fact, they are less than flush with cash.

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

Mr. Mike Morreale: We actually pay a licence fee to Canada Basketball that they hand out amongst their provincial associations, so we actually help support Canada Basketball in that way. But we don't get it in return.

I do know that there was federal money set aside for the national sports federations. Whether it's been distributed or not, it has been divvied up amongst the federations, including the PTSOs. We don't see any of that money. It doesn't flow down to us. We're not suggesting it should. So when we look for ways to try and help ourselves under this current pandemic, we're very limited in where we can go and turn.

To finish my comments that I was making to Donna Skelly, we've looked at every program that's available. We just don't qualify under the guidelines. Whether we have too many employees, too few employees, or we don't have the history of the revenue stream to be able to show what's happening, it's difficult for us to take advantage of that. They are working with us and we're thankful for that, but that's not cash that we get to keep; that's money that we just need to operate.

Mr. Paul Miller: Mike, if you need any support, I would be happy to meet with you. I'm the sports critic, have been for many years, for the party—the NDP—and I'd be happy to sit down and go over this with you if there is anything I can do to help.

Mr. Mike Morreale: I appreciate that. Thank you very much.

Mr. Paul Miller: Okay, thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Any other questions? That's it? Okay. We'll move to the independent members now. Who wants to go first? MPP Blais.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Thanks very much. Pam, you talked about the eligibility of digital events for Celebrate Ontario and other funding, and the need to get going on that now to put the infrastructure in place so that you can have some element of a fall and winter.

How much lead time do you think you need in order to put some of that infrastructure in place to bridge into next year?

Ms. Pam Patel: It's going to depend on the organizations, but in general I would say that the larger the organization, the more lead time they're going to need.

We're considered a mid-sized company, and I would say that if we hit the ground running right now, we could probably implement things in September. But we'd need at least these two months and that would just be working every single day, getting the quotes, engaging the people, getting the personnel—because that's also going to take some time—and also just getting all of that equipment as well. With all of the restrictions that are still in place, I think it's just going to make the process a little bit longer.

Mr. Stephen Blais: If the change in eligibility was delayed until the fall or early winter, when a budget is coming out, do you have the capacity to survive that gap? What kind of strain will that delay put on you?

Ms. Pam Patel: For us, personally, we are surviving, so we're going to be okay. We are not actually pivoting to doing digital offerings, though. What we are looking at doing is drive-in theatre. That still maintains the integrity of our work. But I think that whenever that funding comes out, you need to bank on a three- to six-month period for various-sized organizations getting things together.

Mr. Stephen Blais: I appreciate that. Thank you, Mr. Chair. MPP Hunter has some more questions.

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

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I want to thank all of our presenters. You're the final panel of the day and I think you've really done a lot to keep it very, very interesting for us.

I wanted to just really emphasize, Pam, your suggestions to this committee. We had the privilege of hearing from the minister responsible for culture, heritage and sport in the province and putting forward recommendations. What you're saying is that a different lens needs to be applied in some of the grants and arts funding in this province, and other levels of government have already done that.

1750

We know right now that there is a conversation around equity and fairness for Black, Indigenous and people of colour. It's really important that in Ontario—and our granting programs really reflect that reality and that need. So I really appreciate that advice to run the funding and the evaluation through an equity lens and to make sure that we are investing in those—

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

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: —communities and in those organizations that have historically been excluded because of the rules. I would add to that the digital rule. In 2020, it's time that digital be recognized as an enabler to the arts as well.

I don't know if you have more that you want to say, but the message is definitely heard loud and clear in this community.

Ms. Pam Patel: I don't know how much time I have, but very quickly, what the Canada Council did was they broke in and rebuilt all of their funding streams, and I think that's what is going to be required. You can have panels of diverse voices and diverse artists, but they're still beholden to the criteria and the structures of funding and the definitions. It's just going to require, like you're saying, a completely different lens and a whole lot of consultation and actually having people at the table.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I actually think that the Ontario Trillium fund did the same, and it seems to be getting closer to the funding reaching the need, which is what these programs are designed to do. So we should make sure that no one is excluded from that.

With the little time that I have remaining, I just wanted to give a shout-out to Mike and the Canadian Elite Basketball League. My younger brother, Andrew Hunter, played all the way from high school. He went to the NCAA division 1 because at the time we really didn't have this structure here, and then he played in Europe, overseas—

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

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: —before coming back to Canada. So I fully, fully support you riding the wave right now. There has always been a need for this.

I'm wondering if you work at all with universities, colleges, high schools and middle schools, because we need a pipeline in the basketball field as well to really build up the natural talent we have here in Ontario.

Mr. Mike Morreale: First of all, thank you very much for that. If your brother has still got some good legs in him, maybe we'll bring him back to see if he wants to suit up this year, but—

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: He's 6 foot 6, Mike; he's a big guy.

Mr. Mike Morreale: We could use him.

I would say that the community is vitally important to what we do, so our players—our mandate is part of their contract, that they would commit 30 hours of community service during the time they're with us, which equates to a couple of hours a week. That's usually never an issue or a case. The guys are willing and helpful to do it. It's really important that we build the grassroots—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off. We'll have to move to the government side for their time now. I'll start with MPP Skelly.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Hi, Mike. I'm going to pick it up where we left off, and I'm going to ask you to keep your answers really short so that I can hand this off to MPP Piccini. What is the total ask for the province?

Mr. Mike Morreale: The total ask is \$350,000.

Ms. Donna Skelly: And that's for the tournament. Tell me the details: When is the tournament, and how will you play it under these COVID restrictions?

Mr. Mike Morreale: We are going to bring all seven teams to St. Catharines and house everybody in three separate bubble areas—one being our accommodation

centre, one being our training centre, which is the Y, and one being the Meridian Centre, which is our competition space—following all protocols, similar to what you've read or seen from other major leagues, and make sure that it's vetted through the government.

All those games will start with a training camp portion from July 15 through to July 24. Then from July 25 to August 9 will be a round robin tournament, the start of 21 games which will go into a single elimination playoff tournament, quarter-finals, semifinals and the finals where we will crown the CEBL champion for year two. So everything is condensed. Everything will be on CBC. We have live-broadcast doubleheaders on the first Saturday, second Saturday and the third Saturday, which is semifinal Saturday and the championship game. We will have all other games, including those, broadcast through the CBC Gem app domestically and through a bunch of international rights holders internationally as well.

Ms. Donna Skelly: That's fabulous; it really is. I love the fact that you mentioned the Canadian content so highly. As MPP Hunter said, and you mentioned earlier, it is such a popular sport.

One last quick question: We know it's the fastest-growing sport, but who is your demographic? Who are you catering to?

Mr. Mike Morreale: We are not just basketball. We provide entertainment. Basketball really lends itself to an arts and culture and music and lifestyle component. Our games are not just roll out a basketball and we play ball; there is live music, there are acts, and there's always entertainment surrounding you, because it does cater to a wide variety of people. Our players are diverse; our fans are equally as diverse as you move across the country.

The beauty of what we do is that we provide basketball—everybody thinks Raptors, but there are fans outside Ontario who don't really watch the Raptors. We can provide opportunities to watch professional in their markets. That's really important to us, to spread it across the country. Ontario, having four teams, is obviously a major influence to us as well.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thanks, Mike. You've got a lot of support in our virtual room. I'll hand it over to David.

Mr. Mike Morreale: Thank you.

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

Mr. David Piccini: I'm going to continue with the theme. I know that we've got a lot of Ti-Cats fans on here. I've been a lifelong fan. I grew up going to Ivor Wynne; my family worked at Stelco. And I remember in 1998, Osbaldiston's 54-yard field goal and the outstanding year you had as the Most Outstanding Canadian Award player. So it's great to have you on.

My question is for you. I coached the men's team at uOttawa, so I'm a big fan of your league and what you are doing for our athletes, our basketball players in Canada. Mike, question: Donna has asked about the fiscal ask. I'm going to ask you about a non-fiscal ask: any regulatory changes, anything government can do to assist the league grow?

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

Mr. David Piccini: I know you're in your infancy here.

Mr. Mike Morreale: Good question. I was fortunate enough to serve on the pro-sport task force under Minister MacLeod, so myself along with all the major executives from everyone from the NBA, NHL, Major League Baseball, etc. We did put forward some recommendations on not only how some policy changes could help pro sport, but how those changes could also help amateur sport as well. I know that particular project is being, at some point, handed over to the powers that be to be distributed, but we made several policy changes. A lot of them were regulations related to other opportunities to increase revenues that we could then pass on, stuff like single-game betting or changes to legislation around the 50/50 draw so that that money could flow through us back to them. That was one of the key mandates of the task force. It's not necessarily how pro sports can get back on track, but how pro sports could help amateur sports get back on track.

Obviously, I don't have time to go into great detail, but I think we did a great job in covering some ideas that make us look at different non-financial asks and things that make things better.

Mr. David Piccini: So you'd like to see single-game betting, Mike?

Mr. Mike Morreale: We see that people are doing it anyways. It is something that people are doing, and that money is going outside of Canada, so regulating it within Canada, within the province of Ontario would certainly benefit those people that are already spending that money.

Mr. David Piccini: Finally, that task force that you were on: I note that some silver lining to COVID has been to bring everyone together. In your recent memory, is that the first time that we've had all of the different sports together in a room to talk about ideas going forward?

Mr. Mike Morreale: Yes, and I must admit, it was a tremendous opportunity for us—

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

Mr. Mike Morreale:—particularly in the CEBL, to be able to be alongside this group. It was great to have open and direct conversation about what's happening and how everyone is dealing with things. So yes, I can't remember any other time or any other province, for that matter, where that many groups of people have come together, especially the major four and everyone else.

Mr. David Piccini: Okay. Thanks very much.

Mr. Mike Morreale: Thank you, David.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you to all three presenters for your time and for your presentations.

Before we finish for the day, I will now go over the schedule for the third, fourth and fifth sectors of this study for everyone's clarity.

1800

The third sector of the study will be municipalities, construction and building, and the hearings for this sector will be held:

—on July 13, 2020, from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. to 6 p.m.;

—on July 14, 2020, from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. to 6 p.m.;

—on July 15, 2020, from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. to 6 p.m.;

—on July 16, 2020, from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. and 1 p.m. to 6 p.m. and 6:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.;

—on July 20, 2020, from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. to 6 p.m.; and

—on July 21, 2020, from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. to 6 p.m.

If required to accommodate more presenters, the committee will also meet on July 23, from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. and 1 p.m. to 6 p.m.

The fourth sector of the study will be infrastructure, and the hearings for this sector will be held:

—on July 30, 2020, from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. and 1 p.m. to 6 p.m.;

—on August 4, 2020, from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. and 1 p.m. to 6 p.m.;

—on August 5, 2020, from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. and 1 p.m. to 6 p.m.;

—on August 6, 2020, from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. and 1 p.m. to 6 p.m.;

—on August 10, 2020, from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. and 1 p.m. to 6 p.m.; and

—on August 11, 2020, from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. and 1 p.m. to 6 p.m.

If required to accommodate more presenters, the committee will also meet from 6:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. on July 30, 2020.

The fifth sector of the study will be small and medium enterprises, and the hearings for this sector will be held:

—on the week of August 17 to 21, 2020, from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. and 1 p.m. to 6 p.m.; and

—on August 24, 2020, from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. and 1 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Interjection.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you, Chair. Did you have in your—around report writing, are there designated days where we're going to be doing report writing?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Do we have it?

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife: And I just wanted to know: As the Chair of this committee, you had to read that into the public record so that it could then be shared publicly? Is that what happened here?

Interjections.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Sorry?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Because it happened in camera prior, so now it has to be read out in the public—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Yes.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Okay.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Just a moment; we're grabbing the report-writing days as well.

Ms. Catherine Fife: So the goal though, just as a process—after we finish the hearings, then we are going to do report writing, sector by sector. Then, sector by sector, it will be reported to the House?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Yes.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): All right. So for report writing, the committee meets for report writing on the third sector of the study:

—on August 12, 2020, from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. and 1 p.m. to 6 p.m.; and

—on August 13, 2020, from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. and 1 p.m. to 6 p.m.

For the fourth sector:

—on July 30, 2020, from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. and 1 p.m. to 6 p.m.; and

—on August 4, 2020, from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. and 1 p.m. to 6 p.m.—

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Oh, sorry.

For the fourth sector of the study, actually, we'll meet:

—on August 25, 2020, from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. and 1 p.m. to 6 p.m.; and

—on August 26, 2020, from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. and 1 p.m. to 6 p.m.

And for the fifth sector and the final report:

—on September 9, 2020, from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. and 1 p.m. to 6 p.m.;

—on September 10, 2020, from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. and 1 p.m. to 6 p.m.; and

—on September 11, 2020, from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. and 1 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much.

For the tourism sector, though, we're going to be report writing, I have it on—is it June 22?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): For the tourism—

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Julia Douglas): That's the written submission deadline, June 22.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Okay.

You can let us know tomorrow. How about that?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Sure. That's fine.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Any further questions? Seeing none, thank you to all the committee members and to all the presenters for your presentations.

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 19, when we will meet to continue the hearings on the tourism sector. Thank you.

The committee adjourned at 1806.

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Also taking part / Autres participants et participantes

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Mrs. Lisa Gretzky (Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest ND)

Mr. Terence Kernaghan (London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord ND)

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