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Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy

Estimates

Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming

Ministry of Sport

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

Budget des dépenses

Ministère du Tourisme, de la Culture et des Jeux

Ministère du Sport

1st Session
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Wednesday 19 November 2025

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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

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

Wednesday 19 November 2025

Mercredi 19 novembre 2025

The committee met at 0901 in committee room 1

ESTIMATES

**MINISTRY OF TOURISM, CULTURE AND
GAMING**

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Good morning, everyone. The Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy will now come to order.

We're meeting to consider the 2025-26 estimates of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming for a total of two hours.

We are joined today by staff from Hansard, broadcast and recording and legislative research.

From the ministry, we are joined by the Honourable Stan Cho, Minister of Tourism, Culture and Gaming; Nancy Kennedy, deputy minister; along with other staff from the ministry.

As a reminder, the ministry is required to monitor the proceedings for any questions or issues that the ministry undertakes to address. I trust that the deputy minister has arranged to have the hearings closely monitored with respect to questions raised so that the ministry can respond accordingly.

Are there any questions before we begin from the members? Seeing none, I am now required to call vote 3801, which sets the review process in motion.

We will begin with a statement from the minister for up to 20 minutes. Minister, welcome, and the floor is yours.

Hon. Stan Cho: Thank you very much, Chair. It's always great to be in committee, and I want to thank you, as well as all of the committee members. I know what it's like to serve on committees. It's a lot of work, but very important work, so that is much appreciated from all of us.

The tourism, culture and gaming sectors have had a profoundly positive impact on the economy and the way of life here in Ontario. Now, support for these sectors, of course, drives growth, creates great jobs, enriches our communities and cultural landscape, protects our shared heritage and showcases our province as a top destination for investment and travel. No doubt with certain geopolitical uncertainties, that's even more important, perhaps, today.

Ontario is the largest cultural producer in Canada and our country's most popular place to visit. We have an unbeatable combination of world-class urban destinations, unique cultural attractions and unrivaled natural beauty.

Our gaming attractions offer visitor experiences unlike anywhere else in Canada.

The tourism, culture and gaming sectors are not just about entertainment. All three are powerhouses of economic activity in their own right. Their impact is not only felt in tickets purchased for museums, art galleries, festivals, concerts and events, but for hotel stays, restaurant experiences and shopping trips that all accompany them. Tariffs and trade tensions present obstacles. They also present opportunities. Right now, we have a chance to showcase our province with all our unique historic and cultural treasures to all Canadians and, indeed, to the world.

As we look to the future, we are encouraged by the signs of strength that we are seeing. In 2024-25, MTCG prioritized major tourism and cultural infrastructure investments to ensure agencies could operate effectively, fulfill their mandates and contribute to Ontario's economy. In 2025-26, MTCG's funding increased by \$51.6 million, and this reflects our government's commitment to focus on strengthening tourism and culture sectors, as these sectors contribute to protect Ontario's people and places and help build a unique Ontario identity.

By developing the tourism, culture and gaming sectors, we are helping to create good jobs, strengthen communities, encourage business investment and boost local economies that keep our province strong. We champion Ontario's film and television industry, a key driver of the creative economy while showcasing Ontario to the world, ensuring the province remains the top jurisdiction in Canada for screen-based production and global investment.

We positioned the province as a premier global travel destination by driving increased visitor spending and GDP through investments in tourism- and culture-related activities. From revitalizing iconic destinations like Wasaga Beach and Nancy Island to expanding the McMichael collection, reimagining Ontario Place, enhancing Toronto's waterfront and unlocking new opportunities across the Niagara region, MTCG is committed to preserving Ontario's treasures for all to enjoy while showcasing its natural beauty and developing its economic potential.

Ontario is Canada's top travel destination, as I mentioned before, and the tourism sector is a core element of our province's economy. With the rich variety of experiences, attractions and activities that Ontario has to offer, it's no wonder that a recent Destination Ontario

study found that over 70% of respondents view Ontario as a highly regarded destination for leisure travel.

Interest in travelling to Ontario remains highest among Ontario residents, followed closely by visitors from the US, particularly the fly market, with strong growth from the drive segment. This confirms that even in the face of global challenges like tariffs and trade tensions, US visitors are continuing to choose Ontario for its outstanding offerings.

In a single year, visitors to Ontario contribute \$33 billion to our GDP and support 300,000 jobs. According to our most recent data, there are nearly 104,000 tourism-related businesses in Ontario. Our government understands the vital importance of this sector to people across the province.

In 2024-25, we invested nearly \$200 million in the tourism sector through funding programs, regional tourism organization grants, ministry attractions and tourism agencies. We are continually connecting with partners and stakeholders across the province to ensure funding and support can reach those who need it most.

Through our festival and events funding, including Experience Ontario, we allocated more than \$27 million to more than 350 festivals and events across the province. This funding aligns with our commitment to supporting homegrown, made-in-Ontario events that boost tourism, support local economies and celebrate our shared heritage.

Through our booming tourism sector, we are able to showcase our province to the world, demonstrating Ontario as the world-class destination for visitors and investors that we all know it to be. To reach this ambitious goal and position the province as a premier global destination, we are working on several major projects.

To start, I want to talk about the ongoing redevelopment of Ontario Place, a cornerstone of our government's tourism strategy. Ontario Place was once a vibrant hub for families, tourists, concertgoers and more, but in recent years, the site has fallen into disrepair and disuse. But we have a bold vision. We are transforming Ontario Place into a world-class waterfront tourism destination, welcoming millions of visitors from across Ontario, Canada and the world and becoming a hub for outstanding visitor experiences and community connections. We envision the site as a modern, year-round attraction that will restore Ontario Place as a premier destination while also driving economic growth for the province.

The beloved parkland and shoreline will be reimagined and expanded to include more than 50 acres of free public space with brand new modernized amenities, family areas, event spaces, picnic spaces, artwork and more.

The final designs of the parkland and public spaces in Ontario Place that we unveiled earlier this year reflect more than two years of public, stakeholder and Indigenous community engagement. We're proud of the work, the partnerships and the conversations that have gone into planning and redesigning the public realm, and we're very excited to see it take place.

Next, I want to discuss how Ontario Place will become the new home of the Ontario Science Centre, the OSC.

Currently, the OSC has two temporary satellite locations that continue to successfully inspire passion for human adventure of discovery through fun experiences that educate and entertain kids and adults alike. We're working during this transition to ensure the relocation of the new Ontario Place will deliver a modern, state-of-the-art facility to inspire the next generation of innovators.

The brand new, 200,000-square foot Ontario Science Centre will be designed and built to modern standards, ensuring an accessible and welcoming environment for visitors and staff. We're aiming to present its final design in early spring 2026.

The relocation will provide fresh opportunities for the OSC to offer expanded programming and exhibits, sparking curiosity and innovation in a new generation of visitors and inspiring a lasting love of science, technology and discovery in young people from across Ontario.

Another exciting project in the works is Destination Wasaga. Through our partnership with the town of Wasaga Beach, our government is investing nearly \$38 million into Destination Wasaga, transforming this iconic Ontario destination into a premier and year-round tourism attraction, complete with its famous beaches, a revitalized downtown area and the preservation of important heritage locations.

Our government has also provided the town with an additional \$2 million in support to bolster their tourism planning efforts as work proceeds on the downtown area. The rich legacy of the area is being honoured through a \$25-million investment in the redevelopment of Nancy Island Historic Site, as well as the transfer of administrative responsibility for the site from the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks to MTCG.

0910

Two days ago, Wasaga Beach launched community engagement for a once-in-a-lifetime master plan and called on its residents, local businesses and community partners, including Indigenous communities, to take part in these discussions and planning. Destination Wasaga is a testament to our government's commitment to developing destinations across the province, expanding its vibrant community infrastructure, equipping them for success and ensuring future generations benefit for decades to come.

And, of course, we are pushing full steam ahead with Destination Niagara. With its iconic falls, the Niagara region is a perfect snapshot of the importance of tourism here in Ontario. The region's \$3-billion tourism industry is a huge driver of jobs, growth and economic prosperity, and with 13 million visitors annually, Niagara showcases some of the best destinations and experiences Ontario has to offer to a massive local, national and international audience. Our goal is to double the number of visitors.

We've developed a comprehensive plan to capitalize on the ongoing success and huge potential of the Niagara region. Our plan is to unlock the full potential of the area beyond the falls, enhancing and promoting a region that plays such a crucial role in our province's economy. The Destination Niagara strategy that we will present in December will leverage the unique assets of the region and

attract even more visitors from around the world by offering new and unforgettable experiences that encourage longer stays and repeat visits. The strategy will guide our efforts to enhance infrastructure, support local businesses and promote innovative tourism experiences, encouraging guests to stay longer and explore more of this beautiful corner of the world.

As part of the plan, we've already invested \$35 million over three years to support infrastructure at the Shaw Festival, Niagara region's most famous cultural attraction and a pillar of the Canadian theatre scene. I'll share more about this investment later.

We're also moving forward with the redevelopment of the magnificent but long-abandoned Toronto Power Generating Station into the region's only five-star hotel, funded entirely through a more than \$200-million private sector investment. And we have seen recently the success of the region's newest attraction, Niagara Takes Flight, a \$25-million state-of-the-art flying theatre experience launched by the Niagara Parks Commission. In its first month of operation, this attraction welcomed more than 52,000 visitors and generated nearly \$1.2 million in gross revenue.

I'm confident that our strategy can elevate the region into a truly world-class tourist destination, enhancing its existing attractions and creating new ones, developing its amenities and driving profound economic growth.

Lastly, we've continued our support for regional tourism with a capital investment of \$82.2 million over four years in the St. Lawrence Parks Commission, SLPC. As one of eastern Ontario's premier attractions and welcoming over 600,000 visitors annually, the SLPC is set to modernize its beautiful properties with the second stage of its septic, washrooms and drinking water revitalization project, including the first septic upgrades in 60 years. Through partnership with Infrastructure Ontario, we are forging ahead with upgrades that will provide SLPC with the necessary infrastructure and facilities to enhance environmental stewardship, reduce operational costs, create jobs and save taxpayer dollars. This will ensure Ontarians can enjoy the stunning surroundings of St. Lawrence parks for decades to come.

Now I want to address the province's culture portfolio. I'm not going to go into details of everything we are doing and working on with our agencies and attractions—that would take too long—but I want to highlight that this year we have secured funding to support AGO, one of our true treasures in North America, and the ROM, Canada's most-visited museum, with over one million visitors annually. We need to ensure their financial sustainability.

We are rightly proud to be home to the largest number of cultural producers in Canada. According to our most recent data, the sector contributed nearly \$28 billion to the province's GDP and supported nearly 270,000 jobs. As with tourism, arts and culture are significant in our province's economy, and beyond that, they enrich our lives, bring people together and empower and uplift our communities.

Our support for this sector reflects our commitment to building a diverse and creative Ontario, empowering this sector's dynamic business environments.

Our ministry supports the culture sector through targeted funding provided through the following: the Ontario Arts Council; the Ontario Cultural Attractions Fund; Ontario Trillium Foundation; Ontario Creates; Community Museum Operating Grants; Public Library Operating Grants; and tax credits for the film and television, interactive digital media and book publishing sectors.

We also provide support by investing in cultural infrastructure. The Shaw Festival—as I mentioned previously as part of our Destination Niagara strategy—is one of Canada's premier cultural organizations and a major tourism driver for the Niagara region. Earlier this year, we announced a significant capital investment of \$35 million over the next three years to support the reconstruction of the Royal George Theatre. This investment will allow the Shaw to build a brand new, modernized theatre with improved accessibility and amenities. This revitalized structure will accommodate a growing audience and continue showcasing the beauty of live theatre for decades to come, as well as create opportunities for the Shaw to expand learning and outreach programs and develop new visitor experiences.

We also announced up to \$50 million over three years to expand and modernize the McMichael Canadian Art Collection and building on the grounds in Kleinburg. This once-in-a-generation renewal will remake the McMichael into a world-class museum for the 21st century—a beacon of accessibility, environmental sustainability and artistic excellence. This revitalization marks the first major investment in the McMichael site in more than 40 years. This ambitious project will ensure that the McMichael continues to inspire Canadians and visitors from around the world, again for generations to come.

Another recent example is the Corleck. Ontario invested \$2.2 million to support the launch of the Corleck, a new Irish Canadian arts venue on Toronto downtown waterfront, to celebrate the contributions of the province's large and long-standing Irish community. This investment supports the government's plan to protect Ontario by celebrating the province's heritage, boosting tourism, creating jobs and strengthening the local economy. The new venue will feature a main stage and performance space, as well as a cafe, gallery and museum, meeting and event space, and rooftop terrace. At the Corleck, the Canada Ireland Foundation will deliver new cultural experiences that celebrate and share Irish culture and Toronto's rich immigration history.

Just a time check, Chair, on how much I have remaining?

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): You have four minutes left.

Hon. Stan Cho: Four minutes, thank you.

This fiscal, we have also allocated \$1 billion for the five cultural media tax credits administered by Ontario Creates. Four of these apply to screen-based industries and three to film and television, all to ensure Ontario remains competitive in this dynamic sector. We've also streamlined eligibility requirements so that production companies are getting their tax credits faster. Ontario hosts over 400 productions every year and—according to our most recent

data—adds \$2.6 billion to our GDP and creates nearly 35,000 jobs. From compelling performances to powerful storytelling, Ontario-made productions captivate audiences at home and around the world. We're truly a global leader in film and television, and we want to make sure that it stays that way.

We also support investment in the arts through the Ontario Arts Council, OAC, which is an agency within the ministry and has a mandate to foster the creation and production of art for the benefit of all Ontarians. This fiscal, the OAC is receiving nearly \$60 million in operating allocation from the ministry. This funding has a profound impact. In 2024-25, OAC invested \$52 million in more than 200 communities to support artists and arts organizations, providing 2,000 grants to individual artists and 1,000 grants to arts organizations.

We're also investing in libraries, investing up to \$660,000 in Ontario's public libraries through the Internet connectivity program. This support, which includes a funding increase of \$78,000, targets investments where they are needed most. This is enabling up to 185 eligible public libraries, that serve communities of 20,000 or less, to be fully reimbursed for the cost of providing publicly accessible Internet—particularly small, rural and First Nations communities. With this funding, we are ensuring Ontarians everywhere have access to the reliable, publicly available Internet access they need to thrive and succeed.

Finally, to address the "G" in MTCG, I'd like to talk about our gaming portfolio. Gaming is booming in this province. The launch of Ontario's regulated online gaming and betting market just over three years ago brought the sector to new heights. This year, we anticipate that the industry will exceed \$10 billion in gaming revenue for the first time in provincial history, with OLG on track to register \$6.8 billion in revenue and iGaming poised to bring in an estimated \$3.7 billion. These historic figures represent so much more than a bottom line. They present both significant future opportunities and important current responsibilities.

0920

We also understand the market will continue to evolve and progress in significant ways in the years ahead, and we are committed to supporting this evolution. Accordingly, our government passed the iGaming Ontario Act and made iGaming Ontario, iGO, a stand-alone agency under MTCG. The act strengthens iGaming's governance and accountability, laying a strong foundation for the continued growth and success of the online market. That's why we're conducting a review of the gaming sector to assess opportunities to enhance efficiency and reduce red tape across both online and land-based markets. Our priority is to make sure that the gaming sector delivers strong economic outcomes for all Ontarians.

We're also ensuring our focus on safe, responsible gambling—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thirty seconds, minister. I'm sorry.

Hon. Stan Cho: I could keep going, Chair, but I'll tell you that there's a lot going on in the ministry and we have

a lot to be proud of in this province—a province that is big enough to hold 14 European countries, has four beautiful seasons, two time zones, contains 20% of the world's fresh water and a diverse people that come here from all over the world and get to live in harmony. I can't think of a place that's better to live in.

We're proud of that. The Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming certainly represents that, and we can't wait to see what we're able to accomplish in the coming years.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): There you go, thank you very much.

We will now begin the question-and-answer segment in rotations of 15 minutes for the official opposition members, 15 minutes for the third-party members and 15 minutes for the government members for the remainder of the allotted time. As always, please remember to make your comments through the Chair.

As the Chair, if a member seeks to reclaim the floor during their rotation while the minister is responding, I will recognize the member and allow them to reclaim the floor to ask a new question.

For the deputy minister, assistant deputy ministers and ministry staff, please state your name and title the first time you speak so that the proceedings can be accurately recorded in Hansard.

I will now start with the official opposition. MPP Shaw.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Good morning, Minister. Thank you for being here.

I want to start by agreeing with you about what a wonderful province that we have. I heard your speech before about how wonderful the province is and I agree. I also want to say that the arts sector, the culture sector, arts workers, artists and culture workers across the province deserve all the recognition and all the support that they can get, so there's something we do agree on.

I was really interested to hear you talk about Ontario Place quite a bit this morning and how, in many ways, it anchors everything that your ministry is doing. I have a few questions about Ontario Place this morning. The ministry said that it launched Ontario Place marketing campaign in August and that will go until December. Can you share through the estimates how much is this campaign costing, how many tax dollars are going to this campaign, and which firm got the contract to deliver it?

Hon. Stan Cho: Yes, sure. Thank you, MPP Shaw, and thank you for the interest in Ontario Place. I will turn to the deputy and ADM Robertson in a second to talk about the dollar specifics, but we are going through that process currently. The marketing—I'll sort of give you the strategies and the insights into why that marketing is going to take place.

This thing being closed for the better part of two decades is unacceptable. I remember growing up, having childhood memories of going to Ontario Place with my immigrant parents when they didn't have a lot of money, and those are some of the best memories of my life, whether we were going to the Ex and going to Ontario Place afterwards—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you, Minister. We're here to discuss the estimates. I appreciate that—I also have good memories of Ontario Place. My question, very specifically through the estimates, is how much is that advertising campaign going to cost?

Hon. Stan Cho: I'll wrap up that story a little faster than for you, MPP Shaw. I'm stressing the importance of marketing this iconic place—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: And I'm asking for the dollar amount. How much?

Hon. Stan Cho: It is the most important waterfront in the entire country, and it is important to market that. That's why we're investing into this. Of course, all dollars that are spent on a marketing campaign that we are going—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I'm reclaiming the floor, Chair.

Hon. Stan Cho: —through active procurement, through now, will be made very certain through the public accounts when that is—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Reclaiming the floor—

Hon. Stan Cho: But current marketing campaigns, of course, when you are going through those procurement events—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Minister.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Do you know how much, Minister? I mean, it's your ministry. Can you tell me how much you are spending on a campaign that is so important to an area that is beloved to you and beloved to me? It should be very simple for you to know that dollar figure. You are the minister.

Hon. Stan Cho: It should be also very simple to understand that when you're doing the marketing as we speak and that procurements aren't finished yet, you can't have exact dollars when it comes to estimates. We were working on that—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I'm going to move onto my next question, Chair. Thank you very much. I'm going to reclaim my time.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): It's your time.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Yes, and quite clearly, the minister should have that number at the top of his head, but I understand that.

Hon. Stan Cho: When things are accurately—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Chair, I have the floor right now. Thank you very much, Minister.

The next thing you might be able to answer is with regard to Ontario Place. I want to make clear that through the estimates, this ministry—

Interjection.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Sorry. Thanks, John.

The ministry administration, the money that's spent through your ministry and ministry administration, is for the oversight of what happens at Ontario Place. You recently told CTV, as you are assuming ownership of nearly all of the city-owned Exhibition lands and exempting activities on these lands from various provincial and municipal laws—that's what's happening in Bill 68. Your ministry told CTV that this was about making sure the ministry could shut off a water source or run a power line, but we know that the government already has that power

under section 13 of the Rebuilding Ontario Place Act, which you talked about this morning.

My question is: Why does the ministry need the additional power to assume ownership and control of Exhibition Place? What is the reason, and much is this ownership going to cost taxpayers?

Hon. Stan Cho: It's interesting what you did there, MPP Shaw: You took something that was actually said on CTV and combined it with a little commentary that was not said.

The reality is, we are not taking over Exhibition Place. We are looking at ground infrastructure and amendments to the various important issues to make sure that we are streamlined and able to move quickly. Exhibition Place—there are no changes to the ownership structure at all. This is about building faster.

When you look at ground infrastructure—for example, if you're building and you need to obtain permits for shutting off water, we should not have to go through a month-long process of consultations and obtaining permits. We've seen that story in the past when it comes to building major infrastructure projects. Now, we promised we would be on time and on budget with this project, and we've got to move quickly. That's why—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Excuse me, Minister. You already have that power under section 13 of the Rebuilding Ontario Place Act. You have that power.

Hon. Stan Cho: This is about streamlining ground infrastructure processes to make sure that we're able to build faster, very clearly.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Okay. Thank you.

Hon. Stan Cho: But to be clear, there is no change in ownership of Exhibition Place, and nor do we intend that.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Okay. You said that. Thank you.

You also talked about the revitalization of Ontario Place. The government has said that Therme will invest \$700 million of Ontario Place, so how much of that \$700 million has Therme already secured for financing, if any? And do you know where Therme is getting this money from?

Hon. Stan Cho: All the public accounts will show very clearly where dollars have been allocated. We are looking at a process of a major procurement, and \$700 million—well, that's not all invested at once, right? There's a huge amount of work that goes into a project like this, a once-in-a-generation type of investment into the waterfront. As I said, MPP Shaw, those types of figures, as they're spent on giant procurements, are all shown through the public accounts in black-and-white dollar figures. But to speculate—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: But can you point to me where that is? Can you point that to me in the estimates or in the public accounts? I would like to know.

Really, I appreciate you saying this, because the public would also like to know: Where are these investment dollars coming from Therme? Because you know and you will understand—anybody that does any kind of infrastructure build will know—that until someone actually steps up with money, this is just vapourware. It's not even a real thing.

So can you explain? Until Therme actually risks real money—as the people, the taxpayers of Ontario, are risking real money—there really is nothing to go there. This is your ministry. Through the ministry administration, you should know the answer to whether or not Therme has provided any financing for the project at Ontario Place.

Hon. Stan Cho: It's an interesting framing. I was part of this committee seven and a half years ago. These are estimates, right? This is not public accounts.

Now, when you have a giant procurement like this and dollars have not been invested yet, you can't speculate on where those dollars have gone. That's irresponsible. So as these dollars are spent and the investments are made into this critical infrastructure, of course, that will be made public, but you're asking me to speculate in dollars not spent.

This is a \$700-million investment by the private sector into public infrastructure: as I mentioned, 50 acres of walkable trails and public spaces. This is a huge investment into the public realm, the largest green space in all of the downtown core.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: With all the trees cut away. It looks like a strip mine.

Hon. Stan Cho: As these estimates, as these investments are actualized and materialized, this will be shown in black and white, in dollar figures to the penny, in the public accounts.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: All right. I'll appreciate seeing that. Thank you very much for your answer, Minister. I know that this is something that's something that the people of Ontario would like to hear the answer for—

Hon. Stan Cho: Rightly so.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: —because of the fact that this ministry, this government, gave Therme, a foreign company, a 95-year or 99-year lease—I'm not sure how much it was. I mean, the value of that is, really, almost incalculable. I imagine that's not in any of these amounts.

0930

The Auditor General was quite clear when they said that this deal was not transparent, that it didn't follow the proper procurement rules. I appreciate your answer, but I have to say that the people deserve more than vague promises on what they're going to get in return from a deal that you struck with Therme.

But I'm going to move on to another question, if I may, Chair. Thank you very much. I know that we are not in public accounts; you've made that clear. But you did reference public accounts, so what I really want to know is, do you not, in your estimates, have any sense of the projection that you will be spending at Ontario Place through your ministry?

Hon. Stan Cho: Of course we do.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: And what is that amount?

Hon. Stan Cho: Those dollar figures are there for you in plain black and white. As we've said, these major investments —

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Well, where are they, Minister?

Hon. Stan Cho: You are happy to go into the budget, into the fall economic statement, look at the line “ministries allocation” and the amounts that we have said we are investing into this project—not just us, but the private sector. These are major investments.

Now, it's interesting you mentioned the best interests of the public good. Well, having a place like this shuttered—the most iconic waterfront in the entire country, at the economic engine of Canada—for the better part of two decades is not in the public interest. That's what we're investing in, MPP Shaw.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: You and I will disagree on that, and you know that the people of Ontario disagree on the condition of Ontario Place. You know that the people of Ontario are not happy that you razed all the trees at Ontario Place without an environmental assessment. The people of Liberty Village are not happy that, because of that, coyotes are running feral in their neighbourhood and you're taking no responsibility for that. So you and I have a difference of opinion on Ontario Place and on the purpose, but I'm going to move on from that, thank you very much, because I was looking for dollar figures pointing out in the estimates where the investment is, but you don't seem to have them—

Hon. Stan Cho: Which are all available.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I'm going to move on.

I would actually like to say that my parents lived in—they called it the beach. That's what they called it. Whether it was “Wa-say-ga” Beach or “Wa-saw-ga” Beach, they just called it the beach. So I'm very familiar with that region. I'm also very familiar with the fact that people are not pleased with the fact that the government is going to sell off—is it 650 acres of prime beachfront water to developers?

So my question to you is, how would the government do this? It anchors what you're talking about, but moving the museum at Nancy Island has significant environmental impacts for the silt and the river there, the Nottawasaga River. And there are sensitive areas at Wasaga Beach. As we all know, the piping plover, an endangered species, is much beloved by that community. There are very sensitive sand dunes. That is, in fact, the world's largest freshwater beach in all of Canada. You talked about all the things that Ontario has to offer in your speech, which I also appreciate. It needs to be understood that that beach is the longest freshwater beach in all of Ontario. It's not only cultural, but it's an important environmental heritage. So, taking over 650 acres of this for development is something that is very risky and is not universally loved and accepted as you would represent.

My question to you is, how much is the government going to be investing in this takeover, and what can the expected return be for the taxpayers of Ontario—not Wasaga Beach, but Ontario?

Hon. Stan Cho: Well, let's start by a point of clarification—through you, Chair. It is not just Ontario's longest freshwater beach. It is, in fact, at 14 kilometres, the world's longest freshwater beach.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I did say that. Yes, I was quite clear that it's the world's longest, thank you.

Hon. Stan Cho: Okay. Maybe we can check the record on that. I heard Ontario and Canada.

Regardless, I want to be very clear on this: We are not selling the land—hard stop. We are not selling the land, and there are no environmental protections being removed whatsoever. In fact, the condition of transferring this to the municipality is that the land remains within the public realm, and there are strict environmental regulations to make sure that this beautiful, pristine piece of 14-kilometre beach stays that way.

Now, when you transfer municipality ownership, they know best. They're the ones who deal with this day in and day out. We believe this is the right move for making sure that this world treasure is marketed the right way.

But to be very clear, and to answer your question very directly, we are not selling Wasaga Beach.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: So you're not selling it, but you are taking it out of the provincial park—you're removing its protection as a provincial park in Ontario.

Hon. Stan Cho: We are not removing any protections whatsoever.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: It will no longer be part of a provincial park.

Hon. Stan Cho: All environmental laws, as I said, will remain the same. It will remain public access. We are transferring ownership—to be clear, once again—to the municipality.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: With all due respect, Minister, I don't even know if there are any environmental laws left in the province of Ontario.

Hon. Stan Cho: Well, there are. Happy to—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: But that's a whole other issue.

Hon. Stan Cho: Okay.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Let's move on, if I can, to the part of your ministry that is gaming. You said gaming is booming. You said that the revenue is exceeding \$10 billion. Am I correct in hearing that, and that these are historical figures?

Hon. Stan Cho: Yes, combined with land-based and online gaming.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I also noticed that in the estimates, there's a huge jump in the cost of gaming operations. Could you tell me how much that has accelerated and why there's such a huge jump in the cost of gaming in the province?

Hon. Stan Cho: When you say "cost of gaming," can you clarify what you mean by that?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: In the revenue—well, it's right in your own estimates. It says the cost of gaming operation in your estimates has actually gone up substantially from 2024-25 to 2025-26.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Sixty seconds left.

Hon. Stan Cho: Payments back to municipalities.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Transfer payments.

Hon. Stan Cho: Correct—payments that go from gaming revenue into municipalities. I don't know if you want to clarify that, Deputy?

Ms. Nancy Kennedy: Yes. The expenses for gaming for OLG contain a number of payments that go out. The

cost of doing business with them also involves municipal host payments that go to the municipality for hosting a gaming site; payments to First Nations, so the OFNLP; and also the horse racing industry, which is an important partner.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you for that. I appreciate that. Really, what I would like to ask is: Would the earlier question that I asked about the cost of the Ontario marketing campaign—I'm asking if the ministry would get that response to me in writing and follow up with that. That would be really helpful. Can you commit to that?

Hon. Stan Cho: All are available through public accounts, absolutely.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: But the ministry will provide that to this committee?

Hon. Stan Cho: All available through public accounts, absolutely.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: You will make this available to the committee?

Hon. Stan Cho: As those numbers are figured out and the procurements are spent, dollars actually spent will be accounted for in public accounts.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thank you.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: So, no—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): You're out of time this time.

MPP Cerjanec, you have 15 minutes.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Perfect.

Through you, Chair: Thank you, Minister, for your presentation this morning. There are a lot of great things, absolutely, happening in Ontario; a lot of great non-profit arts and culture organizations and folks trying to do that work, and union partners as well.

I want to pick up on gaming, first off, and very specifically, the Hiawatha Horse Park in Sarnia. As you know, Minister, the agreement that was in place is not being renewed at Hiawatha and also at Kawartha Downs. It raises some concerns around lost revenue for the city of Sarnia—something that is really important to them, important to the 50-plus jobs at the casino at Hiawatha as well. My question is: Will the ministry be releasing that business case in relation to Hiawatha? And what is the ministry's plans for the people of Sarnia?

Hon. Stan Cho: Thank you for that important question, MPP Cerjanec. It's an important issue, horse racing, and I want to start with that. Because six years ago, I remember being a member of the Treasury Board talking about why it was important to support that industry. There is, of course, a lot of community involvement. Horse racing has a rich history in our country. It's important to put that on the record, that our government understands the importance of horse racing. And I know the importance of that particular track.

When it comes to the details of the optional slots, this was supposed to be closed at a certain, set amount of time, but this is something that we are actively looking at, understanding that there have been issues raised about closing it. The options are all being considered. This was a situation in which there was a lease agreement that was agreed to be terminated at a certain point.

To that particular issue, I'm happy to communicate with you after this committee is over to sort of give you an update on how we're progressing through that, but it's something I'm actively looking at at the moment.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Thank you very much, Minister. I just highlight, with Hiawatha in Sarnia, in particular, that they're seeing a lot of folks coming over from Michigan, because there isn't horse racing on that side of Michigan, and families and people coming and making a whole day of their experience there. In speaking to the mayor and speaking to other folks, it's something that really does seem like it's working quite well there. I think it would be well considered to consider keeping that casino gaming operation there. As you know, there's a casino in Point Edward as well.

But I think it's really important that that ends up continuing for the 50 jobs that are there, for the tourism impact, for the revenue, and really creating a facility that I think people of all ages can come and enjoy—a day at the track, a day at the casino and all the other amenities in that area. So I thank you for committing to following up with me on that.

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I want to just switch gears a little bit to Ontario Place. Something that I'm specifically interested in is what discussions or agreement the province has had with the city of Toronto around any potential land swaps. Has there been any conversations with the city of Toronto around land swaps at the Ontario Place site?

Hon. Stan Cho: Not that I'm aware of. I see my deputy and the ADM shaking their heads, so no.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: So it's not something the city of Toronto ever brought forward, trying to be a partner on the Ontario Place redevelopment and site, to create something that might work even better for the people of Ontario?

Hon. Stan Cho: Well, we've had a lot of great synergy. I mean, the city of Toronto is a huge partner in this. We have Ontario Place, but right across the way, they have all of that land at Exhibition Place, and the idea is to sort of create the yin and the yang, if you will, not to separate them.

Next year, we have the Tempo; we have the Sceptres; we have the World Cup; we have BMO Field—all on the Toronto side. We have the Ex. We have all these amazing things. We have to just create this vision of a hub for destinations and transit—the GO line going there, the terminal station of the Ontario Line being there. This is why we're expecting six million visitors every single year to this place.

The city of Toronto is a massive partner. While there have been no conversations of land swaps per se, there have been many conversations about best use for land. Any decisions that we make as we build forward, amendments to ROPA, all of these things—the city of Toronto was a very active partner and involved in all of those discussions.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Thank you, Minister, for that.

The reason why I say that is the waterfront is such a great asset and having access to the waterfront is really

important. With a parking garage blocking out part of that waterfront—and I think there's probably some potential for traffic and challenge issues of coming in and out. There's the Martin Goodman Trail. There are a lot of other things along the Ontario Place site. So there may be some better uses, whether it's the location of the parking garage, and what the plan is—I know it supports the Live Nation activities there as well.

We need to really ensure that Ontario Place is a site for everyone and a site that everyone can access and can be an important tourism driver for the province. But I think it's important that we get it right, that we ensure that we've got public access to the waterfront.

Hon. Stan Cho: I agree with you. If you let me comment on that—to the honourable member, through you, Chair: You mentioned, the parking garage. I would love to sit down with you and show you sort of what the future plans are for this. We are on water. So to put parking anywhere else was extremely, extremely expensive when you get there. And the reality is, when you got your single mom with three kids you want to take down to Ontario Place and you're driving or you're coming in from Kapuskasing, transit is not always an option. So with six million visitors planned, you need thousands of parking spaces.

What my offer is then to the honourable member, through you, Chair, is that we sit down and I can show you what options we looked at. Where the site is positioned, where the intention is to make this—it's got a berm that kind of hides part of the structure, but also there's opportunities, I think, to make it look a lot better, right?

But the reality is parking is absolutely necessary on the site. I'm happy to show you the reasoning that we've got behind what we're doing here.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Thank you, Minister. I appreciate that. And I appreciate the collaboration, in some ways, because it's important that we're really talking about these things and ensuring that an asset that's going to be there for generations is going to be something that works really well.

I have many fond memories of going to the former Ontario Place site on school trips. It was always a place of joy and a place of fun.

Hon. Stan Cho: I'll buy you a beer at the marina.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Well, there we go. And even during the pandemic, I had some opportunities to go around there as well, before we've seen what ends up happening.

I do have some questions, as well, just around the Therme facility in particular. Is the ministry confident that that facility is going to be commercially viable?

Hon. Stan Cho: Yes, absolutely. When you're looking at this \$700-million investment—and if you haven't yet, the materials and the renderings and all the information that we know are concrete has all been published. If you look at that investment that Therme is investing into—I believe the name is actually pronounced “Ther-meyah” or “Ther-mey,” right? Is that correct?

Ms. Nancy Kennedy: “Ther-muh.”

Hon. Stan Cho: It's been mispronounced by me for a long time.

If you look at the actual investments, what I was really happy to learn was that the entire perimeter of Ontario Place, including part of Therme's side of the lease, is public realm. Imagine, on the western side which, arguably—well, not arguably, in my opinion—will have the best sunset views on that side, that is actually available to the public. That's part of that \$700-million investment.

And to speak to the financial viability of the company, all checks and balances have been run through, and we believe that they are indeed a willing and able partner to deliver on what they've promised.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Just to pick up on that, in the event that their attendance is much lower than anticipated or there are losses or they're struggling there, what protections does the province have in place with the lease in terms of what would happen if, let's say, Therme says, "Oh, we can't operate anymore"?

Hon. Stan Cho: ADM Robertson was heavily involved in those conversations, and those checks and balances are there, so maybe the ADM can speak to that.

Mr. Michael Robertson: Thank you very much, Minister. For the record, my name is Michael Robertson. I'm the assistant deputy minister of the Ontario Place Redevelopment Secretariat here in the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming.

Through you, Madam Chair, to the member, as Infrastructure Ontario was building the lease with Therme, we built these provisions into it to ensure that the province and the taxpayers of the province were protected in the, as the minister has said, unlikely event that things were to change.

We retained the confidence that the minister has noted that all of the financial gates that were put into the lease have been and continue to be met by Therme, so we are confident in their financial viability. But into the lease itself, which we have made public about a year or so ago, are some of the provisions that do indeed protect the province, the ministry and the taxpayers should things change on that site.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Okay. Let's say, in the event that they went belly up, what would end up happening? Do they have the ability to assign the lease? Does the province have right of first refusal? How does that work?

Mr. Michael Robertson: I'm not a lawyer, so I'm not going to get into the specifics of that. But what we can commit, Madam Chair, through you and through the minister, with his consent, is to get that information together and provide that to this committee.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Perfect. Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

I'll switch gears a little bit away from Ontario Place and just talk about the AGO. I had the opportunity to attend events there but also go around the facility, and it's a wonderful facility. I know it's not an agency of the province itself, but it does receive significant support from the province. Has there been any changes year over year in the provincial grant awarded to the AGO?

Hon. Stan Cho: The deputy might have to refresh my memory on the funding we provided to them last year on—

Ms. Nancy Kennedy: It's \$4 million extra.

Hon. Stan Cho: It's \$4 million extra on top of their allocation was committed last year for some of the operational challenges that they were having.

Ms. Nancy Kennedy: And just to say, we're in active discussion with them and our major museums including the ROM, just about their funding and sustainability. But last year, in discussions with them, we provided them with an extra \$4 million for their operations on top of the \$21 million that they already received. We understand how important they are to the province and the city.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Perfect. Thank you—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Deputy, sorry. I just need you to state your name and title once.

Ms. Nancy Kennedy: Oh, I'm sorry. Deputy Minister Nancy Kennedy.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thanks.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Is there any consideration, whether in the estimates or the future, of contributing to the capital expansion at the AGO? Because I know, right now, the federal government has stepped up to help support that capital expansion. It's, again, going to be an important driver of tourism. Folks coming to Toronto, they want to see a lot of different attractions; the AGO is definitely one of those attractions. Is the province giving any consideration to support for the capital expansion taking place there?

Hon. Stan Cho: To the honourable MPP, we have shown that we are a willing partner in capital investments. I just pointed to the Shaw Festival, Destination Niagara and Destination Wasaga. We're always looking at a good business case.

From what I understand, some of the larger institutions have an excellent philanthropic base for capital expansion. What we're trying to balance is that it's also important to invest into the operational side of things. Capital is great, expansion is great, new wings are fantastic, but it often adds to the operational challenges of an institution, particularly still fresh off the heels of COVID and trying to get those numbers back.

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It's a balance. What I would say is to absolutely look at all business cases—looking at both sides of it, the capital and the operational side. But I'm always willing to listen to a good business case.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Thank you. I know the AGO has a very ambitious private capital campaign around it. I know they're hoping to be very successful with that.

It was just when I looked at the sign of the expansion, I noticed there wasn't the government of Ontario logo on that. I felt that was a missed opportunity to continue investing on the capital side for our premier art gallery in Ontario.

Hon. Stan Cho: Maybe one last point there—it is important to invest into the capital, but we have topped up on their base operational funding as their need be.

I guess the point I'm making is: That's important, but making sure they're able to continue to operate and provide programming is important as well.

And to the AGO, to the honourable member: If you're so interested in the art, they've got this new, beautiful Dani Reiss side of the wing going up. I'm happy to do a hard hat tour with you there as well. It's some special stuff coming to the AGO.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Thank you.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): You just have a minute and 30 seconds.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Why don't I invoke 3805 and 3804? What portion do you have allocated towards destination development? That's infrastructure, visitor experience, versus cultural programming—so arts, museums and libraries.

Hon. Stan Cho: Can you clarify? Sorry. I didn't get the 3804.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: The capital side in 3804 and then also—I think the operating side is more relevant in 3805, just around destination development versus cultural programming, and what that breakdown ends up looking like.

Hon. Stan Cho: Maybe I can get some clarification on what we're looking at here. Is this a page number you're referencing?

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: No, the vote numbers.

Hon. Stan Cho: Oh, the vote numbers. Sorry. I don't have that in front of me. It's in specific reference to the libraries you're talking about—to the honourable member?

Ms. Nancy Kennedy: Yes.

Hon. Stan Cho: Please go ahead.

Ms. Nancy Kennedy: We spend \$28 million a year on library grants. We spend \$25 million a year on RRR, so capital repair.

You asked a question about operating?

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Just in terms of destination development versus cultural programming.

Ms. Nancy Kennedy: Yes. So, Destination Ontario is our arm that does a lot of our destination work. We spend \$33 million there on their total operations. I would say \$18 million of that goes to marketing—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Sorry, Deputy. Time's up.

Over to the government side for the remainder, until 10 o'clock. MPP Firin.

MPP Mohamed Firin: Through you, Chair, I'd like to thank the minister, the deputy and the assistant deputy minister.

Minister, what is the ministry doing to attract outside investments, and how are you working with Destination Ontario to amplify Ontario's unique experience and attract international visitors? Also, how are we supporting and protecting important destinations like Niagara and Wasaga?

Hon. Stan Cho: That's such an important question. I want to thank the committee member for that and for his work as parliamentary assistant in the ministry.

I've had the opportunity to go on several trade missions, tourism missions, to sell the province globally. I'll speak to a recent one in Japan and Korea in September.

I was surprised to learn that in Tokyo, Osaka and Seoul, not too many people know about Toronto—which, being born and raised in the city, I was surprised to learn isn't the centre of the universe. But in Asia, they actually know Niagara Falls much better.

It was an eye-opening experience when you learn that there's people around the world who know Niagara Falls better than the largest city in our country. It makes sense, right? Some of these cities in Japan and Korea are the size of our country. Think Tokyo—the population is pretty much that of Canada.

The point I'm making to you, to the honourable member, is we need to lean into our strengths and what we're known for. If worldwide and in particular in Asia, we're known for the Niagara region, then perhaps our marketing should be focused on that.

That's actually shown in the numbers that I received from the Niagara Parks Commission this year. There is no doubt that American visitation is down, but I was surprised to learn the increased spending numbers and visitation numbers that have actually come globally. It's staggering. The visitation from Asia is way up; the visitation from Europe is way up.

I'll just give you some numbers from CEO David Adames of the Niagara Parks Commission. Fiscal so far this year, revenue is up year over year from South Korea by 16%—this is to the Niagara region; Japan, 26%; China, 15%; Australia, 13%; the United Kingdom, 38%; Germany, 18%, and France, 33%—staggering numbers.

I think what we're doing at the ministry to sort of capitalize on marketing certain areas of our country and our province is, let's focus on what seems to be working worldwide and put some efforts in there. I think we have an opportunity to open new markets. It's not just about the supply chain, which we're working on in other ministries throughout the government. It's on our tourism industry. We know that American visitation eventually will return once geopolitical uncertainties subside. But I think we have a glorious opportunity to look towards other markets and strengthen that relationship. The first part that we're doing at the ministry is looking to explore those opportunities. Of course, we're working with our agency Destination Ontario on marketing to those areas as well.

I think I'll add a point as well, to the PA. I'm not quite ready to fully talk about baseball yet, but we saw the visitation increases with what sports can do in the Blue Jays and how much tourism that can drive towards a city. Downtown reported an increase of 18% in hotel stays. Rogers themselves have reported a 26% increase in spend in restaurants and bars in just the downtown core over the playoffs. These are massive injections of numbers. I think Destination Ontario is looking at sports tourism and what kind of numbers that can drive as well. I think we're just expanding the horizons a little bit on where we can market our dollars and bring more revenue to the province.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): In reality, there's 10 minutes left on your side, or almost 11, but the clock is going to time out in about three minutes, MPP Saunderson, just to give you that parameter.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Thank very much, Madam Chair. Maybe I'll use it to launch into my question and we'll leave the answer for the return.

I want to thank the minister and your staff, your team for all that you're doing in Ontario. You've been talking about Destination Ontario; we won't talk about the Jays, but certainly, as you said, a huge boost and wonderful to see. Maybe the Leafs can pick up where they left off. We'll see.

In my riding of Simcoe–Grey, Wasaga Beach is a very big part of our tourism sector, and it's been talked about today. We saw in the 2025 budget the announcement there, and then you came up with the Premier to make the big announcement in the spring. The area is still very much abuzz with that.

There is, interestingly, some outside interference coming, really, from the GTA area, to be honest, which is much against the grain of the feeling in the riding. There's a lot of misinformation out there, particularly, around that. We heard some earlier: It's 60 hectares, which is 150 acres, not 650 acres. In fact, the total size of the park is over 1,800 hectares. So this is 3%. It's actually being transferred to the municipality, which controls the balance of the beach, to unify the control of the beach.

Nancy Island is not being transferred; it's being transferred interprovincially from one department to another. This is a huge opportunity. I know my children were all educated in Collingwood. They would get on a bus and they would drive by Nancy Island, which houses the remains of the Nancy, which was a turning point in the War of 1812, a pivotal part of Canada's history and Ontario's history. They would go to the marina facility and Penetang heritage bay or up to Sainte-Marie among the Hurons—all very good facilities that are controlled by Ministry of Tourism. But they would drive by the Nancy, and it's only open four to five weeks during the year on part-time employment.

I know the ministry has been talking with the friends of Nancy Island, who have been working very hard and actually have charitable status, and have been working to raise funds for many years. The transfer of the Nancy Island pavilion is seen very much in our community as a huge boon, but also overdue recognition of the importance of the Nancy. In fact, the whole facility was built in 1967.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): MPP Saunderson, it's 10 o'clock. I'm sorry.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Okay. I'm going to pick up when we get back—

Hon. Stan Cho: Please do.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: —and I'll get to a question.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Yes. When we come back, we'll have eight minutes and seven seconds.

Committee is now recessed until 3 p.m., when we'll resume the consideration of the estimates of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming.

The committee recessed from 1000 to 1500.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Good afternoon. The Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy will now come to order. We are resuming

the consideration of the estimates of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming.

We left off with eight minutes and seven seconds left on the government side. MPP Saunderson last had the floor, so I will go back to him. MPP Saunderson.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Because my memory's not very good, I'm just going to recap a bit of what I was saying. I was asking, Minister, about the Destination Wasaga initiative, an announcement that would see 60 hectares, approximately 3% of the provincial park, transferred to the municipality so that control of the beach is consistent across all 14 acres, and then, the significant investment in Nancy Island: that important historic site which is now being transferred to your portfolio, so it's not being transferred out of the government's control.

The first part of my question—I know the municipality was very excited to have you up there in the spring to talk about this, but if you could just go over the investments that are being made and how this all fits in with the ministry's strategy to partner with our municipalities to promote tourism as an economic driver.

Hon. Stan Cho: Thank you very much, PA Saunderson. You deserve a lot of the credit. This has been an important file for you. You're a former mayor in the area. You know Wasaga Beach extremely well, and so your advice and your input have been pivotal in these investments being made. Thank you for your efforts on that, because I think Wasaga Beach and the area is a gem. It's a beautiful area of the country. It is, indeed, the world's longest freshwater beach. I just went up there with my family this summer. It's a place that, as beautiful as it is, has a lot of potential to drive even more tourism and help the local businesses there to a much greater extent.

There are pieces there that are lacking. You think about infrastructure and accessing the beach. You think about necessary services and amenities, like washrooms. For anybody who's gone up there during peak season, it's crowded and they're over capacity when it comes to some of the restaurants and places to shop.

I think the right investment is now, into the area, to drive more tourism, especially at a time when Destination Ontario, last year, said that 92% of Ontarians planned on travelling within their own borders—and understandably, with some of the geopolitical uncertainty that we're facing these days.

To recap on those announcements being made, we're investing nearly \$38 million into Destination Wasaga, as I said, to make it that premier tourism destination. This includes a revitalization of downtown and some of the really important historic sites that are right there in the town of Wasaga Beach; \$25 million of that investment going to the redevelopment of Nancy Island Historic Site. This is—I don't need to tell you, with your knowledge on the area—a historically very significant piece of our Canadian history, and it's fallen into disrepair for many years. That investment will rejuvenate this, not only to draw tourists in, but to understand our history a little bit better and to appreciate our cultural assets.

Some \$2 million will be for the town of Wasaga Beach to support tourism planning work, as we develop the

downtown area. Really, it must be said—I said it earlier, before the break—the municipality has been asking for better control, better access, to have input into how the town is redeveloped, for quite some time. I know you were part of those discussions with the ministry as well. It's the right move. The municipality knows Wasaga Beach best, of course, because they live it, breathe it every single day and talk to the local residents every single day.

Our government is proud to support that, while protecting the environmental protections that are necessary. As I said earlier, the condition of this entire deal is to make sure that it remains public access on the beach. So I think we've struck the right balance here, in terms of investments, and we've got some very tight guidelines around how those investments will be issued to the municipality. We expect the municipality to co-operate with what we've put out. But we're very proud of this investment.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Thank you very much for that, Minister. Just a quick follow-up: You spoke very eloquently, in the final minutes of your presentation this morning, about the incredible environment we have and opportunities we have in this province to develop tourism generally. You also spoke in your comments about the other destinations—

Interruption.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Excuse me, MPP Saunderson. I'm sorry that I have to interrupt. There is a 30-minute bell right now. I just need all parties to agree that we just keep going until five minutes before we have to go to vote. Do we have all-party agreement on that? Agreed.

I'm sorry. I've stopped the clock, so you still have three minutes and nine seconds.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Destination Niagara, destination St. Lawrence—there were others in northern Ontario. I'm just wondering if you can comment about the overarching strategy to develop tourism in Ontario and, given the geopolitical situation, how this is a great opportunity for us to do that and create a real circular economy in the province. Just talk about, again, the collaborative approach with the different areas, different municipal governments, different stakeholder partners to promote tourism across the province generally.

Hon. Stan Cho: Thank you for that, MPP Saunderson. That's such an important question because tourism in Ontario is almost a \$34-billion-a-year industry. It's as important of an economic driver as any other industry that we have, whether it's parts manufacturing or widgets manufacturing or what have you. It's 104,000 businesses in the province and most of these are small businesses. You're looking at 300,000 people employed in the tourism industry. Sometimes, for whatever reason, I think collectively governments of all stripes and all levels don't see it as that type of an economic driver. I think that's a mistake.

We should also be proud of the place we get to call home. In my opening comments, I touched on this a little

bit. We're a vast province. As I said earlier, 14 European countries can fit within our borders.

We're also lucky to have four seasons. There's a growing trend amongst the tourism world called cool-cations. There are a lot of places in the world, especially with some of our environmental concerns of late, that never get to see cool climates, that never see snow. You know in February, Ontario gets its fair share of that, but that's a draw. We should celebrate the fact that we have those four seasons and—I touched on this earlier—the natural beauty of the place we get to call home.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): One minute left.

Hon. Stan Cho: I know with President Trump, some of the comments he's made on social media has never made me prouder to be a Canadian. We should be showing off those treasures, whether it's Niagara Falls, whether it's Wasaga Beach, whether it's the beautiful St. Lawrence parks. Up and down, these are gorgeous areas that the world is just finding out about. I think it's an untapped place for us to be able to draw on international visitors and show off what we have to offer and, combined with that, that people come here from all over the world to contribute to this diaspora, this beautiful tapestry of cultures that live in harmony.

We have a lot to be proud of in this province, and I think the world needs to see it and we can capitalize from it as well.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Great. There is 27 seconds left.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: I'll just thank the minister for the incredible work you're doing, not only in Wasaga Beach but also in the town of the Blue Mountains and other ski resorts that were helped out during the pandemic by this government, and for the great work you do on the ground to make sure that we're promoting tourism, that we're tapping into a very important part of our economy and making sure we are strengthening and moving forward given the times we're in.

Hon. Stan Cho: I appreciate that.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much, everyone.

We'll now move over to the official opposition. MPP Shaw.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: This morning in my questioning—well, to begin with, the minister was clear to say that gaming is booming, and the minister's own review said that there is a \$10-billion revenue from gaming in the province.

I believe the deputy minister also—when I asked why there was a jump in the cost of the gaming operating budget, the answer was that was because of transfer payments.

What I would like to focus on is, while in fact this industry is booming, we need to focus a little bit on the public harms that come with this rapidly growing gambling industry.

I'm going to start by reading a letter from a constituent that says:

“Dear Sandy,

"I want to share my story with you. I've been struggling with a gambling addiction since I was 19, and it's been a tough road. Online gambling is especially challenging because it's so accessible and addictive. It's not just about the money. It's about the time it takes away from loved ones. I've lost so much to this addiction including relationships and opportunities. Everything I worked so hard for, my life savings—gone in a push of a button. The constant ads don't help. They're everywhere, making it feel like it's no big deal, but it is a big deal. It's a serious addiction that can take over your life."

1510

Zack is not alone in this concern. I'm sure that the members across the way will be getting similar concerns from parents and family members, particularly with the sports gambling. It seems to be particularly prevalent, and the research shows with young men it's sports gambling. It's just everywhere. There are people gambling on everything, including golf, all kinds of things that previously weren't part of the arena, if I can say that.

I will say also that it's kind of interesting to see that the province has gone to the Court of Appeals to expand gaming. With the court's decision—I think it's being appealed—people now will be able to play or gamble online with people all across the world. While that may increase what I think the minister calls "player experience," the court's decision could also pave the way for increased opportunity for people to gamble. But certainly, increased access comes with dangers, especially by allowing international players. It's another one of those things where it's going to increase engagement and the potential for more risk for harm. That comes from Canada's Research Chair in Addictions and Mental Health. Other online gambling experts have said that experts are urging governments to reduce the public health harms that come with the rapidly growing gambling industry.

Sports betting—this is from a basketball coach in Toronto: "Sports betting is now so intertwined with sports as a whole, you can't watch an entire game without seeing an ad," said Jeremy Alleyne, who is a basketball coach near Toronto.

A young man named Oliver reports that he got into online gambling with poker in his early twenties. He goes on to say, "It's so simple to just get on your phone, to open up any of the many apps.

"It consumed my life. It consumed everything. I thought about it. I dreamt about it."

Experts warn that these harms go beyond just financial loss. The Lancet Public Health Commission on gambling said that this "poses a substantial threat to public health," and they repeat what I've just said, that these harms go beyond financial ruin; they affect relationships.

I'm going to say too that I spoke to a constituent who explained just that, how this has impacted their family. They have a young family member who never had any addictive behaviours, and now, through sports gambling, is in such a desperate way, borrowing money, spending money, selling all of his belongings. The parent described

to me that if you are married to someone with a chronic gambling addiction, you have the choice to leave that relationship, but when you're a parent and it's your child that is facing this struggle, you can't leave. You have no other option but to see this through, and it is destroying marriages and relationships, and it's very, very prevalent.

My question to you would be, given this backdrop—the evidence is there, the research is there that with the explosion of online gambling, we've also seen an accelerated explosion of people seeking help for gambling addictions. I want to ask, how much of those transfer payments that you mentioned today from the operating budget go to help families and people that are struggling with gambling addictions?

Hon. Stan Cho: I want to thank the honourable member for this question because I agree this is a hugely important issue. I have intimate knowledge of this particular issue. It has affected my family as well, so it's very personal for me. I would actually like to clarify with the member, how old is Oliver today, the young man that you referenced that started gambling in his early twenties?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I'd have to look at the article. I think it just said he got into it in his twenties, but it doesn't say his age, right now.

Hon. Stan Cho: To MPP Shaw, through you, Chair: It's people like Oliver that caused this government to look at this issue very closely five years ago. The issue that we were specifically looking at—and I will answer your specific funding questions in just a second, but this is important context. The issue we specifically looked at five years ago was that online gambling was happening, whether it was a legal framework or not. It was operating in a grey market, where hundreds of millions of dollars—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Yes, I know that, so let's—

Hon. Stan Cho: This is really important context, MPP, if you'll indulge, because this is related to the funding numbers that we've attached.

That online grey market, which was distributing funds worldwide, had a 1-800 help number. Now, for problem gamblers—as I said, an intimate issue for me in my family—when you called that 1-800 number for help as a problem gambler, you were rerouted around the world. In my particular experience, the individual was rerouted to Lithuania, where there were absolutely no measures of help available in any language that was comprehensible to the person seeking help. That's why our government moved very quickly to bring that online grey market in-house and regulate it here in Ontario.

Now, of course, we spoke of the revenues, which go to health care, education and important social services, but the other thing that it does is twofold:

(1) It brings help right here at home. When you call the number on the Responsible Gambling Council's website or the number available on these gaming sites, you are put through to a direct person locally.

(2) The funding numbers that we were able to attach are very clear. In 2023-24, we provided over \$30 million in funding for responsible gambling programs, service focused on education, outreach and addiction supports. We

also provided the Responsible Gambling Council, RGC, an additional \$3 million annually starting in 2024-25. In addition, OLG allocated \$25 million for responsible gambling activities through their PlaySmart centres.

Now, the other, third piece, which is also very important to understand, is that we spoke about the traditional gaming revenues as combined with the online gaming revenues. They don't speak to each other. What I mean by that is, if you have a problem gambling issue in a land-based casino, you can self-exclude yourself from playing and then you're not able to gamble anymore, because you're on a self-exclusion list. That is not the same list when it comes to online gambling, so you could easily move back and forth between the two avenues. If you have a problem with online gambling, you could go to a land-based casino, because the two self-exclusion lists are separate. This is why we're conducting a gaming review in a very quickly changing landscape of gaming.

So I've given you the numbers on what we've invested into responsible gambling and the future plans to understand that these two forms of gambling are related. If you have a problem with gambling, which is very serious, we need to make sure that all forms of gambling are accounted for and protected. But the point is, we're getting the people with problem gambling the help they need and providing the resources that are necessary to make sure we can get them off that path.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Okay. I really do genuinely appreciate your answer, but I will tell you that my experience talking to family members is that they struggled to find to find help. They couldn't access it. There was a waiting list for treatment. I appreciate your lofty goals and I truly take you at your word that this is a concern, but it's not where it should be. It's not where it should be.

You talk about \$30 million. I really just want to know, as a percentage of a \$10-billion revenue—I think that that possibly should be escalating with the revenue that you're seeing in casinos, and so I just want to know: Is that \$30 million going directly to programming? As this revenue increases and as the follow increases, will your commitment to providing more and more resources be parallel?

Hon. Stan Cho: I'll agree once again with the MPP—through you, Chair—that I think the measure of success is here when you don't have any problem gambling cases at all. That is the goal: to make sure that this is a responsible method of entertainment—and for the majority of people, it is. There are people out there who enjoy this responsibly. That is the goal: While providing these essential services that we all rely on through revenue, we make sure that people are gambling responsibly. That is the point.

When it comes to the investments into the Responsible Gambling Council, they are an independent party, not related to the government, who do absolutely fantastic work and have a proven track record of helping those with the problem gambling issues. We rely on the partners like that, and that was very purposeful. The government didn't want to be the one trying to administer help when we're not the experts in that.

And if there are any resources that you would like me to share on the Responsible Gambling Council's work, I'm

happy to share it. They're individuals who I've had a long relationship with since my time as parliamentary assistant at the Ministry of Finance, when these discussions were first taking place. But we trust that partner with the \$30-million investment, as well as the OLG, who's done great work through their PlaySmart centres.

1520

Ms. Sandy Shaw: All right. Thank you, Minister. I appreciate that answer.

I will note, and I don't know if it's still ongoing, but you did talk about an iGaming review, and in it you committed to consulting the experts. It may just be the way this report is written, but you talked about, you know, it will include stakeholders, experts involved in online casinos and more. It won't be limited to just politicians. The review will consider the pros and cons from operators and other professionals, and you talked about limiting red tape for operators.

I'm hoping that you will include in this consultation, if you haven't already done so, the experts when it comes to the addictiveness of this of this behaviour.

Hon. Stan Cho: One hundred per cent, those parties will be involved.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Okay. Thank you.

I want to now focus on the advertising part of online gaming. We all know you can't watch a game without there being sports betting. Even Sportsnet includes odds in their coverage, and the apps are so pernicious, if I will, that it's just on your phone. All you have to do is tap an app and you can spend next week's paycheck.

I know the government banned professional athletes, which—you didn't have to worry about the Leafs because I don't know if they are actually professional athletes, but that's another question.

Hon. Stan Cho: That's a bit of a low blow, MPP Shaw, to be honest with you.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Well, Marner is gone. They're toast now.

But anyway, my question is—I think there's still a sense that these are ads and that those are unregulated, that that kind of coverage, Sportsnet kind of coverage—that if you look in the sports section of the Toronto Star, the odds are put there, the experts talk about the betting. That's a form of—in my mind, it's an unregulated ad.

So my question to you is, do you agree with me that these are unregulated advertisements and that the average person that's addicted to this doesn't see the difference between what is a regulated ad that doesn't have Jamie Foxx on it and what they see in the newspaper or what they see on TV when they're watching Sportsnet?

Hon. Stan Cho: I agree with the honourable member that certainly when you watch sports or you look at sports on traditional forms of media, it's not even close to what I grew up with. There are odds, there are different forms and numbers I truly don't understand—the minus 165 or whatever it is.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: You can bet on anything.

Hon. Stan Cho: You can bet on anything. It is pervasive and it is at your fingertips. It's very concerning and you have to monitor it very carefully.

Now, of course, all advertising guidelines are monitored through the AGCO, but there's always room for improvement. That's why the AGCO, with regard to Internet gaming advertising in August of 2023, to the very purpose of protecting children and youth, announced that it would be updating the registrar standards for gaming and prohibiting the use of athletes as well.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Forty seconds left.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I'm going to go back to this, but I appreciate this answer. My question will be, and I'll leave it with you, if any of these operators have been in violation of these advertising rules. You can answer that later—and if there are sanctions, and if you can give me an example of any operators that you've had to sanction or who violated these rules.

I have 20 seconds, right, so—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Twelve.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: You have 12 seconds.

Hon. Stan Cho: MPP Shaw—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I'll bring it back on my next round.

Hon. Stan Cho: Yes, sure. Absolutely. Happy to expand on it, but yes, we take any violation very seriously.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much. We'll now go to MPP Cerjanec. Just so you know, we're going to stop five minutes out to go to vote.

So you can start, please.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Thank you and through you, Chair, I want to talk a little bit about the Ontario Science Centre. The science centre for me is a place where I experienced a lot of wonder and joy as a kid. I'll be frank: I love the current location of the science centre—very much set in the ravine.

It's something that for my constituents out in Ajax and Durham region—and I know folks in other parts of the 905 as well, in York region for example—the location of the current science centre is quite convenient for them. It takes a lot longer to get downtown. Good luck getting some school trips on the GO train or public transit, trying to get to the science centre. Imagine corralling 30 kids. I think that's going to be pretty challenging.

So I wanted to ask about the existing science centre: What plans right now does the government have with that current building?

Hon. Stan Cho: There are a couple of issues there, to the honourable member. Let me start by saying that the science centre is hugely important to me as well. I have very fond childhood memories growing up there, and it's not just the Silly Putty in the gift shop. When I became an adult, I was a card-carrying member of the science centre. I think it peaked in 2009 when it had an exhibit called Body Worlds. I don't know if you attended that, but it was an exhibit where they actually showed human organs—real human organs—healthy ones, ones that were subjected to certain diseases or substance abuse. What a way to learn. I remember being there, looking at the kids who were learning about the human anatomy this way. This is the kind of experience the science centre is meant to deliver.

It breaks my heart to say this, because it is a hugely important place to me: The programming fell behind. The building indeed fell into disrepair, and I noticed it well before politics. This isn't a political stand that I'm making. I gave up my membership shortly after that exhibit for those very reasons, and it pained me to do so.

The first thing I want to say is that I'm thrilled that this ministry gets to work on a new-and-improved science centre, and I'm absolutely ecstatic about the opportunity we have to provide an entire generation of learning through this type of medium. It's hugely important. I'm also very excited about the new site, the new location. I talked about the iconic waterfront earlier, but I think that when you look at this—and this is going to be out for procurement and we will have an update to this early in the new year—we have an opportunity here to build it better and to provide better programming, in a transit hub as well.

I know you referenced the school trips—hugely important. But we've got the Ontario Line. The terminal station is right at the doorstep of the science centre. You've got expanded GO service and fare integration, which will connect you very conveniently, plus parking readily available in what we are providing here.

To answer your question directly, MPP, is that we are very excited about this new location. We also believe it will drive international visitors and improve revenues to the science centre.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: So I understand the government's argument with the new location. I may not agree with all of it, but I understand what the government's argument is. My point though, through you, Chair, is the existing building. What are the plans that the government has for that existing building?

Hon. Stan Cho: I don't know, Deputy, if you can speak to some of that.

Ms. Nancy Kennedy: We are in discussions right now about the 770 Don Mills site. The city owns the property; we own the building. And so, I think it would be inappropriate to comment on those discussions at this time, because we're right in the middle of those discussions. But I can assure you, we're also maintaining that property. We do basic maintenance on the property to make sure that it's safe and that it's well cared for while we're having those discussions.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: So, we're not going to see the building just fall down mysteriously one day in the coming future?

Ms. Nancy Kennedy: No, and we work closely with our Ministry of Infrastructure to make sure that that's the case, and they have the courage for that. It is an asset and a government property, and we would make sure that it was maintained.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Okay. When I look at the costs between building a new science centre and utilizing the existing building, it seems to me that the cost to totally revitalize the existing building and the cost to build the new building are around the same, but the new building is about half the size of that. Would that be correct?

Hon. Stan Cho: There's important context on the size of it as well, and not just anecdotal from my experience there—remembering large areas of wasted space, whether they be hallways, giant ceilings, extremely thick walls and not a lot of exhibit space compared to backroom storage space or office space. It was a terribly inefficient use of—I think it was, what—500,000 square feet or so. That's not reflective of the exhibition space or the experiential space for visitors.

The new site: We are making sure that this is a much better use of that exhibition space. And with the vistas on the water, what I would personally like to see is incorporating that nature into the experience of the science centre. We believe that the new science centre will be a much better experience and a much more efficient use of space. We'd like to see more exhibit space.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Thank you. So I guess then, with the current building, as I understand it—to the ADM, I guess—is that those are in discussions right now with the city of Toronto as to what the future of that site is. Is the TRCA, I guess, part of those discussions as well, because they own a portion of those lands and—

Ms. Nancy Kennedy: Yes, they would be. Yes, they are.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Okay.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): So, MPP Cerjanec, it's five—

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Yes, I think this is a good stopping point.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Yes. It's five minutes outside the vote, so I'm going to declare a recess.

Everybody, come back as quickly as you can after the vote. So it's recessed.

The committee recessed from 1530 to 1542.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): We now will resume the committee's estimates on the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming. MPP Cerjanec, you had the floor and there is nine minutes and eight seconds left.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Through you, Chair: I guess it's heartening that we still are here, even though the House is adjourned for a fundraiser for the Premier that's taking place tonight. It's a bit unfortunate, but this is where we are.

Around the science centre and the two pop-up locations: What is the attendance at those two pop-up locations?

Hon. Stan Cho: ADM Robertson, or Deputy, if you have some colour on that?

Ms. Nancy Kennedy: For sure. We've had good attendance at the pop-up locations. At Sherway Gardens, we've had about 55,000 people who've come to that site. It's been quite popular. I think it's because of where it's located in the mall, people come there with their children. Our other sites have been quite popular as well, throughout the summer—high attendance, I would say.

Mr. Michael Robertson: Yes, thank you, Deputy. About 75,000 visitors in total—through you, Madam Chair, to the member.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: What are the revenue expenses like for the two pop-ups?

Ms. Nancy Kennedy: I'd have to get back to you on that figure.

Hon. Stan Cho: Happy to get that for you.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Thank you.

Hon. Stan Cho: But they are temporary locations, and we're looking for an interim solution to that while we build out the new science centre.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Yes, that's where I was going to go to next, actually. I know the temporary science centre was supposed to open by 2026 through previous reports that I've seen, but no location has been announced. So is it still the government's intention, through you, Chair, that they're going to be opening that temporary location?

Hon. Stan Cho: One hundred per cent. The interim location will be out for—I think it's out right now, if I'm not mistaken. It's finalizing the details, Deputy?

Interjection.

Hon. Stan Cho: Very shortly at the very least, but the intention is to have that out and operational as soon as possible. We just want to make sure that the site is right. Ideally it would signal or foreshadow the permanent location and give a flavour of the updated programming that we hope to see.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: When do we expect that opening date?

Hon. Stan Cho: Deputy, I'm not sure if you have the date on that?

Ms. Nancy Kennedy: Yes, we'll be bringing out details of that shortly, and it won't be long after that.

Hon. Stan Cho: Soon—very soon, to answer the honourable member's question. And those details—because they are actively being discussed right now, we can't give you the definitive answer, but we're pushing for as imminent a solution as possible for this.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: At the current science centre site, there's the former Teluscape Exploration Plaza. It's kind of almost like a little bit of a mini-park in some ways, and I know that's fenced off, so members of the public in those communities there right now aren't able to access it. Is the province considering opening up that area so that local families are able to use it?

Hon. Stan Cho: I think, right now, we're looking at the best use of that land. As you mentioned off the top in your questioning, it is a beautiful ravine land. We want to make sure that this can be enjoyed to the best use possible. So all of those options are being looked at, but everything is on the table at the moment.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Okay. And just as a follow-up with the existing building at the science centre: Through you, Chair, has the city of Toronto been able to inspect that building at all—the existing building—as part of the discussions that you're having right now?

Ms. Nancy Kennedy: Not recently. As I mentioned to you, the building is being maintained, so we're making sure that the integrity of the building is being protected. I don't believe they've been on site recently.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: If the city were to request that, Chair, would they be able to?

Ms. Nancy Kennedy: I'm going to refer the question to ADM Robertson.

Mr. Michael Robertson: Through you, Madam Chair, to the member: The former facility at Don Mills and Eglinton is within the government's real estate portfolio. The building and the property, as the deputy and the minister have said, is owned partly by the city of Toronto, partly by the regional conservation authority. It is under the authority of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Infrastructure Ontario. We're doing the work on the government's behalf to maintain the building.

I can't speak to what the answer would be if the city of Toronto asked to inspect the site, but we talk to the city on a regular basis about all the properties we have in common and we'd be happy to talk to them.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Okay. Thank you.

Chair, around gaming revenue: All the gaming revenue that the province is receiving, that goes into general revenues. Is that correct?

Hon. Stan Cho: It goes to the Ministry of Finance under general revenue.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Okay. Do we know what that amount was—or, I guess, is—for what's expected for this current year?

Ms. Nancy Kennedy: In the estimates it would be, if you combined both agencies—OLG and iGO—about \$2.6 billion.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: How does that look like year over year, comparing to last year?

Ms. Nancy Kennedy: I would say, for OLG's revenues, it's relatively flat. For iGO's revenues, they're going up. It depends on the business line in OLG as well. Their digital gaming, their online gaming revenues are increasing; the lottery has been relatively flat; and LAN-based gaming has been holding steady as well.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Thank you. When we invest money into arts and culture, we know that it generates probably about \$25 in other sources of revenue; other studies say \$29. Is there a part of the ministry's strategy here—from gaming revenue to go towards some tourism, arts and culture priorities?

Hon. Stan Cho: I think investing in the arts is hugely important. General revenue discussions aside and how it's allocated, we have several agencies and bodies through which the arts are supported: the Ontario Arts Council is an example of that; the Experience Ontario Program is an example of that, funding festivals and cultural attractions and events throughout the year. I think the total on that is roughly \$27 million when you include the marquee funding. I think the Ontario Arts Council is closer to \$60 million. I think those figures are all available.

But we have things like the film and television tax credit, which is close to a billion dollars. It's something that the film industry and television industry has said has been hugely helpful in keeping production here in Ontario, as well as a big economic driver and job creator.

So there are various streams through which those art institutions are—of course, operational funding for our museums, libraries, things like that. So a complete list—happy to share that with you, but in various streams, that revenue does go out to the arts and culture sector.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I think something that I would encourage—and I'm sure you might be doing it around the cabinet table, but I'm going to say it publicly as well, especially when we're seeing gaming revenue increasing. And it all does fall under that same ministry. I know it goes into general revenue; I know. But when I look at the differences between Ontario and Quebec in arts and culture spending—and investing, really, I should say, into communities and programs and initiatives—I think we really have a lot of work to do to reduce that gap.

I want to talk just a little bit about quarter horse racing. In Ajax, Ajax Downs is the only quarter horse track in the province, and I know that there is going to be a renewal or negotiations around the agreement with Ontario Racing. I just want to see assurances from the ministry around supporting quarter horse racing in Ontario.

1550

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Final minute.

Hon. Stan Cho: We'll wrap it up on the topic, because I know horse racing is an important subject matter to many people around this committee table. This was the reason, six years ago, the long-term funding agreement in 2019 provided support for this industry. It was stipulated back then, six years ago, that Ontario Racing, moving forward in the future, would be the one to discuss and allocate funds and distribute amongst the racetracks as a representative.

That remains the case. At the moment, we're not quite where the ink is dry on what support looks like, but I'll reiterate how important horse racing is to communities around the province, to our cultural history. Our government understands that; it's why we provided that funding six years ago. I hope to have a positive update for members of this committee in the very near future.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thanks very much.

Going over to the government side—MPP Denault.

MPP Billy Denault: Thank you to the minister for taking the time, as well as your staff for being here. It's always great to hear about the good work that's being done in the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming.

We've heard report after report that, in the wake of US tariffs on Canadian goods and anti-Canadian rhetoric from President Donald Trump, many Canadians are choosing to stop their annual vacations down south and rather choose to visit in their own backyard. I know this past April, Destination Ontario did a survey which found that nine in 10 Ontarians were looking at taking a trip in Ontario over the summer. My question is, really, what's the ministry doing to explore this opportunity further and take advantage of Canadians and Ontarians choosing to visit their own backyard?

Hon. Stan Cho: Hugely important question, PA Denault, and I want to thank you for your hard work at the ministry. You're a valuable member of the team and just hit the ground sprinting. I appreciate you acknowledging the team that's with me—the deputy, the ADMs and directors and everybody here in the committee room behind. This ministry is very big, and it's only as strong as its team. The team is fantastic, and they've been working hard to make sure we promote tourism throughout the

entire province. So, thank you to all of you here today as well.

Tourism is a big opportunity in Ontario. It is, as I said earlier, a \$34-billion industry. I mentioned 104,000 businesses, predominantly small businesses, that are involved in the tourism industry and the 300,000 people that it employs. But I firmly believe that we can be bigger and that we can drive more to our economy and create more jobs, especially in light of those geopolitical circumstances that you outlined.

Now, tourism data lags a little bit, and we will be receiving better financial information as the tourism season closes out. All preliminary indications—and I shared some of those statistics earlier from the Niagara Parks Commission—show that international travel is indeed up. Some of the airlines I've spoken to also confirm this. Even rental car companies, who I just met with over lunch, confirm that the travel numbers in Ontario look to be record breaking. This is an indication not only of what Destination Ontario said being true, that local visitation is indeed up, but a very encouraging sign that international travel is up.

I'm not talking about international travel as just our neighbours to the south, of course, which is our number-one visitor, but from Europe and Asia we've seen very encouraging signs. I mentioned some of the increases in revenue year over year just in Niagara region alone, with France at 33% year-over-year increase, Germany at 38%, Japan at 16%. These are really, really big statistics showing that people are choosing to travel—maybe not choosing to travel to the United States, but thinking, hey, Canada might be a great alternative.

The conversation I had earlier said that we need to look to these markets, to promote these markets, and we're having those discussions with our agencies like Destination Ontario. But we're hoping that some of the local trends stay as well. The local visitors don't tend to spend as much on their stays or stay as long, but we're working to change that as well. It's why we have initiatives like Destination Wasaga, Destination Niagara and that significant investment into the St. Lawrence Parks infrastructure: Because we want people to understand that a viable option, instead of maybe going three days across the border, is to stay right here at home and stay three days along the St. Lawrence Parks corridor or up at Wasaga Beach, and to improve the infrastructure so that is possible.

One of the biggest complaints in Niagara—and I've probably been to Niagara more than I've been home this year; my wife will attest to that. But there are gaps in the story of Niagara as it sits currently. I'll just give you a great example of that. We've increased GO service to Niagara Falls. That's great. It's improved travel numbers there, but there's more to do, because when you get dropped off at the downtown GO Station in Niagara Falls, you don't have, I would call—I would go so far as to say a sufficient link to the tourism area. You've got Wego, which is great. It's the public transit system that will take you into Clifton Hill or to the Fallsview side of things, but if it's over capacity and you can't get an Uber, people are

walking two kilometres across the old rail corridor to get to the core. We need to do better in terms of connecting those local links.

People, when they travel, they need the story of that travel experience to make sense. They can't be thinking about those things like, "Well, now how do I get from this point to that point?" That's why part of the strategy we're looking at is what can possible transit or transportation links look like. It's why we're widening the highways—the Garden City skyway on the way into Niagara region. It's why we're looking at the waterways as a potential means of transportation, and it's why in the last budget we mentioned an international airport to Niagara Falls. We know Pearson is the country's busiest airport, but we have an airport in Niagara-on-the-Lake that could service international travel and maybe bring more visitation from those international destinations that we see clearly are spending more and more money in the region.

The story has to make sense. There also has to be attractions for families. We need to take Niagara and turn it from a four-hour stay into a four-day stay. That means you need attractions, you need family entertainment and you need it for all budgets. We need options. So the part of the strategy that we're looking at in Niagara is to say, "What are we missing in that story?"

The first phone calls that I made when the Premier gave me this this opportunity a year and a half ago were to several business leaders and community leaders in Toronto. I asked them one very simple question: When is the last time you went to Niagara Falls for a vacation, not for business but for a family vacation? And the answer I got was predominantly, "Not since I was really young" or "Never."

Now, if you had called the same group of individuals in Los Angeles and asked them about Las Vegas, the same very question: When is the last time you went to Las Vegas for a vacation, not for work? You would have gotten a drastically different answer. So I think that identifies the problem statement very clearly, is, what are we missing that Vegas has in relation to LA when you have Niagara Falls, this natural wonder of the world at the doorstep of the largest city in the country?

We have a lot more going for us in Niagara region than, dare I say, Las Vegas does, which was literally built to service the workers building the Hoover Dam in the middle of the desert. You have a natural wonder of the world, and within a 30-minute drive of Niagara Falls, you have deep-water ports, crystal-clear beaches in Nickel Beach and Crystal Beach. You have cruise ships docking at Port Colborne. You have some of the richest soils on the planet, creating some of the best wines and providing some of the best fruits and agricultural products in North America. You've got a rich history in Niagara-on-the-Lake, a thriving cultural scene with the Shaw Festival, which is world-renowned. All the pieces are there. So government's responsibility, when we look at driving tourism, is to look at stories like Niagara, Wasaga, St. Lawrence Parks and say, "Let's connect it. Let's make the story make sense. Let's provide the necessary pieces that

are missing in this story to make it one with a happy ending,” and that’s what we fully intend on doing.

MPP Billy Denault: Thank you, Minister.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): MPP Sandhu, please.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Thank you, Minister and your entire team, for the presentation. As you said earlier, you’re only as great as your team is, so I want to thank your deputy minister. I had the opportunity to work with both the ADMs, ADM Vienneau and ADM Robertson, on Ontario Place—a great bunch of people, very knowledgeable people to work with, so congratulations on a great team.

I heard my friends from the opposition asking questions about Ontario Place. I always find it a bit ironic when the opposition asks about Ontario Place, because it is no secret that it’s the NDP and Liberals who are responsible for leaving this historic place in a state of neglect and disrepair. We wouldn’t be talking about Ontario Place had they taken any action. This government is taking action, so congratulations on leading this very, very important file.

As I always say, it is an iconic destination. It’s merely not only iconic because of it’s a physical site, but it has a special spot in the hearts and minds of the people of this province.

Congratulations on getting this done. I’m very excited. The people of this province are very excited.

Can you share what you are most excited about in the Ontario Place revitalization?

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Hon. Stan Cho: Thank you, PA Sandhu. I think back to when you were answering questions about Ontario Place, and you shared with us your passion and your stories of being young and experiencing Ontario Place with your family. You nailed it. That’s what we’re trying to provide. This place has been shuttered for the better part of two decades. We robbed an entire generation of those childhood memories. And really, the lesson to take out of that is that you can talk all you want, you can consult and you can dream about these visions of what Ontario Place ought to be, but in the meantime, you’ve robbed people of the reality of a treasure and, I would dare say, a national treasure on the most iconic waterfront in Canada. This is the economic engine of the country, in Toronto. It’s the most iconic skyline that we have, and we have this prime piece of real estate that has literally been sinking into Lake Ontario. That’s unacceptable. There comes a point in time when you have to say a bold decision has to be made.

I know my colleagues around the table—I’ve certainly noticed that people are liking the renderings that we’ve put out on Ontario Place. If you haven’t seen them, they’re readily available online. I encourage you to look at this. This is a game-changing piece of what I believe will be transformational, generational infrastructure here, a cultural treasure in not just Ontario or Toronto but the entire country, which will bring six million visitors annually. You’re looking at 50 acres of public realm. It’s the largest green space in the downtown core: walking trails; you have bike paths; you have a marina; you have boat

launches, kayak launches. As I said earlier, the entire perimeter is public access space. Talk about the best water views: Whether you’re there from sunrise to sunset, you’re going to have the most beautiful views of the city, and that’s going to be year-round. You can’t say it’s ever looked like this.

I know the members of the opposition right now—and they’ll have their time to ask the questions on this, but let’s pay attention to what’s actually been put out in the renderings. This is a lot of work, and the team behind me, for years, has produced something very special. Again, if you haven’t seen those renderings, take a look and imagine what that will look like when this is open, what our kids and their kids will get to enjoy for generations to come. This is something that I’m really proud of. And there will be a day when all of us sitting in here are out of government, and nobody will ever care or remember who made the decision to open that place up. There will be a day when they forget it was ever closed. I look forward to that day, because there’s going to be a day where we’re all at Ontario Place, looking around, saying, “This is fantastic,” and politics won’t be part of that discussion. I’m proud that our government is the one that’s bringing it back to life.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thank you.

MPP Babikian, there are three minutes left.

Mr. Aris Babikian: Minister, thank you very much for coming and sharing your valuable time and estimates with us.

I want to touch upon the arts-and-culture aspect of the ministry. As we know, in Toronto and Ontario, we have one of the best arts-and-culture industries in the world. I mean, all of us know that many of the prominent Broadway shows have launched here in Toronto and after that went to Broadway.

So in addition to our mainstream culture, museums, theatres etc., we have another advantage, and that is the diverse communities that we have in Toronto. They also bring their own added values to our ministry and our tourism.

My question is in regard to the mainstream and the diverse communities, festivals, cultural shows, etc. What kind of support is the ministry providing so that we can advance that sector of the ministry further?

Hon. Stan Cho: That’s such a good question. I really appreciate that, MPP Babikian. If I may promote you for a little bit, I believe you’re the first person of Armenian descent to be elected to the Legislature. This is exactly the strength we’re speaking to, and it’s reflected in our cultural scene in so many ways. I’ll just give you a quick example of that.

I’ve had the opportunity to speak to foreign governments since I assumed this role, and many of their ministers of tourism are very proud of their cuisine. They always show off in their Michelin Guide and their gourmand list all the cuisines that are represented in these countries, who have had the Michelin guide there for much longer. But do you know what we have that’s special in Ontario, in Toronto, in this country, in the Michelin Guide

recommendations? Even if you don't have a star and you're on the gourmand list, we have, in Ontario, 30 different types of cuisine; 16 different ethnicities represented in the guide. There's no other country in the world that can claim this, no matter how good their food is.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Fifty seconds left.

Hon. Stan Cho: We know in our communities, you can walk down the street and get the best butter chicken, the best kebab, next to the best Korean barbecue, next to the best Persian bakery on the planet. Dare I say, there's nowhere else in the world that you can say we're fortunate enough to have that with the natural beauty that we have.

We get to live in a special place. That's reflected in our cultural investments: 350 festivals were funded this year through Experience Ontario, much of that in diverse communities. I'm proud of that and we're going to continue to support that.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much. There's only 10 seconds left.

Mr. Aris Babikian: Okay, I will pass.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thank you.

The remaining time is to the official opposition. There's eight minutes left. MPP Shaw.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I just want to start by saying I find it quite unfortunate that the government has chosen to adjourn the House today so members can attend Doug Ford's fundraiser, because we know we have important work that we should be attending to in this province, but I'm happy to see the committee is still sitting so we can ask these important questions.

Mr. Chris Glover: Don't you guys have to go?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: They're going to be late.

The minister said that investing in the arts is huge, and with all due respect, I don't know if you could categorize the funding in the Ontario Arts Council as huge. Except in 2018-19 when the government cut the funding by \$5 million, your funding for the Ontario Arts Council basically has remained static year over year, and we know that if funding doesn't rise to inflation, really this amounts to a cut, particularly given the economic circumstances right now.

As we've been saying all day here at committee, the arts are an incredibly wide and incredibly deep category encompassing an array of really important cultural creations that you have said, and we agree, enrich the province. So not only is it those arts-and-culture events that the Ontario Arts Council are struggling to continue to support with an essentially flatlined budget, the Ontario Arts Council funding for publishing has steadily decreased over time, and really the concern there, with the publishing, is that this lack of funding is going to force Canadian and Ontario publishers to be published offshore, and given the Trump threat, I don't think anybody wants to see Ontario publishers having to go south of the border.

With that in mind, does the minister know exactly how much arts-and-culture producers brought into the provincial GDP in 2024-25?

Hon. Stan Cho: Yeah, the arts-and-culture sector is a massive economic driver—\$27 billion, creating 27,000 jobs in the province and creating many more skilled trades

jobs. This is a hugely important driver. And the funding well extends past the Ontario Arts Council. I'll just name a few: Ontario Cultural Attractions Fund, Ontario Trillium Foundation, operational funding for the Art Gallery of Ontario and the Royal Ontario Museum, cultural infrastructure, the film and television tax credit, the culture and media tax credit—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Honestly, I appreciate it. I have the list here.

Hon. Stan Cho: It's a long list. It's a long list.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you, Minister. I'm going to reclaim my time, Chair, please.

Hon. Stan Cho: To say that it's just administered through the Ontario Arts Council is disingenuous.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Minister, thank you. I have the list in front of me through the estimates.

But what I want to know, given that they are getting \$60 million and we're talking about a \$28-billion GDP revenue—which will probably increase in 2026—how do you calculate based on that how much money would go to the Ontario Arts Council?

Hon. Stan Cho: Well, precisely through the fact that there are various funding streams that I was interrupted in listing. Those are important organizations and initiatives that take place to promote that culture. The tax credits alone are \$1 billion in film and television, and the colleague across the way was talking about how important the film and television industry is. Those tax credits are game changers—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Minister, we're talking about the Ontario Arts Council right now. I appreciate that, and I do know about the film and television industry because that's huge in Hamilton, and a lot of that heavy lifting is done by the city of Hamilton.

What I want to ask you, if I can be more blunt, is how do you arrive at the decision to not increase the budget of the main arts funder in the province year after year. Which is the Ontario Arts Council? Like, how do you decide, given all this, that you're not going to increase the funding for the Ontario Arts Council?

Hon. Stan Cho: I think right off the top in the first two minutes of my opening remarks today I said that funding is up in the ministry \$51.4 million.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Not for the Ontario Arts Council.

Hon. Stan Cho: It doesn't exist in a vacuum when you support arts and culture. You're looking at one organization amongst dozens of support mechanisms that we have in the ministry. All of those add up to a sum total of \$51.4 million in increased base for this line ministry. I'm proud of that.

We continue to invest into the arts. You can't look at these things in a vacuum; you have to look at it as an environment, an ecosystem, and that's exactly what our ministry is doing.

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Ms. Sandy Shaw: You know what? I'm asking—I'll just end now with the question, which I'm asking very specifically: What goes into your decision-making process? What is the criteria that you use to determine that the

Ontario Arts Council funding remains static year after year?

Hon. Stan Cho: A very rigorous process of listening to the experts and the hard-working officials, who are led by the people in this room behind me, on making sure those decisions are made by the people in the arts and culture sector themselves. We listen to the professionals, not politicians.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: All right.

Interjection.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Yes, exactly. Like the professionals at the Skills Development Fund. Is that who you listen to? Not those politicians?

You're not answering the question, really, quite clearly.

Hon. Stan Cho: I think I've answered it very directly.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: You have clearly made the decision, with all the people that you're talking about, to not increase the funding to the Ontario Arts Council year after year. It's just right here in your own estimates.

I'm going to move onto my next question. How much time do I have, Chair?

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Three minutes.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Three minutes.

Chair, during last year's estimates, you will recall—I guess you weren't here, but in the official opposition, we wanted to know about the staycation tax credit. You talked about Niagara Falls—I agree with you; it's a wonder and it's an important revenue generator for all of Ontario. I'm just wondering whether there would be any consideration of this government to resume the staycation tax credit.

We know, as you've described, that so many communities are tourism dependent, especially given the circumstances now with people not wanting to cross the border. At the time, it was made clear that resuming the staycation tax credit was not on the table, and your government voted down our motions calling for it to resume time and time again.

My question, again, is: Is this is the time for your government to consider resuming the staycation tax credit as part of our fight against US tariffs?

Hon. Stan Cho: I'm going to give the deputy this one in a second, but I find it very ironic, to the MPP, through you, Chair, that she is advocating for a very measure that this government introduced in budget 2020 that she and her colleagues sitting next to her voted against; not only that, continued to vote against it in several iterations of the program. But I'm glad to see that she saw that that program issued during the pandemic worked.

I'll turn it over to the deputy—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: You know what? It's okay, Minister. Thank you anyway. That's fine. I'm going to move to my next question.

Hon. Stan Cho: Okay.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I'm going to take that as a no, that you are not interested in resuming the staycation tax credit. We've moved the motion a number of times; you've voted it down. We can see that the staycation tax credit makes perfect sense at a time like now to fight against the US tariffs. Hopefully, maybe, we'll see something in the next budget, but I won't hold out any hope.

My final question, and this is—I'm just curious about Marineland. Marineland, as we all know, it really is horrific circumstances that those animals are left in.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): One minute left.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: The relationship between the operators of Marineland and the community couldn't be more toxic and upsetting.

My question to you is: Is the ministry involved in any discussions with anybody—any individual or entity—about future uses or plans for the Marineland site?

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thirty-five seconds left.

Hon. Stan Cho: I worry about the welfare of the animals, of course. It's deeply disturbing to me on a personal level. Of course, Marineland is a private business, and the ministry has no association with private entities out there. Animal welfare is a Solicitor General-led issue—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: But the site—I'm asking about the site.

Hon. Stan Cho: I do want it to be on the record, on a personal, non-politician side, that even though we have no ties to a private entity or the site itself, I express deep concern for the welfare of these whales.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: It's terrible.

Hon. Stan Cho: It's absolutely terrible. We will monitor the situation, but again, as a private entity—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much.

This concludes the committee's consideration of the 2025-26 estimates of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming.

Standing order 69 requires that the Chair put, without further amendment or debate, every question necessary to dispose of the estimates. Are the members ready to vote? Okay.

Shall vote 3801, ministry administration program, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hands. All those opposed, please raise your hands. I declare vote 3801 is accordingly carried.

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

Shall vote 3806, Ontario Trillium Foundation Program, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hands. All those opposed, please raise your hands. I declare vote 3806 as carried.

Shall vote 3808, Ontario cultural media tax credits, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hands. All those opposed, please raise your hands. I declare vote 3808 accordingly carried.

Shall vote 3811, agency programs, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hands. All those opposed, please raise your hands. I declare vote 3811 carried.

Shall vote 3812, gaming program, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hands. All those opposed, please raise your hands. I declare vote 3812 carried.

Shall the 2025-26 estimates of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming carry? All those in favour, please raise your hands. All those opposed, please raise your hands. I declare it carried.

Shall the Chair report the 2025-26 estimates of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming to the House? All those in favour, please raise your hands. All those opposed, please raise your hands. I will report back to the House.

That concludes our consideration of this ministry's estimates. I would like to thank Minister Cho and everyone here today for their participation.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Good job, Chair.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much, MPP Shaw.

A five-minute recess.

The committee recessed from 1618 to 1620.

MINISTRY OF SPORT

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): I'm going to resume the committee.

We will now move to consider the 2025-26 estimates of the Ministry of Sport for a total of two hours. From the ministry, we are joined by the Honourable Neil Lumsden, Minister of Sport; and Keith Palmer, deputy minister; along with other staff from the ministry.

As a reminder, the ministry is required to monitor the proceedings for any questions or issues that the ministry undertakes to address. I trust that the deputy minister has arranged to have the hearings closely monitored with respect to questions raised so that the ministry can respond accordingly.

Are there any questions from members before we start? Seeing none, I am now required to call vote 5301, which sets the review process in motion.

We will begin with a statement from the minister for up to 20 minutes. Minister, welcome and the floor is yours. You can begin at any time.

Hon. Neil Lumsden: Thank you to all the members. It's great to see everyone again. At my leisure, can I begin?

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Yes, please.

Hon. Neil Lumsden: Great. Again, it's great to be here today to speak on behalf of the Ministry of Sport. I would also like to recognize part of our team that does such great work in the ministry. We couldn't get any of this done without their efforts and their passion and their willingness to do more than what is probably asked of them, so I thank them.

Sport and recreation: Sport plays a vital role in Ontario. It helps people stay active and healthy and it strengthens the fabric of our communities. It brings families together, teaches youth valuable life lessons and creates opportunity for people to thrive.

Beyond its social impacts, sport is also a powerful economic engine for our province. In 2023, Ontario's sport-and-recreation sector contributed an estimated \$3.25 billion to the economy and supported approximately 42,000 jobs. These numbers speak to the strength of sport

tourism and the impact that is truly felt at the local levels: families booking hotel rooms; baseball tournaments; activities within town; teams going out to the local restaurant after the games are over, spending time in the numbers of 30 and 40; visitors shopping in the local restaurants, boutiques and malls between matches.

This ripple effect is far-reaching. Our government understands how important the sector is to the well-being and prosperity of our province. That's why we are investing in new infrastructure to ensure that communities have the spaces they need to keep people active. We are investing in programming to provide opportunities for children and youth to participate in sport and recreation. We are harnessing the power of sport to drive economic growth across our province. We'll continue working closely with our partners to promote, support and expand opportunities for all Ontarians to participate in sport and recreation, from playground to podium.

The Community Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Fund or, as it seems to be commonly known, CSRIF: If we want people to be active and healthy, then we need places for them to do exactly that. That's why, in 2024, our government launched the \$200-million CSRIF fund. These funds support municipalities, not-for-profit organizations and Indigenous communities with building new infrastructure and revitalizing existing facilities. This is a key part of our plan to protect Ontario workers, businesses, families and the communities that they live in.

This year, we announced investments in 94 projects. This includes \$3 million to help the CNIB, which is the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, build Canada's first dedicated goalball court in Muskoka. It includes nearly \$16 million to support the construction of MIFO's new community centre in Ottawa to expand recreation opportunities for the francophone community in the National Capital Region. It includes more than \$20 million to support projects led by Indigenous communities and organizations. These investments are making a real difference for people and gives them the spaces needed to participate in sport and recreation.

Inclusive grassroots recreation program: In addition to the opportunities being created by investing in infrastructure, we're also proud to support organizations with delivering programs. Since our government launched the Inclusive Grassroots Recreation Program in 2021-22, we have supported over 100,000 children from under-represented and marginalized populations, including Indigenous communities, newcomers and youth with disabilities.

In 2024-25, our ministry invested \$2.92 million through this program to support several organizations with creating more opportunities for kids to participate, again, in sport and recreation. This includes funding the Canadian Tire Jumpstart charities to expand community-based programming across our great province.

Jays Care is holding baseball camps for children with disabilities and running Indigenous rookie leagues. Canadian Women and Sport are creating more opportunities to keep girls active and engaged in sport. I can tell you first-hand how effective these programs are because we've

been there when they've been initiated and installed and run. It makes a huge difference in their lives and in the community and those that support them and family and friends.

The impact of these programs goes far beyond just playing on the field. We believe every child deserves a chance to play, grow and thrive. Through targeted investments at the grassroots level, we're breaking down barriers, building healthier communities and ensuring that sport and recreation are accessible for everyone.

Our after-school programs: I'm pleased to highlight the continued investment and impact on Ontario's after-school programs, which is a vital initiative that supports the health and well-being and development of children across our province. This program was launched in 2009, and it now reaches more than 13,000 children and youth from kindergarten to grade 12 in over 80 communities. It is delivered by 108 organizations, including municipalities, First Nations and community-based not-for-profits. The program provides safe, supervised activities during crucial after-school hours when parents may still be at work. Again, I can tell you from experience: We talk about numbers a lot, but you have to know where the numbers land when it comes to dollars, and these are landing in the right places and doing wonderful work in the communities. Again, I see them first-hand, and they are run by fabulous people in either schools or around the communities.

We're investing \$43.9 million over the next three years to ensure the program continues to thrive. This multi-year funding model provides stability for program partners, reduces administrative burden and allows organizations to plan long-term and deliver consistent, high-quality programming. This program is about building healthy habits and lifelong skills, and it's about helping kids get active and stay active. It's about supporting the hard-working parents of our province.

These are the building blocks of a healthier Ontario, and our government is proud to invest in programs that make a real difference. By investing in this program, we are helping young people gain confidence, stay active and develop the skills they need to succeed in and outside the classroom. The connection that they make with people and their friends through sport can only be done usually through sport. That's another part of building our communities and our young people through friendship and competition, even if it's just friendly competition.

Supporting Indigenous communities: Our government is proud to invest over \$5.2 million in 2025-26 to support Indigenous-led sport and recreational programs developed in partnership with Indigenous communities and organizations. These programs promote wellness, cultural revitalization and community development across Ontario. Through a range of initiatives, we are working to reduce barriers to participate and create meaningful opportunities for Indigenous children, youth and families to engage in sport, physical activities and, of course, recreation.

One of our flagship initiatives is the Sport Pathway for Ontario Native Wellness, delivered in collaboration with

Indigenous Sport and Wellness Ontario. This program supports a regional network of sport and recreation opportunities for First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples living both on and off the reserve.

Since 2014, this program funding has helped to develop and deliver dozens of programs, tournaments and events across Ontario every year. This allows the program to play a key role in preparing and supporting Team Ontario's participation in national competitions and the North American Indigenous Games, helping Indigenous athletes reach their full potential while celebrating their heritage. With these investments, we are helping create environments where youth can thrive, cultures can be celebrated and communities can grow stronger together.

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Further, through our Community Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Fund, more than \$20 million will support projects led by Indigenous communities and organizations. We remain committed to working alongside Indigenous partners to ensure that sport and recreation are accessible, culturally relevant and responsive to the needs and aspirations of Indigenous peoples across Ontario.

Ontario sport recognition policy: A strong and accountable sports system begins with clear standards, responsible governance and a shared commitment to athlete safety and development. That's why our government continues to uphold and enhance Ontario's sport recognition policy, a foundational framework that ensures our sport organizations meet the highest standards of excellence and integrity. This sets out mandatory requirements for PSOs, provincial sport organizations, and MSOs, multi-sport organizations, to be formally recognized by the province. These organizations are responsible for developing athletes, coaches and officials—I would throw in there managers as well—organizing provincial championships and ensuring alignment with national sport standards. Through this policy, we are building a sport system that is safe, inclusive and high performing, one that reflects Ontario's values and supports every athlete's potential.

To support our PSOs with meeting the obligations set out under the sport recognition policy, we invest \$8 million annually through the Ontario Amateur Sport Fund. We will continue to support with our sport partners to uphold these standards and ensure that sport in Ontario remains a source of pride, opportunity and excellence.

Safe sport: Protecting the safety and well-being of everyone involved in sport is a fundamental priority for our government. Abuse, harassment and discrimination have no place in Ontario's sport system, and our government has taken decisive action to foster a culture of safety, respect and integrity—the keyword there is “culture.” Ontario continues to advance its commitment to safe sport through a multi-faceted approach that includes policy development, education, prevention and accountability. We are working closely with provincial and multi-sport organizations to ensure that they meet the mandatory standards under the sport recognition policy, including the implementation of safe sport policies, concussion protocols and codes of conduct.

Rowan's Law: Ontario continues to lead the country in concussion safety through Rowan's Law, the first and only legislation of its kind in Canada. This year, I released the minister's seven-year progress report on Rowan's Law, we've updated our concussion safety materials, and we've introduced a new resource card to ensure that athletes, coaches and parents have access to the information they need when they need it. Just a bit of a show and tell here—that's what we're talking about. You can pick it up later.

We rolled out our annual campaign to raise awareness for concussion safety, including providing resources to the PSOs, teachers, coaches and partners across the sport sector. Landmarks throughout the province were illuminated purple—Rowan Stringer's favourite colour—and that happens on Rowan's Law Day.

This past summer, I met with my federal, provincial and territorial counterparts and urged them to work with us to create a harmonized national approach to concussion safety to ensure that every young athlete in Canada, regardless of where they live, receives the same standard of care and protection.

Ontario Sport Hosting Program: As we work to develop sport in this province, build infrastructure, support participation and keep our athletes safe, we're also working to unlock the economic benefits of the sector for Ontario communities. I'm thrilled to highlight the continued success and impact of the Ontario Sport Hosting Program, which is an important part of our government's plan to protect Ontario's economy.

Since its inception, this program has provided project-based funding to support the delivery of national and international amateur sport events across our province. With an annual investment of \$3 million, the program has supported over 230 events since 2018, generating approximately \$220 million in economic activity for our province. From the Canadian Junior Open squash championship in Niagara-on-the-Lake to the Scotties Tournament of Hearts in Thunder Bay, they all matter, they all count and they all make a difference, a positive one.

We are helping Ontario communities unlock the benefits of sport tourism. Most recently, through the 2025-26 program year, we are investing more than \$3.2 million to support an additional 59 amateur sport events, including national and international competitions. These events are expected to generate over approximately \$62 million in economic activity across Ontario. Local businesses are thriving as the visitors fill the hotels and visit the restaurants when they're not in the arenas or on the court, which has a profound impact on our local economy.

But as much as we love to see that type of return on investment, this program is about, to me, more than that. It also gives Ontario athletes the opportunity to gain an elite competition needed to excel on the world stage, right here in their own backyard at home. We want our athletes to succeed, and through the sport hosting program, we're helping them make that happen. We remain committed to making Ontario a premier destination for sport hosting, while ensuring that our investments deliver lasting benefits for athletes, local communities and our province as a whole.

The Ontario Games Program: I'm also proud to speak to the continued success and evolution of the Ontario Games, an initiative that brings athletes together from every corner of our province in the spirit of competition. We deliver five provincial, multi-sport games and these events provided amateur athletes with a competitive platform to develop their skills, gain experience and prepare them for national, and maybe even international, competition. Investments into these games reflect our commitment to ensuring that the host communities can deliver high-quality events, while maximizing local, economic and community benefits.

The Ontario Games are about more than just medals and match results; they are about opportunity: opportunity created through sport, to the athletes and, frankly, the coaches and the parents. For many athletes, this is their first multi-sport competition experience, and for others it's a step towards representing Canada, quite possibly on the world stage. I can tell you from experience—not personal—that it is a dream of athletes to be able to wear that maple leaf on their chest in competition. As they compete, families and friends are cheering them on from the stands. These games showcase the best of Ontario's spirit and our government is proud to support events that inspire excellence and build lasting connections.

And to note, we have some exciting events coming up. This year, we announced nearly \$1.4 million to support Orillia as a host city for the 2026 Ontario Winter Games. We also announced over \$1.7 million to support Waterloo as they host the 2026 Ontario Summer Games. These two major sporting events will showcase this province's athletes, talent and community spirit. If you haven't been to one of them, take the time and go, because there is an energy that is hard to find anywhere else, once you set yourself in their setting and watch them compete. Through these games, we are investing in the future of sport, supporting our athletes and strengthening Ontario's reputation as a premier destination for sport hosting.

The men's FIFA World Cup 2026: We can't talk about sport hosting without talking about this massive event coming to Toronto, Ontario next summer. As Toronto prepares to welcome people from across the globe for the 2026 FIFA World Cup, I am pleased to highlight Ontario's support for this historic event. For the first time, Canada will host matches in the men's FIFA World Cup, with six games taking place in Toronto between June 12 and July 2, 2026.

Our government is investing \$97 million in funding and provincial services to support Toronto's role as host city. This investment is expected to generate a strong return through sport tourism and deliver lasting economic benefits for communities across the province. With more than 170 million people expected to watch each game hosted in Toronto, the FIFA World Cup will have significant benefits for our economy, with the creation of just under 9,000 jobs and a positive economic input of an estimated \$1.3 billion for the province.

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The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): One minute remaining.

Hon. Neil Lumsden: This event is more than a tournament; it's a catalyst for our economic growth, our

community development and national pride. Ontario is showing the rest of the world that we are a place to do business when it comes to sport.

In closing, Chair and members of the committee, Ontario's sport and recreation sector continues to thrive through strategic investments, strong partnerships and a shared commitment to inclusion, safety and excellence. From putting Ontario on the world stage through a world-class event like FIFA World Cup 2026 to supporting grassroots programs, in every corner of our province we are building a sport system that reflects the values and aspirations of every Ontarian. Our investments in sport are about more than just programs and policies. They create real opportunities for people to thrive that live in our communities. Athletes gain experience and they find their path through the Ontario Games. Students learn more about concussion safety because of the Rowan's Law—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Minister, thank you so much. Your time is up.

We will now begin the question-and-answer segment in rotations of 15 minutes for the official opposition members, 15 minutes for the third-party member and 15 minutes for the government members for the remainder of the allotted time. As always, please remember to make your comments through the Chair.

As the Chair, if a member seeks to reclaim the floor during rotation while the minister is responding, I will recognize the member and allow them to reclaim the floor to ask a new question.

For the deputy minister, assistant deputy ministers and ministry staff, please state your name and title the first time you speak so that proceedings can be accurately recorded in Hansard.

I will start with the official opposition. MPP Glover, you have 15 minutes.

Mr. Chris Glover: Thank you for the presentation. I'm going to pick up where you left off, with FIFA. You talked about 170 million people watching FIFA, 9,000 jobs being created, a \$1.3-billion estimated return for the province. Right now, the province has said that the province will be contributing \$97 million to the FIFA World Cup.

Hon. Neil Lumsden: Correct.

Mr. Chris Glover: What is the breakdown of that? How much of that is cash to the city, which is actually managing the operations, and how much is services?

Hon. Neil Lumsden: The meeting started months ago, maybe even a year-plus ago, and they are still evaluating and working on—this is not something—when it comes to budgeting an event of this size, I can tell you from experience—I was deeply involved in the World Cycling Championships in 2003 in Hamilton. When you're talking about security, when you're talking about transportation, you don't let people know what the number is and you don't publicize it until you've got it done. This is part of the process of doing it right. At some point, that contract will be handed back over to the city for approval and that breakdown will be part of it.

Mr. Chris Glover: Right now, the estimated cost for the games is \$380 million. The federal government is

contributing \$104 million, which is 27% of the total. The city of Toronto is contributing \$179 million, which is 47%. And the province is committed to contributing \$97 million. However, the city of Toronto estimates that the services that you may—your government may hold back \$40 million. Is that an accurate estimate, the \$40 million that you'll be holding back, so the province will actually be giving \$57 million to the city, which is actually conducting the operation?

Hon. Neil Lumsden: I think you're moving the number around. Quite frankly, it's \$97 million and part of that—I'm not crazy about the word "estimate" because that's exactly what it is; they're working through it. The number total is \$97 million. Some of it could be in services and some will be in cash. That number has yet to be finalized.

Mr. Chris Glover: But the city is responsible for actually managing and conducting the games? Is that accurate?

Hon. Neil Lumsden: It is their games, yes.

Mr. Chris Glover: But they don't know what contribution they can expect from the province at this point.

Hon. Neil Lumsden: Sure they do. They know they've got \$97 million to work with, within their breakdown of hosting and delivering the FIFA World Cup. And as this is broken down, they need to assess where money has to go based on their other budgets and where that allocation went up from the other monies, both from the feds and locally from the city of Toronto. So as they are doing their due diligence, we know and will continue to know that our number—and they do—is \$97 million. And how they cut up that up is yet to be finalized.

Mr. Chris Glover: Okay, but the \$97 million is the overall funding from the province?

Hon. Neil Lumsden: Correct.

Mr. Chris Glover: The federal government is committed to giving \$104 million—that's in cash—so the city knows, from the federal government, they're getting \$104 million.

From the provincial government, they're getting \$97 million minus costs, and the costs include OPP and health services and other security. But they don't know what that will be, and so they don't actually know how much they can put towards the games that's coming from the province. Their estimate is, right now, \$57 million in cash, but if they don't have that breakdown—why doesn't the province, why doesn't your government, just give the city the \$97 million in cash so that they know what they're working with, and they can plan the games appropriately?

Hon. Neil Lumsden: Respectfully, when you're talking about a budget of hosting games like that, to make an assumption—when the agreement and the discussions have always been at the table that the province will give \$97 million, a portion of which may go to services. What they want to do and how they allocate the other \$100 million and whatever else they have in cash is up to them.

When they put their budget together and they put a plan together to host the FIFA World Cup, they will move their money around wherever they need to. We will secure what they need with transportation and the other requests that

they have because that becomes our responsibility and that has been known from the very beginning.

Mr. Chris Glover: When the province allocated—when your government allocated—the funds, they specified that the provincial funding is exclusively limited to investments that will build lasting public infrastructure and benefits that will serve the community long after the games are over. Now you're saying that \$97 million was supposed to go to infrastructure, so it would be permanent infrastructure—we would have better sports facilities because of this \$97 million coming from the province—

Hon. Neil Lumsden: That's not what I've said.

Mr. Chris Glover: Now you're saying it's not going to infrastructure and that the province is going to withhold some \$40 million, maybe \$50 million, maybe whatever it is, for provincial services for the games.

They don't actually know—and why is the city being told, “Hey, you can only spend our money on infrastructure” but the province is saying, “But we're going to spend from that same pot on services”?

Hon. Neil Lumsden: You're mixing your messages here, because part of the conversation has always been, in my understanding—and I would defer to my deputy in a second, if I'm incorrect—that there was a legacy piece to this. That legacy piece, from a training centre perspective—that they need to be able to have to host the FIFA World Cup—is part of our \$97 million.

However they want to cut this pie up when they get the final information from us, the province, of what security or what transportation is going to be, then we'll find out what's left and there will be a cash component.

Am I missing anything on this?

Mr. Keith Palmer: Through you, Madam Chair: No, you're accurate. Minister, if I can add—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Just state your name for the first time.

Mr. Keith Palmer: It's Keith Palmer.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thank you.

Mr. Keith Palmer: You're very accurate, Minister. I think what needs to be clarified is, of the \$97 million, the city has an opportunity to spend those dollars in specific areas of which legacy and capital infrastructure is one. The balance of the funds outside of those costs could be attributed to the cost of the games.

Removed from the \$97 million, as originally agreed upon through a letter to the city of Toronto—provincial service costs will be backed out of that \$97 million. Those conversations—turning into a contribution agreement with the province of Ontario—will stipulate exactly what those provincial service costs are going to be, that cost the province to assist the city in facilitating those games.

Mr. Chris Glover: Okay.

Minister, you said earlier that the expected economic impact of the games for the province of Ontario is \$1.3 billion. The city of Toronto is contributing \$179 million and the federal government is contributing \$104 million, plus whatever services they provide. They are not charging; they will absorb the costs. The federal government is absorbing the costs of whatever services they provide for

the games. The \$104 million that they're giving is just cash. They're saying to the city, “Put on the best games possible. Here's \$104 million to do it.”

The province is saying, “Look, we're going to contribute \$97 million, but some of it's going to be for our services; some of it you can use for making great games.” But they can't really estimate how much of that is going to be in cash.

1650

So the question that I have here is, when it's going to generate \$1.3 billion, why doesn't the provincial government absorb the costs of the services that it's providing in order to make this the best games possible? Because, as you said, there will be 170 million people watching from around the world, and this is Toronto's opportunity and Canada's opportunity to showcase our city, our province and our country to the world. Why hold back that other money? Why not invest in this and make it the best games possible?

Hon. Neil Lumsden: You're assuming that they won't be based on the existing funding formula.

Mr. Chris Glover: Well, I'm assuming that—

Hon. Neil Lumsden: No, but you're suggesting right now that the city of Toronto, based on what they have at the ready federally, for their own budget and our budget, can't do a fantastic job. If you know something that they're not going to be able to do, it would be nice to hear.

Mr. Chris Glover: Well, the city has already said that they're going to have to limit because they did not expect \$40 million to be withheld from the provincial contribution for provincial services; that they're going to have to make some cuts to what they're planning.

When I look at this in comparison to what British Columbia has done, they're contributing a much greater amount. They've done a cost-benefit analysis. The British Columbia NDP government is planning to spend \$600 million on this because they expect to make at least that much back in revenue from the games.

You mentioned a \$1.3-billion estimated economic gain for the province. Have you broken that down? What is your return on investment, and why not invest the full \$97 million?

Hon. Neil Lumsden: Number one, that is an investment of \$97 million. It might not all be cash. So you're suggesting that an investment—the money that would cost us to execute and the cash is not an investment?

Mr. Chris Glover: What I'm suggesting is that—

Hon. Neil Lumsden: No, you're suggesting that our investment of \$97 million—

Mr. Chris Glover: I'll reclaim the floor.

The city expected \$97 million from the province, minus some services, but now the services looks like it could be half that investment. The federal government is absorbing the cost of the services that they're providing so that the city knows how much they're working with to develop the games. But with your investment, they can't do that.

Let me go to my next question. How much time do I have, Madam Chair?

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): You have three minutes and 45 seconds.

Mr. Chris Glover: Okay. I'm going to do this one.

The letter from the ministry to the city was that the money—the \$97 million—was not to go to any cost where the primary beneficiary is a private, for-profit or otherwise non-public entity. The provincial government has made private, for-profit entities the primary beneficiary on so many other levels of funding. This government gives money hand over fist to private, for-profit.

First of all, I'll back up there. I think that's a good thing. I think that when we're investing money in the FIFA games, it should go to public entities. It should go to benefit public entities so that we have lasting infrastructure and lasting benefit from this. It shouldn't go to pad profits for private, for-profit corporations.

But this government gives out money hand over fist for private, for-profit corporations: the Skills Development Fund, \$750 million that's gone to particularly Conservative donors; Ontario Place, a \$2.2-billion taxpayer contribution to a private, for-profit Austrian spa; ServiceOntario, \$11.7 million.

Hon. Neil Lumsden: Chair, is this a FIFA question?

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): He's getting to it.

Mr. Chris Glover: So my question is, why do you have one standard for the city which says, "Hey, invest our money in public services because that is how Ontarians get the best return," but for the other funds that you have, the other places this government spends money, they actually use it to pad the profits of private, for-profit corporations. Why two different standards?

Hon. Neil Lumsden: I think you're apples and oranges here. Let's get back to the point about our support of the city of Toronto and their request and their agreement that \$97 million was the number that we landed on when we were negotiating.

I think one of the things you can't forget about when you talk about services is there's a cost to it. You don't clap your hands and they show up. Security doesn't just show up, I can tell you again from experience. Security is a lot of dough, especially in an event like this—world-class—that has six different dates at one location. And I note the world cycling as an example; I have an idea what the security was costing back in the day. It's not something you can pick a number out of the air. That's why they're still discussing it. That's why they're still working on it.

I can tell you, they're also working on it to bring those numbers down as reasonable as they can so there might be more cash at the end of the day for the city. But the city knew, getting into this, it was \$97 million.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): One minute.

Hon. Neil Lumsden: I joke about it that it's Connor McDavid. If you're a hockey fan, you know what I mean. His number is 97; that's the number.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Fifty seconds.

Mr. Chris Glover: Fifty seconds? I've got to find my 50-second question.

Hon. Neil Lumsden: Ask anything.

Mr. Chris Glover: I'll come back. I've got another round.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Now we'll go to the third party: MPP Cerjanec.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Through you, Chair: Thank you, Minister, for your presentation. I just want to pick up on one thing on FIFA—and maybe we'll come back to FIFA a little later—around ticket resale caps. Did the province put any consideration around ticket resale caps as it pertained to FIFA?

Hon. Neil Lumsden: I think you're asking maybe the wrong minister on that, but what I will say is that it is not our event. We, again, are supporters of this event. I know the conversation started happening around the Blue Jays and the World Series. I'm not sure if people understood, when they were talking about ticket prices, that the Blue Jays—it wasn't their game; it was an entity of the national baseball association, whatever it is.

So, the resale—I don't even think they've gotten to the point where they—well, they haven't. They haven't done the draw for the games yet, so we don't even know who is going to be playing in Canada, other than that we know Canada's going to be playing here at least once. But I don't believe—and again, I will happily stand corrected—it's our job to set prices and what the market will bear. As I said to someone when we were talking about Blue Jays, it was sold out. All the tickets were sold, so people were willing to pay on a secondary level. Then so be it. But we don't set prices. We don't control that.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I guess the one thing I would advise—there are a lot of folks that I think are going to want to be able to go to those games who aren't going to be able to. It's really more my concern on the secondary market. We see those ticket sales of all different types on the secondary market, especially for these big, big marquee events. It kind of gets out of control sometimes, and it means that either you've got people scalping and making a killing on those types of tickets—

Interjection.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Sorry, MPP Cerjanec. MPP Pierre, you have a point?

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Yes. Thank you, Chair. Point of order, the question around ticket sales—two points: (1) wrong ministry; and (2) it has nothing to do with the estimates that we're here to discuss in committee this afternoon. I would kindly ask you to redirect the member opposite, please.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Thank you. So, Chair, through you: Is the Ministry of Sport the responsible entity in negotiating the FIFA deal?

Hon. Neil Lumsden: For the province, yes.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: And then now, looking at the administration of the ministry, my question is, is the ministry giving any consideration around that?

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Point of order, Chair.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I mean, the member opposite wants to do this. That's no problem. We can do a lot more.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): MPP Pierre has the floor for a point of order.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Yes. I just don't understand; we're here to discuss estimates for the Ministry of Sport this afternoon, and so I don't see how that relates to the estimates—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): MPP Pierre does have a valid point of order. You've approached it a couple of different ways, but the present ministry, and in the estimates—

Interjection.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Yes, FIFA is, as you know, and you're questioning. But when you're questioning, it's not part of these estimates—

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Thank you, Chair. I guess from the PA, the government's position is they don't want to have that conversation—not a problem. I will move on to something else. I mean, I was just about done actually, and then we got into this, so—

Interjection.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): MPP Cerjanec, I have another point of order now.

MPP Babikian.

1700

Mr. Aris Babikian: Just a point of clarification regarding our colleague MPP Cerjanec: The sale of tickets is under the control of FIFA. FIFA is directly involved in selling tickets, so neither the province nor the city have control over it—

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I don't think that's a point of order, Chair.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): MPP Babikian—

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: And I was going to move on.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): MPP Babikian, we already ruled on the previous point of order, so that's not a point of order.

MPP Cerjanec, you have the floor again.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Thank you.

What I did want to talk about today is youth sport, and in particular kids accessing youth sport. For me, it's something that's a little bit personal. Growing up, we didn't have money. I didn't have money, didn't have the opportunity in order to play youth sports. I wanted to play hockey; my mom said, "Sorry, you can't." And that's okay. I'm doing well. Things are great. But something that I'm concerned with is ensuring that every kid in this province, if they want to have the opportunity to play youth sport, that they have that opportunity.

I am curious: Is the ministry tracking any statistics around playing youth sports and people maybe not having access to—or what that looks like?

Mr. Keith Palmer: The answer is yes. The ministry supports grassroots organizations, to which there are about 37,000 children who are positively impacted by the contributions that are made—around roughly \$5 million. We do work with a number of different organizations, be it Variety Village, Jays Care and a number of other organizations that are focusing on addressing sport access and recreational access for the exact same cadre of youth that you're speaking about.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Thank you. Through you, Chair: I'm curious as to how much the ministry has budgeted for, currently, in the estimates, around helping children access youth sports.

Mr. Keith Palmer: Through you, Madam Chair: It's about \$5 million.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: About \$5 million. Okay.

Mr. Keith Palmer: That's specific to our grassroots program. That number could be larger depending on how you define "youth," but we're investing around roughly \$50 million into sports and recreation across the province of Ontario.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Through you, Chair: Has that number changed year over year?

Mr. Keith Palmer: Again, through you, Madam Chair: That number is fairly consistent. This year, there has been an increased investment for capital. I think as we think about the sport ecosystem in the province of Ontario, we think about the \$200-million CSRI Fund, of which \$150 million was for 2025-26, which will, in turn, address renovation, maintenance and capital infrastructure projects for sport facilities. That will allow greater numbers of youth to access programs simply because we're focusing on making sure those facilities are up to standard, accessible and allow children, youth and adults from playground to podium to access additional spaces for them to participate in recreation and sport.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Thank you. Go ahead, Minister.

Hon. Neil Lumsden: If you don't mind, Chair—it's a great question and we understand it. I think that I want to highlight where we land on this, because we talk about numbers a lot and the dollars, and I know it's always the topic of conversation on any front, but I think when you talk about the impact that the dollars make, I think listing them is important.

The deputy mentioned a couple. Canadian Tire Jumpstart charities support communities in sport and recreation across Ontario to provide low- or no-cost sports and recreation programming for kids and youth. Canadian Women and Sport provides community organizations with training in girl-centred program design and seed grants. MLSE Foundation makes a huge impact supporting community organizations to deliver innovative projects using sport as tools and life skills to help marginalized youth recognize and reach their potential. The Jays Care Foundation touches hundreds and hundreds of people to provide inclusive baseball programming, of which I've gone to a couple of times.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I'll reclaim on that. I appreciate listing off some of the—

Hon. Neil Lumsden: I know you care about it, and I think it's important, because we do too.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Oh, I know.

Hon. Neil Lumsden: And that we're making a difference in that.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: No, I mean, I appreciate the minister reading off some of the organizations, and I know those are organizations that are doing really, really important things. In my community in Durham region, we're

seeing kids as young as 12, 13, 14, 15, 16 being charged with gun crimes and robberies, and we really do need to be addressing the root causes of some of this. That's income, that's a whole bunch of other aspects—employment—as well.

Providing kids with a sense of belonging, providing kids with that opportunity to play sports, to get involved on a team, not just in the summer months but in the winter months as well, is something that I think is really, really important. It's something that I think I would encourage this ministry, through you, Chair—that we've got to do more. Because if one in two kids in this province can't afford to play youth sports—those organizations are doing really, really great work, but there's so much more I think that we can do to help kids get there and provide that belonging and opportunity.

Hon. Neil Lumsden: I agree with you 100%. You're talking to a large choir here when it comes to that. I think that's where the after-school program, that has developed so well and that we support, has done a fantastic job of creating sport. Again, being on-site and seeing what they do is a wonderful experience. If you ever get the chance and you want to come to Hamilton, based on how you are describing it—because, again, 100%, let's get them on the fields and off the streets as much as we can, for as long as we can. And then who knows what happens.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Thank you. That will be a pre-budget conversation that we'll have around that. I might have to take it to the Minister of Finance.

I'm curious around the strategy that sport Ontario, the ministry, has to support equity, diversity and inclusion within sport right now.

Hon. Neil Lumsden: I didn't hear the first—I wasn't clear on the first part.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: What strategies does sport Ontario have around equity, diversity and inclusion?

Interjection.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): MPP Pierre?

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Point of order, please Chair: The intent of the committee this afternoon is to talk about estimates.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Okay. I'll reframe my question, how is that. How much money has the ministry dedicated towards initiatives around equity, diversity and inclusion?

Mr. Keith Palmer: Through you, Madam Chair—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Yes, please go ahead.

Mr. Keith Palmer: As part of our grassroots program funding, one of the organizations that we provide roughly around \$100,000 to is our Inclusion in Canadian Sports Network, which looks at diversity and inclusive coaching, training and education that speaks to the areas of significance when we're looking at different groups that are involved in sport.

What we're trying not to be is a very homogeneous organization that solely focuses on a particular group, but, in fact, really focus on inclusion, equity and areas of diversity in sport; for example, work that's under way in a number of different communities that, I'm understanding, support different Islamic groups, different groups from

different countries that have different cultural norms and behaviours—how we can support those municipalities in being able to provide that level of service that incorporates those differences between the different larger groups in the province of Ontario.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Thank you. Through you, Chair, I guess as part of that, what about addressing barriers that some of those groups that you've mentioned and other folks as well who might be racialized or different religions have faced in accessing or taking part in sports? Is there any focus or funding around there?

Mr. Keith Palmer: Again, through you, Madam Chair, I don't think it's solely a sport challenge. I think it's a community challenge writ large, specific to barriers of individuals within the province. I think when we look at it through a sporting lens, we can't just do that. It needs to connect itself to education, connect itself to some of the broader strategies of other ministries specific to these particular groups. From a sport perspective, what we're focused on is making sure that folks who are providing supports to individuals that are participating through sport and recreation understand the differences between cultures, understand the differences between diverse populations and groups that participate in sport and recreation through some of our stakeholder supporting.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Thank you. Through you, Chair, around that, then: Organizations that we might fund provincially through the ministry—do we have any requirements associated around that, around maybe complaints around racism or discrimination? Do we put any requirements on that through the organizations that we fund?

Mr. Keith Palmer: Again, through you, Madam Chair: Yes, we do. That's the short answer there. Our work with our provincial organization, our sport organizations and our multi-sport organizations—part of their policy development and design must incorporate some inclusive focus as part of our transfer payment agreements with them. So it is not that the province doesn't care in this area; in fact, we care more than meets the eye.

1710

We like to make sure that PSOs also have a level of independence to craft policies and directives that focus on inclusion, which we then take a look at and make sure that compliance is fairly high in that area.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Fifty seconds left.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Thank you. Any future thinking around that through monies allocated through the estimates?

Mr. Keith Palmer: Again, through you, Madam Chair, there are always considerations on how we can improve the broader sports sector and ecosystem, be it for diverse individuals or otherwise. As we continue to address some of the needs within the sports sector and through the minister's decision and direction to some of our officials, that is something that is definitely top of mind for us. Continuing to increase access, continuing to focus on participation, addressing abuse in sport are part of some of the goals that we have within the Ministry of Sport.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Thank you.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much.

We'll now move over to the government side. MPP Pierre, please.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Thank you, Minister, deputy and team, for your remarks and for the work that you've prepared for today's estimates committee meeting. I also wanted to thank you for your dedication to enriching the lives and well-being of Ontarians through sport and recreation in our communities—just what an impact it has made.

I wanted to ask you a little bit about the Community Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Fund. I heard you mention it in your remarks at the very beginning. We know strong, vibrant communities rely on access to sporting facilities, recreation facilities in the community. I've heard first-hand how the CSRIF funding has helped out so many communities across the entire province.

I'm just wondering if you could tell us about how the CSRIF funding is addressing the ongoing need for infrastructure support for things like baseball fields, playgrounds, sporting arenas across the province.

Hon. Neil Lumsden: Thanks for the question. It was something we recognized, as we have on a lot of fronts, that we were falling behind on not only in Ontario but across the country when it came to infrastructure that no one paid attention to for the longest time. I'm referring to fields, arenas, recreation facilities.

When we started to examine closely and felt strongly enough, as we do, that we needed to do more in Ontario to start with bringing people together through sport, that's where the Community Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Fund, thanks to the Premier and Treasury Board, gave us the \$200 million. We went through that process. It's a highlight only as a number, the \$200 million; we had over \$1.15 billion in funding requests. So we are on the right track.

We had a great response. In the communities that we visited through announcements, the one thing that I found that I wasn't quite prepared for—it's worthwhile anyway, but it really makes it worthwhile when we show up at the site and there's not just some media there and the local association. There could be 30, 50, 100 people. These are all people from the community saying, "Thank you. Thanks for the opportunity. We appreciate you looking after our communities and helping us develop our young people," to the point earlier, keeping them focused on sport and recreation.

It may sound silly, but the longer we keep our young people healthy, the better they're going to be off the health care system when they get a little bit older. That's the long-term vision.

The short-term vision is that we need more activity and more direction locally, and to do that, we needed that fund. It has landed incredibly well. We had two streams: Stream 1 was more R&R, repair and rehab; stream 2 was the new build. Again, it was incredible what we saw.

Like anything, it was a competition. There were phenomenal proposals. We made regional advisers available

to everybody, and I think it was five criteria that they had with respect to making the application. I had questions asked all the time about, "What are our chances," and I would always defer to saying, "Talk to the regional adviser. Do the very, very best you can in your proposal, in your submission, because it is a competition." What we saw was what we already knew in the need, and with luck down the road, we'll be able to do this again, but right now, we have made a difference in 94 communities that these projects will land in, both stream 1 and stream 2. It is truly making a difference.

Again, I referenced earlier the questions before, and sometimes it is about the \$200 million, but it is more about what the legacy will be in the communities and how we have changed people's lives in those communities and, more importantly, how the young people can now do what we would like them to be able to do, and that's experience sport and recreation. It could be something as simple as a playground area where moms and dads take their kids, but the activity level is higher, and then as they grow, they get into the pool, and they get onto the basketball court. There are scenarios that there aren't enough opportunities for, and CSRIF is doing exactly that.

The response we've had, and the impact, has just been unbelievable, and we know what's needed. We were so far behind the rest of the world in many ways, and look, I'm not going to point fingers that previous governments that they didn't do anything about it—the point is we are, and we recognize it, and that's the difference.

I can tell you that I'm going to be up in the Blue Mountains on Thursday speaking at a conference on recreational, and my understanding is there are 19 or 20 groups that are going to be there that were the beneficiaries of doing a great application and getting funding.

So it is motivation to do more and go after it in a nice, aggressive way, but we've started something that was needed. I'm really proud of our staff and our group that have done this and that the government saw that it was a need, because it's one of those things sometimes that gets—"Oh, sport is not important. Sport doesn't—it's sport." Well, people have to start to recognize that sport is more than that. It's more than movement; it's development, both physically and mentally. It's about creating great habits. It's about creating leaders that go on and some that aspire to maybe want to stay in sport and become a rep basketball player and maybe go play college. We're the platform for them. We need to make more of those platforms, and that's one of my priorities.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: One of the other things in addition to the impact for sports players and being able, for people's physical health and mental health—and I'm still asking about the CSRIF funding. I think about some of these smaller communities, and I think about the economic impact of rebuilding an arena or building up a new recreation centre, and those are bringing good jobs to communities, and then there's ongoing employment in these communities.

So I'm wondering if you might talk a little bit about not only the mental health, the physical health, the camaraderie,

the leadership skills that you learn participating in sport, but just about the economic impact of the investment in the infrastructure in some of these communities across the province, what that can mean for a small, maybe rural community.

Hon. Neil Lumsden: We've had discussions with—I was up north, and locally that—as a gal who was part of a sport organization said to me, “Once this gets done here and the rink gets fixed and we do recs beside it—we can host events, we can host tournaments, we can put on local challenges, we can be a destination for sport hosting and sport tourism.”

We and I feel very strongly that sport tourism has been one of those gems out there for the longest time that just people assumed: “Oh, there's a hockey tournament. Oh, yeah.” They don't think about the impact. We think about what we can do to create more impact on top of what would already be there. So developing that—Ontario Games and Canada Games are great examples of us stepping forward, creating that support and the impact that they make on these communities to the point where it is so good—and I talked about Orillia in my opening comments—that they've done it at least two or three times as far as hosting games. They know it makes a difference; they know it galvanizes the community; they know the impact it makes financially to the local communities is a bonus, if you will. And it's done through sport. It's done through bringing people together.

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That is recognized almost across the board when we made these announcements or when I've been to locations just meeting with people and saying, “Hey, look, what are you going to be able to do with this?” Knowing very well what I want them to say, but they get creative, they get dynamic.

The other thing that happens—and Orillia was a great example. We were up there just a week and a half ago, when we were talking about the groups that organized—because listen, they are volunteers that organized these events on site, but they couldn't wait to go after another opportunity to make their community stronger through sport hosting. It's contagious.

I'm a big believer in all levels of sport hosting, from the Indy right down to the local tournaments. They all make a difference. And they all add to the overall impact that we make financially in the community that people may look at. Maybe the gasoline station down at the corner does pretty well, but they do great for that week and a half and that makes them profitable. Maybe it's the corner store. Maybe it's the beer store. It doesn't matter. As long as we're bringing people to a point where they're going to stick around a bit for something that everyone just took for granted for years and years is no longer being taken for granted by us.

We know it's an opportunity, we know it helps build communities, and with CSRIF added to that, people are seeing it. It's a treat to be able to sit back and see these organizing committees, these people who chair, saying, “Oh, yes, we're going to get it back. We want to do this.

We want to get the 55+ games now”—which I think Orillia has got next year. They're beasts when it comes to this.

At the end of the day, people in Ontario, people in those communities win, and then drill down into the athletes and the young people and the parents and the camaraderie that that's all about. For me, it doesn't get a whole lot better than that.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: I've seen that actually first-hand in Burlington, in my community, where we hosted the international racquetball competition.

You mentioned the corner store. I would add to that the hotels, the restaurants, the shopping malls—in between games, parents taking their kids off to the local mall. You know, even—

Hon. Neil Lumsden: Can I interrupt you just for a second, Chair?

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Sure.

Hon. Neil Lumsden: I was invited four years ago for the LNHL, which is the little Indigenous hockey league, and they had a tournament. I knew some people and they said, “Would you come up and guest coach?” And I said, “Sure, I will come up.”

I had some fun, saw what they did, saw the numbers, saw the involvement, talked to some parents. This was coming out of COVID, so they were building their numbers back up to numbers of teams. So they were cutting close to their old number, which was 250 teams, and they were now getting over 200 again. Their goal was 300.

The people in Markham saw what they were doing with this tournament and realized the benefit that this tournament has to a community. They went to the LNHL leadership group and said, “We'd like to have you come to Markham, and we want you there for three years.” They see the opportunity. They're going to set the platform—or the plate, if you will—for the LNHL—“And we will take care of you because what you do on so many fronts is so important for the sport model with Indigenous hockey and the community,” that they were willing to say, “No, no, we want you here. We want you to be part of what we do here in Markham. That's how we think and that's how we move ahead.”

That's why they got the Indy, because they were aggressive, they see the opportunity in sport tourism, and we want them to take advantage of that opportunity. We want growth coming from sport. I'm tired of people saying, “Oh, it's just an activity; it doesn't mean anything.” The hell it doesn't. It builds communities on so many different levels, and like nothing else.

When I heard that they had signed a three-year deal, I thought, “Well, that's brilliant.” They're on their toes, and it will happen even more now—and it is happening more, some of which I can't reveal.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Time check?

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): A minute and 15 seconds.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Okay.

You mentioned about the Molson Indy and the three-year deal, I think you said, to have it hosted in Markham—

Hon. Neil Lumsden: Five-year deal—

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Five years.

Hon. Neil Lumsden: Honda Indy.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Honda Indy; sorry.

Hon. Neil Lumsden: That's all right.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: I stand corrected.

Just about the economic impact of that and how important it is to keep those kinds of sporting events here in Ontario versus moving to another province in Canada, and how it's that important to our communities and to our province.

Hon. Neil Lumsden: I have a chart somewhere, but I'll go off the top of my head.

If you took the Indy and you take the Canadian Open, which was at TPC Osprey last year—it was in Hamilton and the Hamilton golf club the year before that—and you took maybe the Grey Cup, the total investment to make sure they come to Ontario and make that their home was a \$5 million total investment.

Of the return we got, economic impact was over \$200 million. As we don't do everything in our ROI—return on investment—we look at things that are going to make the biggest and most positive impact at the minimum cost.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thank you, Minister. That's great for this round. What can I say?

Over to the official opposition: MPP Glover.

Mr. Chris Glover: I will say, one thing that I share in common with the Minister of Sport is the love of sport. I was never a professional athlete like you, but at one time I was a decent Beer League hockey player.

Hon. Neil Lumsden: Are you still?

Mr. Chris Glover: No, I'm a mediocre Beer League hockey player. I'm on the team, but I'm realizing just how rusty I am.

Anyway, so we're here in estimates and we're looking to ask questions about the economics of the Ministry of Sport. You mentioned—I'm going to come back to FIFA—\$1.3 billion in economic impact, and I want to break this down.

One of the questions I have: Of that \$1.3 billion, when you're looking into it, is the HST on the sale of tickets a part of that calculation for the \$1.3 billion?

Hon. Neil Lumsden: Could you repeat that?

Mr. Chris Glover: Is the HST on the sale of tickets for FIFA part of the calculation for the \$1.3 billion in economic impact from FIFA?

Mr. Keith Palmer: Through you, Madam Chair: It very well could be. The studies done by the consultants on behalf of FIFA would have incorporated dollars in, dollars out. Those numbers of the billion-and-some-odd dollars that you probably are referring to would be a culmination of all spending that's taking place.

If the question specifically is around federal HST versus provincial taxation, those are two different components.

Mr. Chris Glover: I mean the provincial tax. HST is—what is it—12%, and 8% is provincial. Sorry, it's 13%, and 8% is provincial, right?

Okay, so 8% of every ticket sale is contributing to some of the revenue that this province will get from FIFA. If

each time those tickets are resold, that adds to the revenue and adds to the \$1.3 billion. Is that accurate?

Mr. Keith Palmer: Through you, Madam Chair: I cannot answer the question if that is accurate or not—it depends on how those tickets are resold. They could be resold online, offline, scalped—that we don't know. It's a difficult question to answer.

Mr. Chris Glover: Assuming it's sold through Ticketmaster, which I'm assuming charges taxes and passes them back to the province—I'm assuming that that's what Ticketmaster would do.

Mr. Keith Palmer: Again, it depends on who has oversight for the sales of those tickets. If it's being sold through a FIFA online platform, our Consumer Protection Act will dictate how those tickets are to be sold or released, so to speak.

Again, clarity around the Ministry of Sport's responsibility around ticketing and ticketing revenue is a question that we probably can't answer in this ministry.

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Mr. Chris Glover: But then, assuming that tickets are resold through an agency like Ticketmaster and Ticketmaster would charge HST and then pass on that revenue to the province, each time the tickets are resold, that would add revenue to the provincial coffers. And so, the 2018 decision of the province to allow the resale of tickets without any caps would increase the revenue of the province from the FIFA games. Is this accurate in principle?

Hon. Neil Lumsden: Chair, that's not how it works in tickets sales. If Ticketmaster has the right through FIFA to sell and distribute tickets, they've signed an agreement. They have signed their own separate agreement with Ticketmaster. Ticketmaster doesn't resell tickets that were already sold. No one walks back in and hands the ticket back and says, "I bought this for 50 bucks. Do you want to pay me \$100, and you can sell it for \$200?" They're not a resale operation. They are the centre of the sales through FIFA. FIFA manages that part of the event.

So to suggest that we know—now, I know you're talking about the income. We would get the first taxes on the original sale that would go to the revenues of the province. But after that—

Mr. Chris Glover: So, if I bought tickets for the Jays, for example—I wasn't able to get tickets for the Jays; a lot of people weren't able to get tickets for the Jays, especially the World Series games—but you can resell on Ticketmaster, and if you're reselling, then you pay the HST again. That, presumably, would be adding to the revenue of the provincial government. I mean, it just seems logical.

And so, in 2018, when the provincial government changed the rules—at that point, there were restrictions that you could only resell tickets for 50% above the cost of the face value of the ticket. When the government removed that restriction, there is the potential for the province—the province would be earning more money.

One of the concerns that people have—we both love sports. We both love playing sports. We both love watching sports. One of the challenges—we saw it with the World Series—is that there are these professional agencies

that have computer bots that buy up tickets and then resell them—

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Point of order.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Excuse me, MPP Glover. MPP Pierre has a point of order.

MPP Pierre.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Yes, I would just ask you to rule: We're here to hear the estimates of the Ministry of Sport, and I'm not sure that the question or the line of thought around the question that you have has anything to do with the Ministry of Sport or the 2025-26 estimates for the ministry.

Mr. Chris Glover: Right. This is about the revenue—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Just hold on, MPP Glover. Sorry.

He's getting to the question. He has been asking questions about the income, so I'll just ask him maybe to get to the question for the minister that's related to the income and related to the estimates that are before us.

Mr. Chris Glover: Okay. If the government hadn't changed the resale law, if they had at least capped the resale tickets at 50% above face, then the government would not be making so much revenue from the FIFA World Cup. The unfortunate part is that because the government changed that law, it will increase the government's revenue from FIFA, but at the same time, it will make it possible for people with bots to buy up a whole bunch of tickets and jack up the prices beyond the ability of many people to afford to go to those games.

This is one of the challenges with the FIFA World Cup: People want to go to the games, but just like the World Series, they don't want to be priced out of it. They want to pay face value for the tickets. Would the government be willing to reduce its HST share on resale tickets with FIFA by restricting the resale of tickets to face or to 50% above face?

Hon. Neil Lumsden: Intriguing question, and it's a hypothetical. I think maybe you should have that question with the city, given that they are the host city to this event.

Mr. Chris Glover: But it's the provincial law that allows the resale and that prevents—

Hon. Neil Lumsden: It's the—

Mr. Chris Glover: It's the change in the provincial law that allows the resale at whatever value people can get. It allows bots to buy up the tickets and then resell them for whatever value they want and price many people out of the ability to go to the game.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): MPP Glover, this is not the ministry that is before us that regulates the topic you're on. So if you can direct the question more directly to how it affects the ministry—

Mr. Chris Glover: Okay.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): They are not the ministry that regulates the topic that you're talking about.

Mr. Chris Glover: Okay. Some of the \$1.3 billion that the province expects to generate from the FIFA World Cup will come from the resale of tickets, from HST on the resale of tickets. Would this ministry be willing to forgo

that and restrict the resale of tickets to face or 50% above face value?

Hon. Neil Lumsden: I think your language is incorrect. We do not get the \$1.3 billion. That is an economic impact across the province.

Mr. Chris Glover: Right.

Hon. Neil Lumsden: It is a number that is the result of what's going to happen, and all the elements and all the pieces that have to do with FIFA, whether it's retail or otherwise, and go outside the green patch, if you will, the stadium, to all the other transactions that are taken, everything else—that's where that number comes from.

Mr. Chris Glover: Right, and I understand that. That's the economic impact. But a part of that economic impact is, in fact, the sale of tickets and the resale of tickets. If the resale of tickets was restricted, it would reduce the amount of revenue that's generated for the province but would allow people to be able to pay face value for the tickets and more people to be able to attend the game. So would you be willing to forgo the HST—

Hon. Neil Lumsden: More people can't attend the game if it's already sold out. You're assuming that more people can attend the game when it's already sold out. It's like saying that the World Series—

Mr. Chris Glover: No, no. What I'm assuming is that bots will not buy up the tickets—

Hon. Neil Lumsden: No, but you referenced people attending the game. I've heard people talk about the World Series and that so many people didn't get a chance to attend that game—because it was sold out. There were no tickets.

Mr. Chris Glover: In response to that—I'll reclaim my time. In response to that, yes, it was sold out. It was sold out within seconds of the tickets going on sale, not by the people who had waited an hour online, waiting for the moment to press the button to buy the ticket, but bought up by professional scalpers who have bots that buy up massive amounts of tickets and then jack up the prices and resell them. So the opportunity for people to pay face value was eliminated.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): MPP Glover, MPP Pierre has her hand up, please.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Point of order, Chair: I would ask the Chair to rule on whether the line of questioning is direct to the committee business that's before us today, which is regarding the 2025-26 estimates for the Ministry of Sport, please.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): When you say direct, that is a good question. It's a very circuitous way of asking questions that indirectly do not apply to this ministry and the estimates that are before us because it's controlled either by other ministries or other organizations. MPP Glover, could you possibly tie it in a little bit more to the estimates that are here, because I think you want to talk about, if I can, the revenue generation of, in this case, FIFA. The ministry and the deputy have given some answers, but if you could maybe just direct it a little bit more.

Mr. Chris Glover: I think I've gotten my response. Basically, we're asking for an opportunity for people to be

able to pay face so that more people would be able—more people with fewer means. Everybody would be able to attend the games because they're not competing on purchasing tickets with professionals who have bots to buy up the tickets.

Let me ask another question. How much time do I have, Madam Chair?

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Two minutes and 20 seconds.

Mr. Chris Glover: Okay. This is going to be quick, then.

Today, the government passed Bill 33, which allows the Minister of Education to take over schools. He's been talking about the loss of democratically elected trustees. This is a great concern to me. I was a TDSB trustee for eight years—

Interjection.

Mr. Chris Glover: I will come to it.

I was the chair of a community use of schools advisory committee. It looked after permitting schools after hours and on weekends to allow sports teams to play—sports teams and cultural groups, like the Scarborough Basketball Association and the Somali soccer club. There was a Somali girls soccer club that used the schools.

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One of the concerns I have is that CUSCAC was televised. It was a public—well, online. It wasn't a hit show or anything, but people could watch, people could come participate, and we were making decisions. And we went through a process to bring it to cost recovery. So whatever the permit cost was, it covered the cost to the school board of the use of that facility for that time. What I'm hearing from CUSCAC now is that the ministry taking over the school board is looking at increasing the cost of those permits beyond what we had calculated as a cost recovery amount.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): One minute.

Mr. Chris Glover: This could lead to the loss of school facilities for local sports teams. Will you commit to looking into this and try to protect local sports teams that permit schools?

Mr. Deepak Anand: Point of order.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): MPP Anand, on a point of order.

Mr. Deepak Anand: My question is simple: Is it related to estimates, the numbers?

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): MPP Glover did mention the CUSAC program, which is part of the estimates. Minister?

Mr. Chris Glover: So will you commit to protecting those sports organizations that permit schools and not have a massive increase in the fees that they pay—at least looking into it?

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Our time is up for this round, but there is another round.

MPP Cerjanec.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I think you'll have some time at the end, so you'll definitely follow up on that one.

I want to pick up just one last piece on the diversity in sport piece, and then I want to move on to a couple of other

topics. In this year's estimates, did the ministry provide funding for the Diversity in Sports Conference or kind of a similar convening of stakeholders?

Mr. Keith Palmer: Through you, Madam Chair, yes, we did support the organization that does coordinate and facilitate that event. How they utilize those funds is completely up to them, but in my conversations with the executive director, to which I was actually invited to speak at that event—I don't want to make the assumption, but she's very keen and very wise on how she manages her expenditures, so I'm going to say with the funding that she received from us, it's likely that our funds have gone to that conference.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Year over year from last year to this year, have there been any changes in funding to that organization?

Mr. Keith Palmer: I think, depending on their asks annually, we try to manage the full budget to be able to provide them with some supports. They are a really good partner with the province of Ontario, so we are able, through some of the discussions and the number of organizations that are seeking funding—we try to make sure we're carving out space for marginalized or under-represented groups.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Thank you. I want to talk about community sport infrastructure, and I want to talk about a couple of pieces around it. First, just given the news lately and what we're seeing around the Skills Development Fund in the Legislature, I think there is definitely a higher level of concern over how funding is given, how that application process works and who is involved. I just really want to make sure that, with the Ministry of Sport, the funding that's being provided is going through a very rigorous process, that the applications being selected are the ones that score highest.

I'm wondering if I can get a little information on what that evaluation process is, what does it look like and what are some of the checks and balances there with the money that we're giving out?

Hon. Neil Lumsden: I can start by saying that it is a rigorous process. I would be careful painting us with the same brush that some are suggesting others. So I appreciate that. The criteria are five, I believe, for both stream 1 and stream 2. I have seen the results, and the scores that have come in have been outstanding and consistent with the dollars that I mentioned earlier. It went fast. To be clear here, stream 1 had 77 projects for a total of just under \$49 million; stream 2 was 17 projects and funding of \$150 million, almost \$151 million. Seventy-one municipalities benefited, and 14 not-for-profits and nine Indigenous communities and organizations.

It was—I used the term earlier—a competition. That's how we approached it. There were some really, really good submissions that did not move forward. I think if I use the stream 2 criteria, the lowest score that a recipient had who made the cut to get into the funding was just under 85%. We continue to communicate to those in both stream 1 and stream 2—and hopefully we get the chance to do it again—that it is a competition and you have to be

very, very good in your application process. The work that goes into it is incredible at our end and it's not me; it's staff. There's no question that it's a—it's only sensitive because we know it's necessary and we look forward to the opportunity to challenge people again. What we have done—I mentioned it before, so I'm sorry for repeating—but regional advisers, the support mechanisms that were in place to help them be at their very best through the application process, were there for them to use. We did it, we did it right and we did it successfully.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Thank you for providing that. I think it's just really important for the public to be able to understand that and I know that there's such a competition. There are so many municipalities and non-profits that would love to be able to do more. I do appreciate your comments earlier around the importance of sport and getting people active and involved and engaged. I appreciate your passion around that, Minister. I know that comes from your past as well. But it's so important that we're able to do that, so I appreciate and thank you for that. I do think that program definitely can be a legacy program for folks in some of those communities as well, much like the Pan Am Games were in the past and other previous initiatives to build community and sport infrastructure that then communities get to use over and over and over again.

In terms of the capital funding that's provided, how does that look like in terms of allocations or projects in different parts of the province? Is it generally weighted in the different regions of the province or is it really just based on the applications?

Hon. Neil Lumsden: It's based on the successful applications. Absolutely.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Okay, thank you.

Something that I've been hearing a lot about, especially in northern Ontario, as I speak to people in the north and northwestern Ontario—even, to be honest, here in southern Ontario as well—is we've got winter. Winters definitely are harsher in some places of the province than others, absolutely, and how the weather changes on a dime.

Something I hear about in my community is the need for indoor-sport, field-house-type infrastructure: That's for things like soccer, cricket, flag football and so many other sports where you kind of need that field-house environment. I know some folks are working on projects like that, even trying to do public-private partnerships. But it's something that I think is really important.

Is there any consideration there, maybe, around a program specific to that to help some of those year-round sports or areas where the field gets muddy in the spring and the fall? Seasons are shorter in other areas. Would there be any consideration, perhaps in the future, as we look at this program and maybe an allocation around that?

Hon. Neil Lumsden: Great question. You're spot on, because one of the criteria is community needs. It matters.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Perfect.

Hon. Neil Lumsden: And you're right, before I answer your question, because I visited most of them and up north—we have been up north. Again, the celebration

around it is equal to, if not even a little bit more joyous, because they don't often get these opportunities. Again, it plays back into the overall concept of getting out and creating opportunities in all communities. I say that with zero shame. Again, I have no problem that the best move on, win and get the bid. The same thing as I've said—we will be continuing to push and get more because there's more to be done.

1750

Deputy, did you want to jump in?

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Go ahead.

Mr. Keith Palmer: Thank you. If I can add, through you, Madam Chair, as part of the CSRIF program, municipalities weren't ineligible to apply. The majority of the fields and pitches are owned by municipalities, of which many would have sought funding for drainage in fields, rehabilitation or maintenance of basketball courts within their purview.

Interjection: Arenas.

Mr. Keith Palmer: Arenas. Again, it depends on the application and how it's scored.

Of the 94 projects, there are a number of municipalities that were successful. Many of those projects are looking at maintenance and upgrading, updating pitches, arenas, courts so kids can play or adults can play on those spaces to which you are referring to.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Thank you. Through you, Chair, it's something—especially with some of these bigger facilities. I know in Thunder Bay, they didn't—I'm not sure if they applied for funding, to be honest, from the program or not, but there's a really big field-house facility being built in Thunder Bay that I think is going to be able to serve as an anchor for tournaments. And that—as I wear a different hat of mine sometimes—is tourism. It's folks coming into the community, spending money into the community as well. So the more that the province, through you, Chair, is able to do that, I think, the better.

And definitely encourage around the cabinet table as you're having those discussions, Minister, to continue to fight for those pieces, because I think it's just so important that we're building that type of infrastructure that's going to last long past this government and next governments that communities are going to be able to benefit from.

Hon. Neil Lumsden: If you don't mind, I'll jump in.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Go ahead.

Hon. Neil Lumsden: The other thing that has come out of this from my perspective is, when we're talking, even in the early stages, the creativity around it. It's not just about—it is in some cases, maybe, on our side of it in stream 1, but they are creating something more than just a single entity. "We're not just going to do arena; we're going to think about a double pad. We're going to think about a recreation centre and maybe we're going to do a cricket pitch in the back." They are thinking more widespread impact in their community versus just saying, "Well, it's about hockey. We need another arena." That's not the way they've looked at it. The creativity that we have seen and that I have heard for those that still talk to

me about it—and hopefully the opportunity comes—is really life-changing for that community.

Back to the original question, when we talked about hosting, they see that opportunity in hosting. It really becomes contagious when someone sees success in something else, and they say, as we all should at times, “Why can’t we do that? Why can’t we? When we move forward, let’s move forward this way.”

Because, to your point, drawing tournaments up north, whether it’s my example of Markham and the little Indigenous hockey league—tournaments are looking for homes, and they love to travel. They like to get out of town and play. I don’t care if it’s rep; I don’t care if it’s house league. It doesn’t matter. They’re thinking about, longer term, to your point, that they’re going to be there long past us. They’ll do it right, and they’ll do it with more than one dimension. I think that is something to me that is becoming more and more important—which includes things like domes added on. It’s a 12-months-of-the-year opportunity for multiple sports.

That’s how you develop young people, and that’s how you become more competitive. That’s how your university within sport in a small, medium or large community finds and develops young people to go on to that next level of education, become athletes at U Sports or in Ontario at the OUA and then maybe go on to the Olympics and things. That’s how these things get started.

The other part of it is, when sports are developing vertically and then they either drop off because they’ve got the facilities—RBC Training Ground became so very enlightened with this about four years ago that they travelled around the province and went to universities, predominantly, because of the sites. They were looking for athletes that played rugby that maybe could do something else, and it took off. So the opportunity for athletes out there now isn’t only one-dimensional. “Oh, I’m a rugby player. I can’t do anything else.” Not so fast. There are other opportunities out there within sport that can take you to a national and international level. That’s why we’ve done so well in Olympics. That’s why the CSIO has done such great work on high performance. People shouldn’t be afraid to want to get to that level because, frankly, it’s a lot of fun and the upside is huge. The only downside is, “Hey, I met a lot of people. I competed. I had a chance to do what I love to do.” That’s not a bad thing.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I would say more of that, through you, Chair.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Okay. There’s only 60 seconds left.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Let’s move on.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Okay. Over to the government side—MPP Sandhu, please.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Thank you to the minister and the entire team for the presentation.

Minister, I want to thank you first of all. I had the opportunity to attend the national junior field hockey tournament in my riding of Brampton West. Thank you to your ministry for providing the funding for the tournament, because it is very, very important. These are not just

tournaments; it’s about community, it’s about the opportunity and it’s about giving the platform to young athletes who are pushing their limits and striving for excellence. So, thank you for that.

Also, the Community Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Fund—I remember this stream was under the Ministry of Infrastructure before. It is a very, very popular stream, because communities rely on this stream. It has a very positive impact on families and on communities.

My question to you: As you know, recreational sport is such an important part of staying active and promoting physical activity among our youth. Can you speak to what your ministry is doing to promote amateur sport and recreation in the province?

Hon. Neil Lumsden: Yes, absolutely. I think one of the things we’ve talked about already is the Ontario Games, which draws teams and athletes from across the province to compete both summer and winter.

Again, for me it was—you get to a point in anything in life where you think you’ve seen a lot of things, and what really came to light to me is, when I went to London a few years ago for the summer games—where they were held, a large portion; certainly the residents at Western were utilized to the nth degree. For opening ceremonies, they march the athletes in. And when I first got there, before the official part of it started and we were off to the stage, I noticed the stands were full and I said to somebody, “Well, this is fabulous. The athletes are going to come down from the stands.” And the organizers said to me, “No, no, no. Those are all parents and family.” So there are 7,000 people in those stands. Then they marched the athletes onto the field. And when it was all said and done, that football field at Western was covered with athletes sitting on the ground, just waiting to get an opportunity to perform. When you talk in those terms and the aspiration of those who would like to get there, I’m a believer that playground-to-podium does come into play; the opportunities are there to become who you think you can be in sport.

So, it really becomes a factor, again, through our PSOs who do a great job of developing sport following under the policies that the deputy talked about with respect to, “This is how you have to run the PSO. This is what we expect from you. Here’s what’s at stake. Go out and be the best you can within your sport and develop as many young people as you possibly can, young men and young women.” We are trying to feed that and those opportunities and those hosting opportunities. Again, it comes back to what I said a little bit earlier about the sport tourism model that we are pushing hard and that we believe can continue to be a massive impact for this province on so many different levels, and one of them is culturally.

I think it’s really important that, when we do sport and we do all aspects of it, we do it right and we do it better than anybody else. We’ve joked about this, and we say this in our office: Ontario has become a destination for the world when it comes to sport. They’re going to come here to compete. They’re going to come here to host their

events. Whether it's professional or amateur doesn't matter, because we do things very well.

I'm reminded about when I was at Humber Polytechnic the other day when we launched—with the mayor of Toronto, a bunch of colleagues, the federal Minister Adam van Koeverden—that Humber is going to be the centre for the volunteers for FIFA. We had a press conference; it was very well-received. The response was great.

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But think about this: They need 3,000 volunteers for that event. That's what they've calculated. And these volunteers aren't just going to come on and sign up. They're going to be trained in specific areas, and they're actually going to get a certification. I met with the president of Humber, and the work that she has done—and she's not charging anybody for the use of their campus, and it's a fabulous campus.

But the other side of it that I was amazed at, and it was talked about a couple of different times—it goes to when we talk about people wanting to help and make a difference. Remember, they need 3,000 volunteers. Their applications to that point on that day were 246,000 people wanting to volunteer for FIFA from all over the province and outside the province and in the US and even from elsewhere. They thought their country was going to be—they wanted to volunteer. That goes to the point of, again, what sport can do by bringing people together. There's a willingness to volunteer.

Again, I don't like necessarily turning back the calendar, but my involvement in world cycling—we had just under 3,000 volunteers as well. You can't run an event—FIFA couldn't come here if we didn't have those volunteers. We couldn't have run the event in Hamilton, and the Grey Cup couldn't be and nor could the RBC Canadian Open. None of those events could happen in our province if we didn't have the best volunteers. We do, and that's why they keep coming back.

That's why we want to shine a light on this province, to say, "Hey, look." I have no problem saying we're better than anybody else—never. We might not have as many people, but we can do what anybody else can do and do it better when it comes to any aspect of sport, whether it's management, execution, playing or volunteer—doesn't matter. And the more we talk like that, the more we will become a destination for hosting, and that, in fact, does a wonderful job for the economy.

And to say nothing about the energy. Use the World Series as an example. I've been down at Indy, the people that are walking around there two days before the event; RBC Canadian Open; the Grey Cup—I mean, it's incredible. We need more of these lights shining on our province to show what we can do, and we're going to get that. That's part of our plan. I'm not shy to say it.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): MPP Babikian.

Mr. Aris Babikian: Thank you, Minister and the deputy and the rest of the staff for coming and sharing your valuable input with us.

Before I ask my question, I would like to state that, as a Torontonians and former soccer player and coach and also

as part of this government, I am so proud to be here to discuss the issue of the estimates.

Being part of a government which is wholeheartedly supporting the FIFA games in Toronto—some people might talk about dollars and cents, but organizing these games here in Toronto goes beyond dollars and cents. It will put Canada on the map of the soccer world. It will show the world that we are a country which can organize international events.

It's not only that: The residue of organizing the games will last forever. For example, the BMO Field will be converted to a first-class soccer stadium for over 40,000 attendees. In my own community of Scarborough—Agin-court, non-profit organizations are coming together to organize soccer watch parties. They are renting huge screens in one of our big malls, inviting the community to come to watch the games for free. That will provide the community the pride of being Canadians, the pride of watching the games here in our city, but also encourage the younger generation to follow in the footsteps of international soccer players like Ronaldo, Messi and others. This is the value of organizing the games in Toronto, and I am so proud of our government supporting. Regardless of how much money we are putting, we are supporting these games. That's my statement.

I will come to my question. There has been lots of work by the ministry over the past year to support participation from under-represented groups. Can the minister elaborate how much we are spending and how it is affecting those under-represented groups and the impact on them? Thank you very much, Minister.

Interjection.

Mr. Aris Babikian: The question is regarding the under-represented groups.

Hon. Neil Lumsden: That's a great question, and I was going to list off because I spoke about them a little bit sooner. I want to be very specific because we've had outreach and been involved with where the money goes, if you will. Again, I apologize for repeating myself again. But the grassroots recreation program, partnering with six organizations that supports over 200 community groups, trains more than 1,100 sports leaders—and this is the number that makes me smile—to the point of making a difference in youth sports and around the conversations for 37,000 children and youth from under-represented communities including women and girls, racialized groups, Indigenous peoples, LGBTQ2S+ individuals and persons with disabilities. I will specifically talk in terms of the breakdown that makes that impact. Again, Canadian Tire Jumpstart charities—I know what they do. I wanted to see first-hand their reach.

Listen, if you haven't figured this out by now, the numbers are great and investment is important—really important—but if it doesn't translate to success and opportunity and wins, if you will, with getting more people involved—you talked about how important football is for you and in your life. I think there are close to 380,000 young people playing soccer in Ontario.

Mr. Aris Babikian: The largest participation in youth sports.

Hon. Neil Lumsden: It's incredible. If you don't think this is a shot in their keisters to want to be somebody that they will see and get an opportunity to—I would suggest you find Fort York; I think it's where the fan fest is going to be. Take that group of friends of yours down there for some fun times when a game is going on because the fan fest there will be incredible. I'm not making assumptions; I believe Toronto and the hosting will do a fantastic job because they have the opportunity to do exactly that and really make a difference.

Canadian Women and Sport: The Next Play program develops inclusivity, which is really important on the participation side. MLSE Foundation—another phenomenal organization. I look at it a little on the business side of it because I look at our investment, then I want to know what the return is. How many young people do we reach if we're investing X? And what we're doing and what they know now is how we look at it, and what we want to see as a return. The money has to go as far as it possibly can, and tell us how it's going—in other words, where it lands. That's how you find out and that's how you monitor development in anything: Match the dollars with what the plan is and then the result. These groups do it: KidSport Ontario, Inclusion in Canadian Sports Network, and I talked about Jays Care. It really is impactful, and the reach is tremendous.

Again, 37,000 young people—are we going to try to get more? Are we always going to try to exceed these numbers? Of course we are, because that is how we think. And that's how the organizations think, and they know the importance of the work that they do. When you talk about the Jays Care Foundation and how they integrate into their organization and do something on the field—we were there this year with young people with disabilities. The field was covered with challenges. Our whole office was there. We included ourselves. We had a lot of fun. But then step back and look where the money goes. These young people had the experience of their lifetime. They did things that most people can never had a chance to do: number one, get on the field where the Blue Jays play, and where the World Series was held this year.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Fifty seconds.

Hon. Neil Lumsden: Those are things that you can't measure—you just cannot measure. We're going to keep doing that, and these groups are helping us get there.

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Mr. Aris Babikian: Thank you, Minister.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): That's great. Thank you.

There are 30 seconds left. MPP Anand, please go ahead.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Absolutely, 100%: Thank you, thank you, thank you, Minister.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Any other thank-yous across the side here?

Mr. Deepak Anand: I was about to ask you for FIFA tickets, but it's okay.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much. The government is—are you done with 20 seconds left? Okay.

MPP Glover, you get 10 minutes and 25 seconds.

Mr. Chris Glover: That's perfect. Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to get some FIFA tickets, but I don't think I'll be able to afford them.

Let me go back to the question that I was asking before. I was talking about Bill 33 that just passed, and one of the concerns is that it's replacing the democratically elected trustees with a supervisor from the school board. Our schools are used by local sports organizations for permits for the gyms, the fields. A lot of the community teams in the city and across this province use these school facilities.

One of the concerns is that in the bill, the minister has been given the power to sell schools, and he doesn't have to go through a process. That could impact the ability of schools to offer permits and space—

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Point of order.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Sorry, MPP Glover. MPP Pierre has requested the floor.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Point of order, Chair: We're here to discuss the ministry estimates for the Ministry of Sport. We're not here to discuss Bill 33.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): MPP Pierre has a point, and I know you're getting to the question that relates to the estimates that are here before us, MPP Glover. Can we stay to those, please?

Mr. Chris Glover: Yes. This is about funding for schools. It's about the funding for sports to take place in schools, and the potential disruption of sports, particularly community sports, that take place in gyms and on fields of schools.

If the Minister of Education uses his power to sell off schools, that's an impact. I'm already hearing from the community schools advisory committee that there's pressure on the staff at the school board to increase the cost of the permits, even though they were set at a cost-recovery level.

Will you work, as the minister, with the Minister of Education to protect community sports in schools?

Hon. Neil Lumsden: Well, I know that space pretty well because of my years of coaching and having to—organizations like the BMFA in Burlington and football and others—renting space at Nelson High School, at John T. Tuck, all of them.

I think that the first thing that popped in my head was, an increase of the rental fee—you'll have to talk to the organizations. That will land on the athletes and the parents that are going to have to—right?

Mr. Chris Glover: Yep.

Hon. Neil Lumsden: It would be an interesting conversation. I don't see it stopping, frankly, because—without stepping back into the CSRIF conversation and facilities and how we haven't gotten enough of them—some of the best platforms for sport, whether it's soccer, boys or girls; football, men or women; flag football; lacrosse field—all of them rent space at high schools.

Mr. Chris Glover: Absolutely. Schools, especially the double gyms in schools—

Hon. Neil Lumsden: But I haven't heard that.

Mr. Chris Glover: I know from my experience, the double gyms in schools are in constant demand and then the fields as well.

Hon. Neil Lumsden: To your point—and because, again, I'm lucky enough to meet a lot of people—I have not heard anyone approach me or talk to me about that. I was just at a high school in my riding in Hamilton East—Stoney Creek three weeks ago talking about Rowan's Law and talking to both football teams that—and I know them, and I would hear about it. I would hear about it if there was a problem with those that want to come in and rent space, but I haven't.

Mr. Chris Glover: Okay—

Hon. Neil Lumsden: I've not heard it. At this point, you may think there is a problem—I don't see the problem yet. So there's no point of—I have no discussion on it.

Mr. Chris Glover: I will refer some people to you, because I'm starting to hear about problems in Toronto.

Hon. Neil Lumsden: Sure.

Mr. Chris Glover: Okay.

The other question I have is around KidSport Ontario. KidSport Ontario receives \$200,000 in funding from the provincial government—

Hon. Neil Lumsden: Correct.

Mr. Chris Glover: KidSport Alberta provides \$3.5 million, and their population is a third of what ours is. KidSport Nova Scotia provides \$1.2 million, and their population is about a million. So on a per-capita basis, Nova Scotia gives KidSport Nova Scotia \$1.20 per person, per capita; in Alberta, it's 70 cents per capita; in Ontario, it's 1.2 cents. These KidSport Ontario grants are to help families to cover the costs of registration fees so all kids can play a season of organized sports. Why is it so paltry in Ontario that it's only 1.2 cents per capita versus \$1.20 in Nova Scotia?

Hon. Neil Lumsden: I'm going to pass it over to my deputy in a second.

Again, we're apples and oranges, number one. Number two is, I would ask those—and though we are hoping to partner with them in another way through Rowan's Law—and that the legislation we have for concussion safety and the money that we've spent taking care of youth—and, frankly, adults too, because concussions can happen to anybody. The research has been done into that over the last seven years, and I can't get any other province to spend a dime on the same sort of thing.

Their priority—they don't seem to want to jump into our basket when it comes to the safety of athletes, and we're not going to push it. I want to get them involved, and at the FPT meetings we talk about it, and we have some interested parties, but there's a difference at times.

From a funding perspective, I think—Deputy, the \$8 million for—go ahead.

Mr. Keith Palmer: Through you, Madam Chair: I can appreciate the question and the comparison. I think what is important to understand as well is between—our grass-roots funding and funding for our Indigenous program are upwards of \$8 million in providing supports to groups that are quite often deemed under-represented.

As the minister says, it really isn't a simple apples-to-apples. That math doesn't necessarily always add up. I think if you look at the province of Ontario's full funding, we're somewhere around \$50 million for the province of Ontario, which is inclusive of supporting not just individuals that are considered marginalized but all other individuals as well—those who are considered disabled or otherwise. The full funding is to be considered as well as the specific funding of \$200,000.

Mr. Chris Glover: I'll reclaim my time.

Even if it's that amount—so, this is money that different provincial governments give to low-income families so that their kids can play in registered organized sports. As I mentioned, in Ontario, it's 1.2 cents per capita. In Nova Scotia, it's many times that; it's \$1.20 per capita. Even if you count in this \$8 million that you just mentioned to support sports, our population is 17 million. That's only 50 cents per capita. It's less than 50 cents per capita. So we're still less than half of what Nova Scotia invests in providing opportunities for low-income families to be able to participate in sports. Will you increase that funding so that more low-income families and particularly the kids in those families can participate in organized sports?

Mr. Keith Palmer: Through you, Madam Chair: I think when we look at the overall contributions and fundings by the province into the sports sector, not just do we look at the funding that we provide, but we look at opportunities that the PSOs also have—our provincial sport organizations—to stretch their funding as far as they can and come together and look at ways that they can collaborate to increase access to different individuals that are participating in sport. Now, that's not saying we do not continue to have a responsibility there; we do, but we also recognize that with—

Mr. Chris Glover: I'll reclaim my time.

One of the things about sports is a lot of the best athletes are the ones that are the hungriest and they come from the lowest-income families. We've seen it. A lot of our greatest athletes of all time—Pelé didn't even have a soccer ball to play with when he was a kid. There's a lot of talent, a lot of potential talent, in kids and particularly in low-income kids.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Sixty seconds.

Mr. Chris Glover: If this government doesn't increase the funding to allow low-income kids to play organized sports, then we're not going to see that talent develop. They're not going to get the opportunity to develop that talent and we, as a province, are not going to be able to see what they can actually accomplish.

Will you increase the funding for low-income families for kids' sports so kids can participate in sports?

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thirty seconds left.

Hon. Neil Lumsden: We have so much more to fund than those two provinces you're talking about. Again, it's not apples-to-apples—it really isn't. Because if you compared, across the board—because I have talked to them about that, especially the minister from Alberta—they don't come close to our overall investment in sport in general—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Five seconds.

Hon. Neil Lumsden: —because we have more volume that eats it up, so that's one of the challenges we have.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thank you, Minister.

This concludes the committee's consideration of the 2025-26 estimates of the Ministry of Sport.

Standing order 69 requires that the Chair put without further amendment or debate every question necessary to dispose of the estimates. Are the members ready to vote?

Shall vote 5301, ministry administration program, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hands. All those opposed, please raise your hands. I declare vote 5301 is accordingly carried.

Shall vote 5302, sport recreation and community programs, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hands.

All those opposed, please raise your hands. I declare vote 5302 is accordingly carried.

Shall the 2025-26 estimates of the Ministry of Sport carry? All those in favour, please raise your hands. All those opposed, please raise your hands. I declare it carried.

Shall the Chair report the 2025-26 estimates of the Ministry of Sport to the House? All those in favour, please raise your hands. All those opposed, please raise your hands. I shall report.

That concludes our consideration of this ministry's estimates. I would like to thank Minister Lumsden and everyone here today for their participation.

There being no further business, this committee stands adjourned. Thank you, everyone.

The committee adjourned at 1822.

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