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HE-27

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HE-27

Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy

Estimates

Ministry of Sport

Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming

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

Budget des dépenses

Ministère du Sport

Ministère du Tourisme, de la Culture et des Jeux

1st Session
44th Parliament

Tuesday 6 October 2026

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44^e législature

Mardi 6 octobre 2026

Chair: Hon. Laurie Scott
Clerk: Tanzima Khan

Présidente : L'hon. Laurie Scott
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON HERITAGE,
INFRASTRUCTURE
AND CULTURAL POLICYCOMITÉ PERMANENT DU PATRIMOINE,
DE L'INFRASTRUCTURE
ET DE LA CULTURE

Tuesday 6 October 2026

Mardi 6 octobre 2026

The committee met at 1000 in committee room 1.

ESTIMATES

MINISTRY OF SPORT

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

We are meeting to consider the 2026-27 estimates of sport, 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 Brian Saunderson, 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 the 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 again. The floor is all yours when you're ready to begin.

Hon. Brian Saunderson: It's an honour to be here today. It's a little different because, for the past four years, I've been a member of this committee, so I know what comes from the other side of the table. Thank you for the work each and every one of you do.

It's wonderful to be joined here by my team: Deputy Minister Palmer and the team over at the Ministry of Sport.

It's kind of a dream role for me, actually, given where I started in my past.

I also want to give a shout-out to my predecessor, Minister Lumsden, for all the work that he did in this portfolio for the past four years. Our plan is to pick up and continue with that work as we move forward.

The Ministry of Sport is doing significant work to strengthen the sport and recreation sector in Ontario. We're working to provide a safe sporting environment for the people of Ontario while enhancing their quality of life

by fostering healthy, active communities and driving economic growth. Promoting active living and supporting athlete development for Ontarians directly supports the priorities of this government, including those set out in the 2026 Ontario budget, A Plan to Protect Ontario.

Our ministry recognizes the importance of developing sustainable sport and recreation policies, supporting athletic development, funding grassroots community programs, building critical infrastructure, and driving economic growth by attracting sporting events to communities across this great province.

Sport has a wide-ranging impact on all our residents across the province. From our student athletes who compete locally with neighbouring schools to parents who travel across the province with their children for tournaments—or for tournaments of their own—to the shops and restaurants that fill up during sporting events, nurturing this sector stimulates growth across the entire province in many, many ways.

Sport plays a vital role in the health and well-being of our Ontario residents. From soccer pitches to basketball courts, from ice rinks to baseball diamonds and from pools to rowing courses, Ontarians are finding ways to stay active and healthy. In many ways, sport imitates life. It strengthens the fabric of our communities and brings families together. It teaches our youth valuable life lessons and creates opportunities for people to excel and succeed.

Beyond its social impact, sport is also a powerful economic engine for our province. Ontario's sport and recreation sector contributes an estimated \$3.6 billion to the economy and supports approximately 43,000 jobs annually. These numbers are a testament to sport tourism and the impact it has on our economy.

Through sport, visitors are experiencing everything that Ontario has to offer. Whether it's taking in a game at the Rogers Centre or visiting Niagara region for a basketball tournament or competing to be a national lacrosse champion in Ottawa, tourists are booking hotel rooms and enjoying our shops and restaurants. They are taking in local attractions and monuments. They are appreciating our culture. They are meeting our people.

Our government recognizes how important this sector is to the well-being and economic success of the province. That's why we are investing in infrastructure to ensure communities have the spaces they need to keep people active and healthy, while continuing to attract world-class events to Ontario.

In 2024, this government created the Community Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Fund, backed by an initial \$200-million investment. This investment supports municipalities, non-profit organizations and Indigenous communities with building new sports and recreation infrastructure and revitalizing existing facilities. Just a few months ago, our government announced an additional \$300 million to expand this program, to the provincial total of half a billion dollars—\$500 million—over four years, making this the largest single investment in sport and recreation infrastructure in Ontario's history. These are the types of commitments that Ontarians need. Our investments will support local community projects; create good-paying jobs; promote active, healthy living; and give the next generation of Ontarian athletes a place to train and grow their skills.

Last year, we announced investments in 94 projects from the initial \$200-million investment. This includes:

- a \$19.5-million investment to help the city of Cambridge build a 112,000-square-foot recreational complex;
- more than \$15.7 million to support the construction of a new recreation centre for Mouvement d'implication francophone d'Orléans, a not-for-profit francophone artistic, cultural and community organization in Ottawa; and
- more than \$9 million in Wauzhushk Onigum Nation to support the development of a modern, multi-purpose recreation complex featuring a regulation-size ice surface, running track, fitness facilities, community gathering spaces and an elders' lounge.

Yesterday, I was in Mr. Bresee's riding for the opening of the W.J. Henderson facility in his riding, which has been there for many years but now has a new ice surface and a brand new pool, which have given a great new life to an existing facility in a very growing community.

These investments are providing spaces for people to be active and participate in sport and recreation, in safe and welcoming facilities.

Bricks and mortar are a key part of our metric, but funding critical programs on the ground for residents of Ontario, particularly our youth, is a huge priority for this government. So beyond bricks and mortar, we are investing in the next generation of Ontarians.

I'm proud to highlight the continued investment and impact of Ontario's After-School Program, a vital initiative that supports the development of children across the province. This program reaches more than 13,000 children and youth from kindergarten to grade 12 in 80 communities across the province. It's delivered by 108 organizations, including municipalities, First Nations and community-based non-profits. The program provides safe, supervised activities during critical after-school hours, when many parents are still at work. We are in the second year of a three-year continued investment of \$43.9 million. This multi-year funding model provides stability for our program partners; reduces administrative burden; and allows organizations to plan long-term and deliver consistent, high-quality programs to the youth across the province. It provides children and youth with a foundation to build healthy habits, learn physical literacy and be active, giving the next gen-

eration the tools to thrive and prosper. It's also supporting the hard-working parents of this province by ensuring their kids have access to fun, safe, supervised activities, along with a nutritious snack, after school. Through this program, we are laying the groundwork for a healthier Ontario. Our government is proud to invest in programs that make a real difference in the lives of families across the province. By investing in this program, we are helping young people gain confidence, stay active and develop the skills they need to succeed inside and outside the classroom.

In addition to the opportunities being created by investing in infrastructure, we're also proud to support organizations with delivering affordable, accessible and inclusive programming.

Since our government launched the inclusive grassroots recreation program in 2021-22, we have supported approximately 150,000 children from under-represented and marginalized populations with participating in sport and recreation. That includes children from our Indigenous communities, newcomers and youth with disabilities. In 2025-26, our ministry invested \$3.2 million through this program to support several organizations with creating more opportunities for kids to participate in sport and recreation. This includes investments in Canadian Tire Jumpstart charities, to help more than 37,000 children and youth across Ontario participate in sport and recreation programs; the Jays Care Foundation, to continue supporting baseball programs for children with disabilities, and Indigenous youth—when I was up in Kenora three years ago for the opening of the justice centre, we visited one of the Indigenous bands up there and got a tour of their ball diamond, which was facilitated through the Jays Care Foundation—Canadian Women and Sport, to create more opportunities to keep girls and young women active and engaged in sport; and KidSport Ontario, to help children participate in organized sport by assisting with registration fees and equipment costs.

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Every child deserves an opportunity to experience the many benefits of participating in sport and recreation. That's why we are also continuing to support Indigenous sport and recreation programming, with more than \$5.2 million invested annually in the Community Aboriginal Recreation Activator Program, youth cultural camps, and the Sport Pathway for Ontario Native Wellness. Since 2018, investments in these programs have supported over 178,000 participants in communities across Ontario.

It is crucial to build a sport system where cost, geography, ability or background are not barriers to participation. Through these targeted grassroots investments, we are breaking down barriers, strengthening communities, and ensuring that everyone has access to sport and recreation. This is part of our overall program that looks at encouraging our youth and supporting our youth, from the playground to the podium.

We are also helping to fund programs and services that support the development of athletes, coaches and officials across Ontario. Our Ontario Amateur Sport Fund provides more than \$8 million annually to 68 provincial and multi-

sport organizations, supporting over four million amateur athletes, coaches and officials, and building pathways to national and international competition. With this support, our PSOs and MSOs are in a better position to strengthen athlete programming, identify clear athlete performance targets, and develop a stronger talent identification system.

I'm proud to say that more than half of the team that represented Canada at the FIFA World Cup 2026 were from Ontario.

It has been a busy year in Ontario. The World Cup was a huge boon both in Ontario and BC. And I would say that the city of Toronto had an action-packed summer. We welcomed visitors from across the globe. I'm proud of our province's contribution to the successful planning and delivery of this historic event. Toronto hosted matches between June 12 and July 2, creating a memorable experience for visitors and locals alike. This event was forecasted to create more than 8,700 jobs and an estimated economic impact of \$1.3 billion for the province. Our government invested \$97 million in funding and provincial services to support Toronto's role as a host city. This investment generated a strong return through sport tourism and delivered lasting economic benefits that will be felt for years to come. One legacy of this investment is the new, permanent, state-of-the-art pitch and field house at Centennial Park in Toronto. This was used as a practice facility for visiting teams, and it now will serve the local community for generations to come. But the benefits of hosting extend far beyond facilities like this.

A recent study released by Destination Ontario found that more than nine in 10 visitors to the FIFA World Cup 2026 said they are likely to return to Ontario for a leisure trip within the next two years, while a whopping 96% said they would return for another large international event in the future. The eyes of the world were on us, and we showed them why Ontario is where the world comes to compete. The World Cup created lifelong memories for soccer fans, young and old, who witnessed Canada reach the knockout round of 16 for the first time ever. It was a celebration of our country, our communities and our athletes, and an opportunity for Ontario to showcase its leadership, diversity and thriving sport culture in one of the world's most dynamic and welcoming cities. That's one example of the benefits of sport hosting. The World Cup gave us a chance to see the impact on a global scale. But we in Ontario have been building our sport hosting sector for years.

Through the Ontario Sport Hosting Program, we're helping communities across the province attract and host major sporting events that bring visitors, create local economic activity, groom the athletes of the future, and leave a lasting legacy, which is an important part of our government's plan to protect Ontario's economy. As we look at the geopolitical events and what's going on south of the border, our economy is what drives our programs. This program provides project-based funding to support the delivery of national and international amateur sport events across the province. With an annual investment of \$3 million, this program has supported over 300 events since 2018, generating approximately \$278 million in eco-

nomics for Ontario. From the Volleyball Canada youth and senior Beach Nationals in Toronto to the Canada Cup of Diving in Windsor or the under-18 curling championships in Timmins, we're helping Ontario communities unlock the benefits of sport tourism. Most recently, through the first intake period of the 2026-27 program year, we invested more than \$1.3 million to support 26 amateur events, including national and international competitions, with additional investments still to be made through the program's second intake period. These events alone are expected to generate approximately \$28 million in economic activity across Ontario. This program also gives Ontario athletes the important opportunity to gain the elite competition experience needed to excel on the world stage right here at home. We want our athletes to succeed, and through the sport hosting program, we're helping make that happen.

We're not just investing in amateur sport events. Our government also invested \$1.5 million each to support the 2026 Ontario Honda Dealers Indy and the 2026 RBC Canadian Open, and \$500,000 for the 2026 National Bank Open. Together, these events were projected to attract nearly 500,000 people and generate \$225 million for our economy.

These investments build on our government's work to help communities unlock the economic benefits of sport tourism through high-profile events, while creating more opportunities for children, youth and families to participate in sport and recreation.

One of our signature programs for these events is the Ontario Winter Games, an initiative that brings Ontario athletes together from every corner of the province, in the spirit of competition. We deliver five multi-sport games. These events provide amateur athletes with a competitive platform to develop their skills, gain experience, and prepare for national and international competitions. Investments into these games reflect our commitment to ensuring that host communities can deliver high-quality events while maximizing local economic and community benefits. The Ontario games provide valuable opportunities for their participants. For many athletes, this is their first multi-sport competition experience, and for others, it's a stepping stone towards representing Canada on the national and international stage.

Our government is proud to support events that inspire hard work and dedication, build lasting connections and help athletes push their limits and achieve personal goals.

Recently, we invested nearly \$1.4 million to support Orillia as the host of the 2026 Ontario Winter Games earlier this year and more than \$1.7 million to support Waterloo region as the host of the 2026 Ontario Summer Games. These two major sport events showcased this province's athletic talent and community spirit, and they were each a tremendous success.

Next summer, the city of Brockville is hosting the 2027 Ontario 55+ Summer Games, from August 17 to 19. And the city of Brantford will be hosting the 2027 Ontario Para-Sport Games, from February 19 to 21. I encourage you all to come out and watch those events.

Collingwood had the privilege of hosting the 2012 winter games, which was my window into that event, and it was a massive success.

Through these games, we're investing in the future of sport and once again reinforcing Ontario's reputation as a premier destination for sport hosting.

We support our developing athletes through a number of initiatives. We're proud of the high-calibre talent coming out of Ontario.

We continue to support the next generation of athletes through the Quest for Gold program. This program provides direct financial assistance to Ontario athletes, helping them compete at the highest national and international levels.

Through the Ontario Card stream, we invest \$3.2 million annually in eligible provincial sport organizations. This funding enables organizations to provide direct support to top-ranked provincial athletes, to deliver high-performance programs that enhance training and development, or a combination of both.

Through the Canada Card stream, we invest \$3.1 million annually to support more than 500 athletes across 65 sports as they pursue opportunities to represent Ontario and Canada on the national and international stage.

Ontario athletes made up almost half of Team Canada at the 2024 Summer Olympics; that was an increase of approximately 15% from the 2004 Olympic Games. And of those athletes, 91% received Quest for Gold funding at some point in their athletic journey.

This support helps keep Ontario's high-performance sport pipeline strong. But more importantly, it helps to develop the athletes across this province.

Our government remains committed to developing the next generation of Ontario athletes and helping them achieve success at the highest levels of competition.

While programs like Quest for Gold help athletes achieve success on the field of play, our commitment also extends to safeguarding their well-being and their health. We are doing important work to ensure sport remains safe, welcoming and inclusive for everyone. Protecting the safety and well-being of all involved in sport is a key priority for our government. Abuse, harassment and discrimination have no place in Ontario's sport system, and our government is working to foster a culture of safety, respect and integrity.

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Ontario continues to advance its commitment to safe sport through a multi-faceted approach that includes policy development, education, prevention and accountability. We're working closely with PSOs and MSOs to ensure that they meet mandatory standards under the Sport Recognition Policy, including the implementation and adherence to a comprehensive safe sport framework, concussion protocols and codes of conduct for athletes, parents and coaches.

An accountable sports system leads with clarity, responsibility and a shared commitment to athlete safety and development. To deliver on these expectations, our government upholds and enhances Ontario's Sport Recognition Policy, a foundational framework that ensures our

sport organizations meet the highest standards of excellence and integrity. The policy sets out mandatory requirements for PSOs and MSOs to be formally recognized by the province. These organizations are responsible for developing athletes, coaches and officials in the health and safety of their athletes, as well as organizing provincial championships and ensuring alignment with national sport standards. Through this policy, we're 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 work with our sport partners to uphold these standards and ensure that sport in Ontario remains a source of pride, opportunity and excellence.

And when it comes to safety—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Sorry, Minister. I didn't give you a warning, but—

Hon. Brian Saunderson: How are we doing?

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): About 10 seconds. Wrap that up, would you?

Hon. Brian Saunderson: Well, it's a pleasure to be here.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): I was so in tune listening to you, I didn't watch the clock there.

Hon. Brian Saunderson: We have much to do and we look forward to doing it.

I'm happy to entertain questions. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

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, 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 the 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 Glover.

Mr. Chris Glover: Thank you for your presentation this morning. I'm a big sports fan. I play a lot of sports, and I really appreciate especially what you were talking about with sport being from the basic community level, where people are just playing for fun to developing professional athletes here in Ontario.

I've got a couple of quick questions, and then I'm going to get into a longer question—so if you could just respond a “yes” or “no” to these two.

Would you agree that the Ministry of Sport has a responsibility to make sure that sports facilities are available in communities across Ontario?

Hon. Brian Saunderson: I would agree that we work very hard to work collaboratively with our municipal partners and our not-for-profits to make sure that they have the bricks and mortar they need. There's a lot of demand out there, but we're working hard.

Mr. Chris Glover: And would you agree that the gyms and fields in our public and Catholic schools are important sites for community sports organizations in the evenings and on weekends?

Hon. Brian Saunderson: You're blending a little into the education sector. We work with our communities and our not-for-profit organizations. The education sector is something different. But we're working to make sure, with our colleagues at the Ministry of Education, that there is access to those facilities, because they do play an important role in the communities.

Mr. Chris Glover: Part of this is my own background—I used to be a school board trustee at the TDSB, and I was the chair of the community use of schools advisory committee for eight years. At that time, we went through a process to bring the community use of schools to a cost-recovery model so that it wasn't being subsidized by the funding that was intended for the daytime students.

But this year, the government seized control of a number of different school boards, including the TDSB, and what has been happening with those school boards, with community use of schools, is that they have jacked up the rates for permits in the schools. I'll give a couple of examples from the Toronto Star: The York district school board increased one permit from \$715 last year to \$5,400 this year. That's a 652% increase. At the TDSB, the board, under this government's supervision, increased another permit at Central Tech, which is a school not too far from us right here at the Legislature, from \$3,400 to \$9,800, which is a 188% increase.

Would you agree that if your government is increasing fees by these drastic amounts, they are going to be discouraging community use of schools and the ability for community groups to participate in sports in our schools?

Hon. Brian Saunderson: Well, you've gone on to the Ministry of Education. But what I would say is we've seen those cost increases across not just the boards that we've taken over; it's across the province generally. So I think it's a very graphic example of the tension we see with the maintaining of these facilities and keeping these facilities operative and making sure they're accessible to the public.

We, through our CSRIF funding, have been very focused on making sure that we can assist our communities and not-for-profits with the infrastructure they need.

Mr. Chris Glover: One of the things that this government has claimed is that they're increasing the fees to absorb the cost of the custodians. If you have to bring in a custodian on a weekend to open up a school, then the permit should pay for that custodian. But what has been happening at the TDSB is that each permit is charged separately, as if they're the only permit that's operating in the school. So if there are five permits in the school and there's one custodian on a Saturday, each of them is being charged as if they're the only permit, so each of them is

being charged the full amount of the custodian. This is why we have these drastic increases.

When I was on the TDSB, we brought our community-use-of-schools costs down to a point where it was cost recovery. Now the boards under supervision by this government are increasing these fees by astronomical amounts, claiming it to be cost recovery, but they're actually double-dipping or triple-dipping and charging extra for the custodians.

Hon. Brian Saunderson: I can't speak to how they're doing their fees. I can say, as indicated earlier, that I don't think it's just at the boards that have been taken over.

We here at this table and in the Ministry of Sport are focused on making sure that we can make sport accessible and inclusive for all our residents through the organizations that we have control over.

Mr. Chris Glover: Would you be willing, as the Minister of Sport, to work with the Minister of Education to investigate these astronomical increases and to see if they are actually justified or if they can be brought down so that we're not squeezing out community organizations that want to use our schools for sports?

Hon. Brian Saunderson: I'm always happy to have the conversations. This is a government that works collaboratively across all ministries to improve the life of Ontarians. I'm happy to have that discussion.

Mr. Chris Glover: Thank you.

Time check, Madam Chair?

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): You've got 10 minutes.

Mr. Chris Glover: Good.

How much did the ministry spend on—and I'm looking for interim actuals—provincial sports organizations in 2025-26?

Hon. Brian Saunderson: You mean our 68 member PSOs?

Mr. Chris Glover: Yes.

Hon. Brian Saunderson: I've got a lot of numbers swimming in my head; it's like I prepared for them the last four weeks. What I can tell you—and I'm going to look to the deputy minister to give you more detail on that—is we have our agreements with our PSOs. Our PSOs are all linked with a national sport organization, so we work closely with them through the funding for coaches and program implementation. The Ontario sport funding is one envelope, and there's also our Quest for Gold funding envelope.

I'm going to look to the deputy minister to give you the actual numbers on all of those.

Mr. Keith Palmer: Through you, Madam Chair: That number is \$17.16 million.

Mr. Chris Glover: Thank you.

There have been media reports about alleged fraud and improprieties with some of the leagues associated with PSO funding, including ongoing legal issues surrounding the Ontario Hockey League.

Does the ministry conduct any kinds of audits with the public dollars that the PSOs received for the leagues that are funded?

Hon. Brian Saunderson: I'm not aware of the lawsuit you're speaking of. We can certainly look into those.

There is accountability in our sport agreements with each PSO. Their funding is contingent on them honouring their aspects of their agreements.

In terms of the recognition policy and how that would relate to any lawsuits, I'm going to look to the deputy minister to provide details on that.

Mr. Keith Palmer: Through our transfer payment agreements, there is a responsibility for those PSOs and MSOs to report back annually on how their funding was utilized. We review those reports. We cross-reference that with the amount of money that they've received, aligning that with the criteria in regard to their transfer payment responsibilities. We feel fairly confident that we're not seeing elements of abuse in those areas.

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Mr. Chris Glover: Are there audits performed?

Mr. Keith Palmer: Audits are on the recommendation of officials. We will conduct those audits if we recognize there are some challenges in how those dollars are being spent. But there is a process for auditing, and we will review those audits based off risks.

Mr. Chris Glover: The province chose 94 projects from its \$200-million Community Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Fund—a commitment from 500 applicants. What determined what a successful application would be?

Hon. Brian Saunderson: Let me speak generally to the CSRIF model. There were two streams. One stream was up to a \$1-million maximum, which would represent 50% of a project to upgrade or rehabilitate an existing facility. There was stream two, which was up to \$10 million for a new recreational facility. Of the 94 projects, 77 were stream one and 17 were stream two. There were set criteria that were analyzed and evaluated by an independent body, a committee, and then recommendations were made to the ministry, and we adopted all those recommendations.

I'll look to the deputy minister to go through the dynamics of the metrics.

Mr. Keith Palmer: Through you, Madam Chair: The assessment process for the CSRIF applications—and your number is correct: Just under 500 were processed through our partner ministries. Those assessments were then turned over to sport officials. Sport officials then reviewed that information, including scores, made recommendations to our minister's office, who then approved those top-scoring assessments, and then dollars were attributed as such.

Mr. Chris Glover: How much time do I have?

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Six minutes. And then you have another round of 15 and then another little bit.

Mr. Chris Glover: That's good.

I want to ask some questions about FIFA, the World Cup.

The province provided \$41 million in 2025-26 toward the World Cup—is that an accurate number?

Hon. Brian Saunderson: I have \$97 million in total, of which \$27 was in in-kind services and \$70 million was in direct investments.

In terms of the \$41 million, I'm going to look to the deputy minister.

Mr. Keith Palmer: I think in regard to the \$41 million, you're probably thinking about the amount that was attributed in the year 2026-27. Some of those dollars were re-profiled into another year as a result of those funds not being shared, and that happened in a timely fashion as a result of reports coming in from the city of Toronto.

Mr. Chris Glover: From the three levels of government, what percentage of total funding for the World Cup came from the province?

Hon. Brian Saunderson: I don't have an answer to that. Deputy Minister, do you know?

Mr. Keith Palmer: Thank you, Minister.

Through you, Madam Chair: There was \$97 million distributed from the province of Ontario to the city of Toronto. I do believe the total bill that Toronto had shared was \$380 million. I'd make the assumption that the federal government picked up somewhere around \$100 million and the balance was remaining with the city of Toronto.

Mr. Chris Glover: So, roughly, the feds put in \$100 million, the province put in \$100 million, the city put in \$180 million.

Mr. Keith Palmer: Roughly.

Mr. Chris Glover: What was the return on investment for the FIFA investment, the \$97 million?

Hon. Brian Saunderson: We have preliminary numbers. I think, in advance, the projections were that it would support 8,700 jobs and contribute over \$1.3 billion in positive economic return. My understanding is that the city of Toronto is still going through their reconciliation, so those numbers are not yet released.

I can tell you there were approximately 250,000 fans who visited the Toronto Stadium and more than 350,000 who attended the FIFA Fan Festival. As I indicated in my comments, of the interviews they conducted, 96% said they would come back to Ontario for another athletic event and 92% said they would come back to Ontario just generally to tour. I think the return—those have to be quantified in that as well.

Mr. Chris Glover: Are you doing a value-for-money assessment, after the fact, of the World Cup?

Hon. Brian Saunderson: We're certainly looking for the finalization of the numbers. But as I said, I think there are other aspects to it.

I think one thing we should be very proud of is that through our services that we provided, through multiple ministries—I think 12 ministries were involved—we really had a safe, happy event. We didn't have any significant events, so I think that speaks very positively to Ontario and Canada, generally.

I don't know, Deputy Minister, if you have anything to add to the returns.

Mr. Keith Palmer: Thank you, Minister.

Through you, Madam Chair: I think there are two aspects of return on investment that we're looking at, as a ministry. There's a social return on investment as well as a financial return on investment. We recognize that as a result of supporting the FIFA World Cup tournament in Ontario, we have seen a number of our populations come together to really represent and support Team Canada for

these games. We recognized how substantial of the \$97-million contribution by the province—really turned into a gathering, if I can use that term. In downtown Toronto and across the province writ large, we saw a number of different populations, different cultural groups come together to celebrate the tournament, and as such, recognizing that there were no major issues—from health-related, policing, security—this was a success, overall, in partnership with the city of Toronto and the federal government.

Mr. Chris Glover: I would agree with that assessment. That's my riding—where the fan fest, where the World Cup games took place. I've got to give kudos, particularly, to the city, but also all three levels of government for the managing of the World Cup. It was an incredible success, and I think it really did showcase Toronto and Ontario and Canada to the world. So kudos on that.

I'll hold the rest of my questions for the second round.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much. We're now going to the third party. MPP Cerjanec.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Through you, Chair: Congratulations, Minister Saunderson, on being appointed Minister of Sport.

I'd just recognize the deputy minister, as well, on his upcoming retirement and length of service for the province of Ontario in supporting sport in the province.

Around the FIFA World Cup, just to pick up from my colleague MPP Glover—we know it was a \$97-million provincial investment into the FIFA World Cup, and my understanding is, it was estimated that about \$38 million of that would go towards provincial police, paramedics, GO Transit, and staff. So, out of that \$97 million, do we know how much the city of Toronto has received?

Hon. Brian Saunderson: The breakdown, as I understand it—and I'll look to the deputy minister to confirm this. Some \$27 million went to the services that you referred to, not \$38 million—so \$70 million was to direct investment, some was to infrastructure, and some was to other programs to assist the city.

For further breakdown, I'll look to you, Deputy.

Mr. Keith Palmer: Thank you, Minister.

That number is actually around \$27 million in provincial services, which—of course, the balance then will go over to the city of Toronto. That number is actually being reconciled at the moment. Of course, it takes a little bit of time, post-event, to make sure the expenditures are accounted for. At a later date, we'll have the precise numbers, the accurate numbers. But for now, that's roughly around the ballpark number.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Thank you. I appreciate that transparency.

In terms of the money allocated for the World Cup, how much of that money was allocated for salaries and operating costs within the Ministry of Sport itself? Do we have that number?

Hon. Brian Saunderson: Within our ministry?

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Yes.

Hon. Brian Saunderson: I don't know that there were any additional salaries that would have been allocated in our ministry. That's part of their job. So we certainly allocated a great deal of time. Whether we allocated salaries

for any aspect of our provincial staff—I'll look to the deputy minister.

Mr. Keith Palmer: Thank you again, Minister.

Through the total \$97 million and provincial services of about \$27 million, there's about \$1.5 million that was distributed to the Ministry of Sport around—staffing, the coordination, working with different levels of government, the overall planning, coordination directly across the entire tournament was counted in that \$1.5 million.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I suspect it might be around \$12 million or so. Do we anticipate—because that number did bump up—moving forward, that that number will bump back down to where spending on staff salaries was in a previous year, previous to the World Cup?

Hon. Brian Saunderson: Those numbers, I guess, are still being reconciled. But I'll look to the deputy minister.

Mr. Keith Palmer: Thank you, Minister.

You said \$12 million?

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: The total payroll for the ministry, I believe, tripled this year, from \$5.9 million to \$16.6 million, which I believe is directly attributed to the World Cup. Do we anticipate, then, that spending on staff salaries to go back down to the level which it was before, or is this something now that the ministry will be sustaining moving forward?

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Mr. Keith Palmer: Any dollars that were attributed to the World Cup project around salaries would not remain. Those numbers would reflect the reduction in the overall resources that are necessary to effectively operate and/or coordinate that program.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Thank you. I appreciate the clarity.

Just around the World Cup and some of the expenses—I know we're doing the accounting and going through that. Can we expect to receive a full accounting of where those monies were spent once, obviously, that reconciliation process is done? Is that something that we can bring back to either committee—or be announced publicly?

Hon. Brian Saunderson: I think that's something we take into consideration. The reconciliation we're doing with our own records and the city, I imagine, would be part of the public record, but we can look into that.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Thank you.

I think the World Cup was a fantastic event. I had the opportunity to go to one of the games, the Croatia game, on my own dime. I can confirm that the price cap law that the province had in place wasn't necessarily working for that. But it was a great experience, and I think there was a lot of great pride in Toronto, the GTA and Ontario as well. I understand—and this is through FIFA's consultants—it generated \$1.3 billion in economic activity. Do we agree with FIFA's analysis of that, or have we done our own kind of value-for-money audit around it, just to ensure that we know what the economic benefits were and how much additional tax revenue, for example, the province collected? Do we know that, or do we have that?

Hon. Brian Saunderson: We had our projections prior to the games, which were 8,700 jobs and the \$1.3-billion economic impact.

The reconciliation is ongoing. So I think the short answer is, we don't yet have the granular detail you're looking for.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Perhaps we'll loop back on that at a future time.

In my community in Ajax, in Durham region, something I hear quite a bit about from community groups, from community organizations is that there's a need for more space—more space for meetings and events, more space for community recreation, more space for programming. Schools provide a very valuable source of space for many, many community programs, including sport.

In York region—you'll know this, Minister, and it follows up with what MPP Glover was talking about—we've seen some organizations go from \$1,500 in yearly permit costs to \$14,000. In a different league, a basketball league, with the increase in permit fees that they're experiencing, they've said very bluntly, "We're going to lose kids"—and more than 100 in one league in York region. Registration is down.

I know the government is investing in building new facilities all across the province, and renewal of facilities, which I think is a good program and a very important program, by the way.

I know for a fact that within schools, we do have vacant space. We do have space—whether it's in gyms, other spaces—in our schools all across the province that we can better utilize. But now we're seeing this approach—in boards that have been taken over by the province, but as well in other boards because of declining education funding—where community organizations and groups are struggling to maintain and grow their own programming that they do, that they don't necessarily receive any other dollars for. These are non-profits, volunteer-run, volunteer-organized. Does that concern you, Minister?

Hon. Brian Saunderson: I think that this government, by the very virtue that you're talking to a Minister of Sport, shows the importance that this government places on sport and recreation. We appreciate all the impacts it has, both on the athletes and the communities, and the demands that that places.

Our population is growing dramatically, as we know. We have a lot of pressure points across many ministries with infrastructure, and sport is not alone in that.

The \$500-million fund for sport and recreation infrastructure across the province over the next four years is an indication of our priorities. We're focused on that.

A lot of the issues you've raised in your question deal with the Ministry of Education, but as I indicated previously to MPP Glover, it's a conversation I'm happy to have.

This government is very focused on making sure Ontarians can live healthy, inclusive lives with access to the recreation they need. We know that investing one dollar upstream in the health of Ontarians, regardless of their age, can have huge impacts downstream on health costs. So it is a priority of this government, yes.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Maybe we'll talk offline afterwards, just around how we can ensure that those community groups and organizations are able to remain sustainable, but also how we expand that.

I do recognize that the Ministry of Education is responsible for our school system.

I just think we've got to utilize every single asset we have that is publicly owned in this province to, to your point, enhance health and wellness. When we are able to build those healthy habits at a young age, we know that continues on throughout life and that there are other positive benefits around health care, for example, and mental health as well.

Something that has been in the news quite a bit is government advertising. This government spent an advertising record last year—much of which designed to appear to promote the activities of the government itself.

Within the Ministry of Sport, and in any of the \$1.72 million in services that went to advertising and communications, did any of that go towards advertising? And what are examples of advertising that the Ministry of Sport is doing?

Hon. Brian Saunderson: I'm going to pass that off to the ADM, but first I would like to say this: Partly with MPP Glover's support, we passed Bill 22, which is the Ontario University Athletics Week Act. We kicked it off last weekend, and I've got many events to go to this week I'm looking forward to. That, I think, does address your question on the extent of our collaboration with our stakeholders.

There's a lot of advertising that's going on through the OUA and my ministry, through social media, which is having a huge impact.

I was just at the Panda Game this past weekend—24,000 fans. It is actually the biggest university sporting event across the country.

So we are leveraging other ways of advertising.

I think advertising is critical to raising the awareness about sport, about recreation and about the opportunities in Ontario.

In terms of direct investment, I'm going to look to the ADM to give the breakdown.

Mr. Keith Palmer: Through you, Madam Chair: Those figures are estimates.

For the most part, the Ministry of Sport is advertising through social media campaigns. The majority of our advertisement and marketing comes by way of our LinkedIn and other social platforms that are available to us. We find that that methodology and approach to advertising and marketing the Ministry of Sport and some of the activities that we are responsible for and participate in is extremely impactful. We have great data on the uptake of those social investments pertaining to social marketing.

In regard to things like the FIFA event—again, incorporated \$97 million—the city of Toronto took responsibility around that type of advertisement. But through some of the iconic opportunities across the province, like our Honda Indy and the World Cup, you would have seen the provincial logo advertised prominently throughout those events. Again, those opportunities happened by way of our agreements with some of our stakeholders.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Around the Community Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Fund, looking at the estimates—last year, I believe the deputy told the committee that we

expect to see \$150 million flow to projects in 2025-26. Looking at the estimates right now, I believe it looks like we spend about \$79.1 million on capital grants. Does that include the \$20.6 million for Centennial Park in this year's estimates?

Hon. Brian Saunderson: I'll just speak generally to the CSRIF programming, and I'll let the ADM speak to that specific question.

The envelope that we created of the \$200 million last year, in the first year of the program, had the two streams. As I indicated in my comments, 77 of the 94 went to upgrading existing facilities, and 17 were new capital builds. We went all across the province. I think we serviced 80 different communities, and importantly, almost 10%, \$19.7 million, went to Indigenous communities to create infrastructure for them.

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I think if it's not evident through our after-school programs and our funding an inclusive grassroots program, we are very focused on making sure that all across the province people have access to recreation, regardless of their age, regardless of their abilities and their race or their Indigenous backgrounds.

We're trying to make sure that we reach as many as we can, and \$500 million is a huge investment. It is transformative across the province. But there is a lot of demand, as you've indicated in many of your questions. So making sure that we get those projects to areas that need them—

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

Hon. Brian Saunderson: —is a tough decision.

With that being said, I'm going to pass it to the DM.

Mr. Keith Palmer: Thank you, Minister.

Through you, Madam Chair: The short answer is no—\$200 million was for the CSRIF program, and the \$20 million came out of the \$97 million that went to the FIFA event to support the new field in Etobicoke.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Looking at it through here, we're looking like we probably got about \$70 million or so unspent. Is that just because projects haven't advanced far enough that funding would be going out the door?

Hon. Brian Saunderson: Can I get clarification: \$70 million of what?

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: In the Community Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Fund.

Hon. Brian Saunderson: Yes, that is correct.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: So we are expecting those projects to happen, but for some reason or another, from the proponents, they're not ready to receive that funding yet.

Mr. Keith Palmer: Yes, 100%.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): We'll now move to the government side. MPP Pierre.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Minister, thank you for your remarks this morning.

It's an absolute pleasure to be able to serve as your parliamentary assistant in the Ministry of Sport.

My question is really a continuation around the Community Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Fund and about amateur sport in the province of Ontario.

We know just how important local sport and recreation facilities are to keeping people active, bringing people together and giving families a place to connect, giving coaches an opportunity to work with their teams, giving athletes sometimes what might be a pathway to further their professional sport abilities or to be able to compete at higher levels.

I'm hoping you could tell us about how the Community Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Fund, or CSRIF, is helping to address the need for infrastructure and recreation in communities across the province. And maybe talk a little bit about how this half-a-billion dollar fund is helping to build and improve facilities across our province.

Hon. Brian Saunderson: Thank you very much, PA. I feel very fortunate to have you working with me. I know you've been in this portfolio for a while, so your contribution has been much appreciated.

The CSRIF fund, as I indicated initially, was a single-year line item of \$200 million, and we awarded 94 grants, but the demand was overwhelming—I think it was almost 500 requests totalling \$1.1 billion. We, in this year's budget, and Premier Ford, saw the importance and the need out there. So we've now expanded the program from the initial \$200-million envelope to now half a billion over four years. So the next three years will be \$100 million per year, again with the two streams.

For me, this is a particularly important topic. It's actually what got me into the world of politics. I started off being a co-chair of a steering committee for an infrastructure upgrade in Collingwood. We fell short of the mark, because it is a difficult project. It is difficult to find the funding, and we did not have this funding available to us at that time, in 2012. It's competitive, but it's extremely important.

This huge infrastructure injection, I think, is a very important piece in advancing our communities and working with them to make sure that they have the infrastructure in place so that they can provide the programs for their youth and for their aging athletes and for athletes of all abilities. It's really about raising the communities and the level of health and activity across the province.

As I indicated earlier, an upstream investment of \$1 in recreation saves—in 2012, it was \$15 in health care; I imagine it's more than that down the road. And now we see people aging, screen time, social disconnection—these community hubs are just so critical in making sure that our residents have access to a community hub. You go to many of these facilities, and they'll have a pool, a rink, often a library, sometimes a cultural centre and meeting rooms, and they are busy. It's a hive of activity from the time they open their doors at 6 in the morning to the time they close at 10 at night. This is the type of community activity that really bonds and helps to cement a community, but it also elevates the level of involvement in the communities and gives our coaches, our volunteers the opportunity to give back to our communities in a way that really powers and raises the living for all of us.

Governments are in the business of doing building blocks for our communities—and the volunteer sector and

the people who are on the work on the ground, from coaches to administrators, are the mortar that cements those communities and provides the lifestyle that they deserve. So working together in this way with our communities across the province—as I indicated earlier, 10% of the initial \$200 million went to Indigenous communities—we are working to raise the lifestyle and the health of our residents across the province, and this initiative is a critical piece to that.

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

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: Thank you, Minister, Deputy Minister, and the entire team for the great work that you're doing at the Ministry of Sport.

I want to especially congratulate Minister Saunderson on his appointment as minister. It's going to be a pleasure working with you. Thank you for everything that you're doing for our province.

Building on the questions that were asked by all sides here today on the community infrastructure fund and all of the great assets you're funding across the province, I wanted to touch on the inclusive grassroots recreational program, and I wanted to touch on some of the investments that we're making into the Ontario Amateur Sport Fund. Not only is the government investing in building infrastructure, but we're also investing in making sure that children have the opportunity to participate and play in sport, and that that funding is being allocated into that direction.

We see that when we take a look at all of the major sporting events your ministry was able to fund—even through FIFA, with the majority of the players coming from Ontario and almost 30% coming from Brampton. It was an exciting time for our entire community to get together, and that really put that inspiration into kids across the province of joining sport—what it means and how far you can really go through that.

That's why I wanted to highlight this program and see if you can mention some of the opportunities and things that the government has been funding through even our partner programs—through Canadian Tire, Jays Care, Canadian Women and Sport, and all the other great organizations that your ministry is working with in making sure the next generation of Ontarians have opportunity and access to sport.

Hon. Brian Saunderson: Thank you for the question.

It was fun to sit with you on that side of the table too for many years.

Also, I gather you're going to be renaming five soccer pitches in your area to recognize each of the five members of the FIFA program. That's a huge thing. That's a stellar example, I think, of how having kids proceed through the system, come up, pursue elite sport and demonstrate excellence lifts the community. I'm sure you're going to see soccer enrolment go up hugely in Brampton over the next couple of years, because the kids will want to be like those five guys and have a stadium named after them at some point.

I saw that in my career, both as a university athlete and as a national team athlete over the time I was on the team.

When you go back and you visit the places you came from, it really is incredible to see the kids get excited, and the enrolment go up.

It's also important, I think, to have that opportunity for the kids to be able to compete with and against athletes at that level. When they train with the athletes who have attained that elite status, they get a better understanding of what it takes. They get a better understanding of the work ethic, and they get exposure to the programs, the coaches and the mentoring they need for themselves to progress along that pathway.

Elite sport in Ontario has many different forms, especially for our young girls. There are now professional women's hockey teams.

When I was down at the Panda Game, I was talking with Danika from Ottawa U. She is a former national hockey player and is now involved in the administration at the school. She's coaching and involved with the recruitment for the Ottawa U hockey team. Also, those athletes now have a whole new career direction. They're not just going to be playing rec league after they finish; they now can aspire to be professional hockey players. She said that has done so much for the quality and the uptake they have at the college level. We have it with the Northern Super League in soccer, the WNBA—incredible opportunities there.

I was down at Trent watching the women's soccer team play, and a number of them have aspirations to play professional soccer.

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These types of opportunities really enhance the sport runway for a lot of our athletes. But it's not just about the kids who want to go on and play at the elite level; it's about making sure that we work on athlete development at all levels.

That's why we're providing over \$9 million in targeted sports investments to support athlete development across the continuum—we have \$8.4 million to the Ontario Amateur Sport Fund and \$1.07 million to Coaches Association of Ontario to make sure that the infrastructure is there, the network is there to help these athletes achieve their best selves through sport. As I said, that doesn't always mean going to the elite level. The lessons that you learn through sport, you'll carry for life. The lessons in teamwork, working together, having a common goal and—any team at any level. To me, the metric is when a team—the whole is far greater than the sum of the parts. That's when they're really working together, and it doesn't matter what level they're at. Those are lessons they carry with them forever.

So we work with our provincial sport organizations, our multi-sport organizations. Through those organizations, we support four million athletes, coaches and officials across the province. And we make sure that we help those athletes achieve their best selves.

We also are investing significantly in important programs to reach our kids outside the organized sport world—\$44 million over three years in the after-school programs to make sure that our kids are exposed to sport, physical literacy and all the great lessons that it teaches

them, in after-school programs by 108 organizations across Ontario. That helps young families and parents who have to work a full day. They know that their kids are in good programs, learning good life lessons, and getting a snack at the same time.

We also have the inclusive grassroots sport organization. That is an important level of investment, to make sure that kids are learning and have access to sports where there might be barriers for them in the communities they live in. We want to make sure that they get exposed to active life and the benefits of sport and that community feeling that you get, being a member of a team.

So these are all aspects and metrics that we look at when we do our budgeting annually and when we work in collaboration with our stakeholders to make sure that kids have access to healthy living.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: Chair, how are we doing for time?

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

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: Minister, I would just like to follow up on this. We were just talking about all the investments that were made into kids and all of the things that they were doing. We talked a lot about FIFA and soccer.

The province also funds and supports a lot of other organizations that drive a lot of economic opportunity and tourism to our beautiful province.

This summer, the Honda Dealers Indy was all over TV, and a lot of people were watching. A lot of youth were also involved in that. And I saw so many people enjoy their new relocation from Toronto—and putting Markham's skyline on the map.

Would you like to share some of the investments that were made into the Honda Dealers, how that worked out on the number of people who joined, as well as some of the other items that we were investing in, such as the National Bank Open—that was an amazing, tremendous hit—as well as the RBC Open? So much has been going on across the province—and maybe some highlights on the investments that we've been making in other sports across as well.

Hon. Brian Saunderson: That's a great question. I know I'll probably run out of time on this one.

Our business model on this and these larger events is to make sure that we're showing the world that Ontario is a great place to come and compete. So these big professional events, we contribute to on an economic basis. We're looking at the return on investment for these. In the investments that we've made to date, the return has been as high as \$16 for every dollar that we've invested. We want to make sure that we continue that—that we bring the world to Ontario to compete. FIFA was probably the biggest example of that. I know it was more of a one-time opportunity, but these other events are reoccurring. So we like to make sure that we're competitive in that field.

We also have our sport hosting event funding program—\$3 million annually—where we fund programs across, so there can be national, provincial and regional events. So we make sure that we're providing opportunities for young

athletes to come and play on a big stage. Again, the metric there is a return on investment, but it's also in athlete development.

When we look at our programs and the Ontario games, we have five programs—summer and winter games, over 55, and the ParaSport games—all to make sure that we're giving an opportunity for our best to compete and develop our athletes. The bigger events are about a return on investment, making sure that Ontario is recognized globally as a place to come and compete.

Then, internally, we're making sure that we have events that will help develop our young athletes and coaches, and making sure that they have every opportunity moving forward to develop their skills.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): There's one minute left, but you don't have to take it if you don't want it.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: I'll definitely take it. There's so much to discuss here at this great ministry, because not only is it connecting youth, but it connects all of us across the province, as something that creates a shared passion and goal, especially during times of sport when we're all banded together to support our team against the world.

This also gives the opportunity for the ministry to look at a lot of other priorities ahead and opportunities in other sports.

What would be some of those priorities that the ministry is currently considering to fund—looking at funding, or has funded and is new and exciting?

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): You have 20 seconds, Minister.

Hon. Brian Saunderson: We're just on the threshold of announcing the winners for our sport hosting program for the upcoming year. They're different every year, so the opportunity is there. I guess from a selfish position, it's wonderful to see the many different sports and the athletes involved. We're looking forward to that. But it is a great way to build community.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): We'll now move over to the official opposition for their next 15 minutes. MPP Glover.

Mr. Chris Glover: I've got a couple of follow-up questions from my earlier questions.

One: There should be a quick and very logical response here. Initially, the funding from the different levels of government for FIFA—actually, let me back up for a second.

I was negligent in not congratulating you on becoming the Minister of Sport. I was happy to support your own bill to support university sports in Ontario. It's great that we've got an athlete with an international background as the Minister of Sport. So congratulations on that.

Hon. Brian Saunderson: Thank you for that.

Mr. Chris Glover: That doesn't mean I'm going to take it easy on the questions.

Hon. Brian Saunderson: Yes. I know. Like shinny, you've got to go harder now.

Mr. Chris Glover: That's right. Yes. That's the only kind of hockey I play.

The expenditure was \$380 million—about a year ago, there were some news articles that it was going to be \$104 million from the feds, \$97 million from the province, and the city was going to contribute \$198 million. Then, the province said that they were going to be withholding \$40 million of that \$97 million. It would be a breakdown of \$14 million for the Ministry of Health, \$14 million for the OPP, \$7 million for the Ministry of Transportation, and \$2 million for the Ministry of Sport. What ended up happening with the holdback? Was that at \$40 million, or did that get reduced?

Hon. Brian Saunderson: I think you're referring to the services, so I'm going to turn to the deputy minister.

Mr. Keith Palmer: Actually, Minister, those were preliminary numbers that you're quoting. Those numbers did not actually come to fruition. As the ministry sharpened their pencil, took a solid look at what the costs would be pertaining to their ministry's involvement, the numbers were reduced to \$27 million. That wasn't a straight reduction without evidence; it was a matter of making sure that what needed to be covered off in regard to safety, security, transportation etc. was much more accurate—but as an estimate at that point.

Mr. Chris Glover: The city had anticipated the full \$97 million in cash to cover the expenses that they were covering, so \$27 million was held back and went to provincial expenses. So did the city invest another \$27 million, or did they reduce that from their own expenses or from the expected expenses on that?

Hon. Brian Saunderson: I'm going to lead off. I just want to be very clear that in our initial letters and all through this process, we were very consistent that we would be contributing \$97 million and that that would include an element of costs or in-kind services. As you heard from the deputy minister, that envelope floated or changed. We're still going through the reconciliation.

I'll look to the deputy minister to fill that in.

Mr. Keith Palmer: Minister, you're very accurate in that response. It was made very clear to the city of Toronto that the allotment of \$97 million would include provincial service costs, and that's what it did.

Did the city of Toronto increase or decrease their financial commitments? I can't answer that question. That's a question for the city of Toronto. But the province maintained their \$97-million investment.

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Mr. Chris Glover: They budgeted for \$380 million. They expected \$97 million from the province. They got \$70 million from the province. You don't know what they did with that \$380 million? Did they add another \$27 million to make up for the unexpected shortfall, or did they just cut some of their own expense?

Hon. Brian Saunderson: I want to be very clear, again, that the \$97 million that we committed always had a service component to it; there was that aspect. How the discussions evolved over time, I'm not party to that. But we were very clear at the outset: \$97 million is our funding envelope. Some of that will include in-kind services, and these are yet to be figured out with the full reconciliation, but we have a good idea.

I'll pass it over to the deputy minister.

Mr. Keith Palmer: I think if you look back to the original design or concept specific to the World Cup event, the city, the province, the feds would have probably had an outlook that would have represented a particular design. I think as we got closer to the time and recognized that costs were going to be what they were, there was some scaling that had to take place. A perfect example of that is our fan fest. Originally, it could have been planned to be open for 30 days or the entirety of the tournament. Depending on the costs associated with those initiatives, we'd have to scale back a little bit. But working with FIFA Canada, working with the province, working with the city, what we landed on in regard to what the event looked like was exactly what it seemed we were looking for initially. That happened as a result of the city of Toronto, province of Ontario coming together and saying, "Here's what we can do with the dollars that we have." And, as such, you saw the outcome of that event.

Mr. Chris Glover: I note, and you mentioned earlier, that there's \$500 million in new—and, I guess, upgrading of sports facilities.

At the same time, the Ministry of Education is pricing, costing sports groups out of our public and Catholic schools, with outrageous increases in the cost of permits. I mentioned one permit that went from \$700 to \$5,400, for a year permit. Another basketball group's fees went from \$3,400 to \$9,800.

We've already paid for these gyms and the fields that are in our schools, and they already exist.

So the government is investing, and it's wonderful that you're investing in new sports facilities.

But should the government not be doing a cost-benefit analysis of keeping the permits in our gyms and fields and schools affordable, so that those don't end up just being empty and the kids and others who are using them for sports get costed out?

Would you commit to doing a cost-benefit analysis of whether some of that \$500 million should be going into keeping our school gyms and fields affordable so that those sports organizations are not priced out of existence?

Hon. Brian Saunderson: As I indicated before, I'm here as the Minister of Sport. I'm happy to talk about the programs that we have, through this ministry, to promote sport and provide bricks and mortar.

Previously, I indicated to you I would have a conversation with the Minister of Education, but that's the only undertaking I can give you today.

Mr. Chris Glover: A lot of those sports organizations—your ministry is in charge of, for example, or has a relationship with community sports organizations. Is that fair?

Hon. Brian Saunderson: We have a number of relationships through our 68 PSOs, but also through our after-school programs. I think we engage 108 different organizations. And through our inclusive grassroots programs, we partner with people like the MLSE Foundation, Jumpstart, so we leverage those relationships.

To go to your last question—a number of the after-school programs utilize school properties and school

facilities. So we are already in that space, and we're going to continue to work in that space, because, as I said, safe, inclusive sport is a priority for this government.

Mr. Chris Glover: Some of the sports organizations that your ministry supports are being priced out of our schools by these massive increases in permit fees by your government's Ministry of Education fee increases.

Hon. Brian Saunderson: I don't know that to be the case. But as I said earlier, I do know as a fact that some of these increases in costs aren't necessarily coming from the boards that are controlled by this government. So I think the characterization is not entirely accurate. But I can't speak to which sport organizations are being impacted by this.

Mr. Chris Glover: Some of the boards that were taken over, that are under the direct supervision of this government, are the ones that have the most outrageous fee increases. I mentioned earlier—188% for one organization, a 652% increase year over year for another sports organization that was using a school gym.

You're talking about this division. You're supporting these community sports organizations. They use the gyms that are in the schools. Yes, the schools are under the Ministry of Education—but it's all one government. There's only one taxpayer. We paid our taxes to build those school gyms, and we would like to see them used. I think the majority of people in the province want to see those gyms used, their fields used, to their maximum potential so that as many people as possible can participate in sports.

Would you commit to that being a goal of your government—to maximize the use of our school gyms so that as many people as possible can participate in sports?

Hon. Brian Saunderson: Well, that's asked and answered, I think, MPP. I've indicated I'm here on behalf of the Ministry of Sport.

With respect to the particulars, I understand that these cost increases are across the province, so not necessarily in school boards that have been taken over by this government.

The priority, as I've said many times, is for us to make sport accessible and inclusive across the province. We have many sport initiatives that are designed to do that.

Mr. Chris Glover: Those are all my questions. Thank you.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): MPP Cerjanec, you can go next, please.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Through you, Chair: I want to switch gears a little bit.

Back in February 2019, provincial and territorial sport ministers committed, through the Red Deer Declaration, for coordinated action against harassment, abuse and discrimination, including investigating a mechanism to report and monitor incidents in sport. Seven years later, Ontario's Sport Recognition Policy requires recognized sport organizations to maintain harassment and accessibility policies, but those requirements don't establish whether the province tracks complaints or measures outcomes.

Minister, seven years after the Red Deer Declaration, what has Ontario delivered on its immediate actions?

Hon. Brian Saunderson: It's a good question.

The Red Deer Declaration was made in anticipation—as the policy of the federal government's group on the future of sport in Canada was being struck. As you know, that report came out this past March. It has identified many avenues, particularly in the federal space, where we can find improvement. It has identified issues, funding deficiencies, so the federal government is working forward through that. We know, at our next FPT, we're going to be talking about that report and ways to implement it. One of the recommendations in that report is for the federal government to create a unified body across Canada to do this. That's a topic of discussion.

In terms of our federal or our provincial mechanisms, all of our sports organizations, PSOs, in Ontario are linked to a national sport organization, so there's a chain of command. We have our transfer payment agreements with each of those sport organizations, and we have accountability processes through that. They're all required to have a code of conduct. They're all required to have complaint mechanisms. Making sure that those complaint mechanisms work in the best way and fashion possible is a big topic of discussion and is something we're looking at.

We do have accountability guidelines in place, but I think there's room for improvement. That's a topic of discussion with our federal counterpart.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Would you consider tabling a progress report that's identifying what's complete, what remains outstanding and in progress on achieving the commitments under it?

Hon. Brian Saunderson: I think we're going to have our FPT first and see what comes from that engagement. But it is a topic of discussion.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I definitely appreciate that organizations are required to have policies in place. There's a lot of trust, I feel, in trusting those organizations to investigate and address and deal with complaints.

When we see a student athlete—this could be at a university, for example—or an athlete with a disability report discrimination, who takes that responsibility for ensuring the complaint is addressed and the athlete receives support?

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Hon. Brian Saunderson: Well, that's a contextual question.

The universities have their own mechanisms and accountability processes, and certainly, from talking now with the administrators from Trent, Western, Carleton and Ottawa U, I'm very confident that they have that well in hand.

When you have a complaint at a high school level—again, that's an education complaint—it's a different avenue.

When we have an initiative complaint through a PSO, that is then when we get involved, and our accountability transfer payment arrangement with that PSO becomes a critical piece of the puzzle.

Making sure that we have adequate codes of conduct and adequate complaint systems is an important topic.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: What is the ministry tracking right now, if anything—I'm not quite sure—with those incidents and outcomes? Is the ministry tracking?

Hon. Brian Saunderson: I'm going to pass that to the deputy minister.

Mr. Keith Palmer: Thank you, Minister.

I just want to back up a little bit. Some 80% of the athletes in the province of Ontario working with their PSOs and MSOs are covered through an independent, third-party mechanism when there are issues of abuse. The transfer payment agreement that the province currently has with a number of our stakeholders requires that those PSOs track, monitor and address issues of abuse. It's part of our transfer payment agent agreement. It is also important to know that they are independent of the government. They function in a way that works through their own bylaws, through their own boards. And we are a funding source. Of course, as a result of them receiving funding, there are some expectations of those PSOs—have their codes of conduct, make sure they're addressing inclusivity etc. Right now, there is no formal responsibility for them to report back on all issues of abuse. That's when they would work through their national sport organizations, and, if it is something that is criminal, work with the local police departments.

This is something that we know needs to be strengthened. We're seeing much more of these issues raise their ugly heads through media, and this ministry is well aware and working with FPT. At our upcoming conference in February, there's going to be more ongoing conversation that the minister will be engaging in with members of the federal government and other provinces and territories.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Would we consider requiring that the funded sport organizations provide this information to the ministry through the transfer payment agreements that we have with them?

Hon. Brian Saunderson: I'll start off, and then I'll look to the deputy minister.

The nature of the transfer payment arrangement is a contractual one. If you start to legislate relationships, that leads to other complications. So the way to find that sweet spot of accountability and efficiency is a topic—and you've seen, as you indicated, back in 2019, at the FPT, this became a topic of discussion. The future of sport recommendations has come out now—and so it's a discussion about how you implement those.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I'll just say it takes a lot of courage for people to come forward with these incidents and complaints. I want to make sure that, through our public dollars we're providing to organizations, there is a level of accountability that goes along with it. It is a stain, in some cases, in sport, and it's something that I think and I hope all of us want to see rectified and resolved to the best of our ability, to try to prevent incidents from happening in the first place. And it's a lot of work to change culture, but to work to change that culture within it—that's why I raised that today.

On performance measures, the ministry right now—I think the two indicators that the ministry looks at are sport GDP and sport jobs, on a formal level. Is that correct, or are there other performance indicators that the ministry is looking at?

Hon. Brian Saunderson: When you say sport GDP and sport jobs, you're referring—

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Overall—not specific complaints of race. I'm moving on from that topic—but yes.

Hon. Brian Saunderson: I, personally—and I'll look to the deputy minister afterwards—as your minister, my personal metrics for looking at the performance of our ministry is making targeted investments that are intentional and yield results, looking at a business case for the large events, professional events, bringing tourism to Ontario, but also the hosting events.

To me, some of the really critical metrics are how we're affecting the lives of our residents, whether they be young or old and of all abilities and any challenges, and making sure that they have access so it's a level playing field across the province.

Just in a simplistic metric, in preparing for today and seeing that since 2004, Ontario had less than a third of the Olympic athletes, and we now have close to 45—it's a similar metric for the winter games as well. I think the elite athletes bubble to the surface when you have a broad base. It's a reflection of the population that we're reaching. To get that level of excellence, you have to have a very broad base.

I think coming out of the pandemic with social isolation for all our residents, but particularly our young kids—talking over the weekend at the Head of the Trent, some of the coaches were commenting how they seem to be getting out of that high school group that was affected by the pandemic, getting into the younger kids, and participation levels are going up.

Seeing our reach increasing, seeing the number of kids involved in sport at university is one indicator.

But again, as I said, for me, the metric, the results that matter most are seeing healthy Ontarians, Ontarians performing at the elite level, us expanding opportunities for those elite athletes, and making sure that we're reaching all Ontarians of any age.

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

Mr. Keith Palmer: Of course, Minister. Thank you.

Great question, MPP.

Through you, Madam Chair: You would have recognized in the document that you're looking at that GDP and employment are definitely key performance indicators that we're looking at. But it's equally important to recognize that the province continues to see numbers like four million participants participating in sport across the province; if you include parents and relatives who attend sporting events, you're closer to eight million people involved.

We also look at provincial representation. How many athletes from the province of Ontario are representing Ontario on the national stage? Of course, we also look at the national representation, the international representation, and total number of sporting events that are hosted here in the province of Ontario—not just looking at the financial return on investments. We're also looking at opportunities for amateur athletes to be part of larger hosting events where they can see themselves represented in the future and feel really good and inspired and motivated to continue on and stay in sport and recreation.

I'll just add, we know that we're seeing numbers of females reduce their participation in sport. The more we can advertise and/or support, through events, through employment opportunities, nationally, internationally—we hope to see those numbers increase because we know that participation in sport is a great indicator to the attributes that are important around leadership and those who participate in the employment sector in the province of Ontario through sport.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: How much time is left, Chair?

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Three minutes and 40 seconds.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Just on the topic of women and girls in sport: Looking at the Next Play, which is the main girls' program in the ministry, it received \$380,000 in 2024 and \$480,000 in both 2025 and 2026. We know that there's about a 15-point difference between boys' and girls' participation within sports. We see how successful sports teams are—like the Tempo, for example. I think that's inspiring a lot of folks to think about sport. But we've seen that main girls' program flat, at \$480,000 for the last two years.

Will your government commit to a target to close that gap between boys and girls in sports, Minister?

Mr. Brian Saunderson: First of all, I have to start off just to say that I think in Canada and Ontario, playing like a girl is a compliment.

I can tell you that from my days on the national team, we had some incredible rowers—Kirsten Barnes, Silken Laumann, Marnie McBean, Kathleen Heddle. All of those women, to me, personified what excellence in sport means and were groundbreakers.

I think we've seen that trend continue. We've seen our women's basketball team, our women's rugby team, our women's hockey team, our women's soccer team have been leading the charge.

I do think there's a cultural, social stigma that we're still overcoming.

In those numbers that you refer to, in the program that you refer to—I think you have to also understand that the other funding programs don't make a gender distinction. Our after-school programs, our inclusive grassroots program, the Indigenous supports program, and all the other sport funding does include, in equal measures, male and female athletes. This is above and on top of that. And I think you're seeing in the return, we're trying to close that gap in participation levels. We're working on that.

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In terms of the tip of the pyramid, again, as I said, our women are leading the way. With every success we have at that level, you see a reflection, I think, in the base, and our base broadens with more female participation. We're working on that.

Again, accessibility and inclusiveness are key markers for this government, and we will continue on those efforts.

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

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: So it's to be determined if we'll commit to a target to close that gap. But we definitely recognize the incredible accomplishments of many women and girls in sport.

I'll leave the questions there, Chair.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): We will now move to the government side. MPP Babikian.

Mr. Aris Babikian: Thank you, Minister, Deputy, and the staff for coming and sharing your time and insights with us.

First of all, before I ask my question, I would like to commend your ministry and the government for playing an important part in bringing the FIFA World Cup to Ontario, to Toronto. I wish it was more than six games, because we have seen the excitement and interest generated by the games here. I can speak about my own riding of Scarborough—Agincourt. Of course, I know there are so many other benefits, in general terms, to the province and the country. But in my riding, I've seen how plazas, malls, community centres, restaurants organized free watching sessions where communities, families and friends from diverse backgrounds came together to get to know each other and enjoy the games. That created a camaraderie in our communities between our different, diverse groups, and that was, at least for me, an important benefit of organizing the games here. We hope we will be continuing to support major sport games like that, worldwide events, in Canada and in Toronto.

My question is related to your ministry's support of professional athletes and organizations. How are you supporting these organizations and athletes, and what are the benefits that they are getting?

Hon. Brian Saunderson: You're speaking, MPP Babikian, about the Quest for Gold program?

Mr. Aris Babikian: Yes.

Hon. Brian Saunderson: The Quest for Gold program is ways that we work with our sport organizations to develop—basically, to have the network and the facilities they need to promote excellence, but also then how we support the individual athletes. Annually, it's about \$6.3 million. One significant portion of that is to support our PSOs, to make sure that they have the coaches and the network to promote those athletes. They can provide direct support to the athletes as well—so, the developing athletes, the Ontario athletes who are aspiring to be on the national team. That's about \$3.1 million annually that we provide to the PSOs for their operations and to support their key athletes directly.

We also have the Quest for Gold national program. It's about \$3.2 million—where we support over 500 Ontario athletes who are at the national level, who are representing Canada internationally. Of the proportion of the 45% of the Paris Olympic team—about 91% of those athletes from Ontario received that kind of direct support.

The costs for athletes—we've seen in some sports, they are charged to go on their tours internationally or nationally. So our work to help support those athletes with the financial support they need to compete at that level and buy the equipment they need and the housing and the food—it's an expensive process, so we want to make sure that we're supporting those athletes. Between that \$6.3-million envelope, that filters down directly to the PSOs and the athletes, but on top of that, through the Canadian Sport Institute Ontario, we provide an additional—I think

it's in the \$6-million range, as well as just over \$1.1 million to help with coaching.

All of these investments are helping to work at that elite level and prepare our Ontario athletes to compete on the national and world stage—and they are critical supports to have to make sure that our Ontario kids can progress in a very, very competitive field, both in Canada and internationally.

Mr. Aris Babikian: We have individual sports, and we have group sports, team sports. Are there any stats about how much is going to individual athletes or team athletes?

Hon. Brian Saunderson: When we get to the carding system, both provincially and nationally—if an athlete is a part of a sport organization that competes at the Olympics, then they're eligible for funding. That funding is related to, at least on the national level—and the provincial level, to some degree—your world ranking. So it doesn't matter if you're an individual athlete or a team athlete; you're eligible for the same funding, based on your ranking in the world. And for the \$3.1 million that goes through the sport organizations—they are responsible for doling that out between their operating costs and their operations as a sport organization and what they will filter down to the athletes directly, for the kids who are developing. But, again, it's the same metric. If you're an Olympic sport athlete, whether it's a team sport or an individual sport, you're eligible for that funding.

As an ex-athlete, I would comment that the individual athletes often have more commercial appeal than, say, for example, a member of a team—if there are 15 or 20 athletes—unless you're one of the outstanding athletes. So, in my mind, making sure that we support the team athletes is really of critical importance, because the team is as strong as its weakest link, and they don't have some of the same commercial opportunities that the individual athletes may have.

As I indicated in my comments, the Quest for Gold, Ontario or Canada—we support over 500 athletes who are all competing on the national team in whatever sport they're in.

Mr. Aris Babikian: I will cede my time to my colleague Sheref Sabawy.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): MPP Sabawy, go ahead.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: I'm really very happy and very delighted, because the amount of work that has been done in the tourism sector—I, myself, served as a parliamentary assistant for that ministry for five years, I believe. I think there is still potential to add to the tourism and make sure that Ontario benefits from all the opportunities and options we have in Ontario.

I would like to thank the ministry for supporting the FIFA World Cup. Having first-hand experience with this, all the myriad of the World Cup—all the restaurants, all the hotels, all the different attractions in Ontario were 100% full. We've seen in all those matches—game 2, Toronto—how much Ontarians enjoyed going there and how much business that created.

Can the minister tell us a little bit more about how the investment we made in FIFA could create a long-term

return on tourism generally, or the tourists who could come back to Canada or put Canada as a destination for their future tourism trips?

Hon. Brian Saunderson: That's a great question. Thank you very much, PA.

I think you now know why—well, you served in this ministry when sport was part of tourism, so they're very closely linked. I have to say, I'm very excited that sport is on its own now, because I think we deserve our own position, but that being said, there is a very close connection.

Your question about FIFA, I think, helps explain our investments in larger commercial events, but also in our sport hosting program.

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Starting off with the FIFA event, as I indicated in my earlier comments, we know from the polling we did in the Fan Festival—and we had about 350,000 people go through the Fan Festival over the course of the games—that 96% said they would come back to Ontario for an international sporting event and 92% said that they would come back just to tour Ontario. Many of them were here for their games but in the interim had an opportunity to go out and see what a great province we have—go to Niagara Falls, see all the great amenities. But as we indicated, I think one of the real selling points is that we're seen—and this goes across government, from foreign investments and immigration—as a safe haven. We're seen as a very multicultural, diverse country, and one that is safe and accommodating and inclusive. I think, through FIFA, we put an exclamation point on that reputation. So I think you're going to see tourism in the future continue to accelerate based on the FIFA result. On a more selfish level, on the sporting level, I think the infrastructure, like the \$20 million in the Centennial stadium, the profile that we brought the sport, having five stadiums in Brampton now named after members of our Canadian team—that all serves to enhance and emphasize our sporting culture and the success of our athletes across the board. So, for the sport ministry, that was a very important investment. And kudos to the team and the city of Toronto and all involved. I really have to thank the volunteers, because without them, this event would not have resonated the way it did. The success of that event was a real testament to the efforts of the government and the city of Toronto, as well as the feds, but also our people and our volunteers.

That reflects, I think, on our other events and our other sport hosting programs, like the 2026 RBC Canadian Open, the 2026 National Bank Open, and the Honda Dealers Indy.

More recently, I was at the 2026 International Wheelchair Basketball Federation tournament championships in Ottawa. Our women got silver, our men played incredibly, and we had, I think, teams from 20 different countries.

Showcasing that elite talent in Ontario, to me, is a great selling point, and the trickle-down effect in those sports for our local athletes is huge.

These are big investments, but the returns locally in terms of—whether it be infrastructure—improving the wheelchair facilities where the games were played was a

huge part, and creating training courts. That's infrastructure that's going to enhance our athletes' experience for generations to come—but also, including the profile, including the awareness and bringing the focus to that sport has huge dividends down the road.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: I would like to follow up with a small piece in regard to how you see organizing something like the FIFA World Cup can help and raise that specific sport with Ontarian youth and get more people into the soccer sport and expand soccer as one of the growing sports in Canada, here.

Hon. Brian Saunderson: I think it's a very direct link. I think you're going to have all sorts of young kids in Brampton who want to see their name on a soccer stadium now, and that success on that kind of a theatre and that kind of stage.

We've seen that Canada has hosted the Olympics twice. In 1976, in Montreal—that was my first taste of the Olympic experience, and it changed my life. In 1988, in Calgary, our former minister Neil Lumsden—his son, Jesse, is a three-time Olympian in sliding events and is now the technical director.

These things have direct impact on our talent pool—and not just the athletes, but coaches.

We need to develop our own coaches, so developing the infrastructure or the manpower and the expertise to help work with our upcoming athletes—you need to develop the coaches and that generation, as athletes' playing careers end and they get into coaching.

Over the weekend, when I was in Ottawa for the Rowan's Law announcement, I met Haley Irwin, a former three-time Olympian in hockey, who's now the acting head coach for the PWHL Charge out of Ottawa. I met Ghislaine, a former rugby player and Olympian, who's now working at Trent University. I met Danika at Ottawa U, who's working with the athletes there and is part of the recruitment.

We now have females working in the NHL and NBA, and now they have the WNBA and the PWHL.

These are all opportunities that come out of hosting these events and broadening the opportunities for athletes moving forward and creating our own coaches.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you very much, Minister. That was important to get into the record—how much the impact of that is.

I will dedicate the rest of the time for my colleague.

MPP Mohamed Firin: How much time is left, Chair?

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Well, to be honest, there's only 18 seconds left. I didn't want to interrupt that beautiful flow that was going on, with all the women athletes.

MPP Mohamed Firin: I'll just thank the minister and his team for coming out.

Congratulations on the new role.

I heard, from MPP Cerjanec, that you'll be retiring soon, so I hope you enjoy retirement. It was a pleasure to work with you in my previous role, as the province's advocate for community opportunities. Good luck, and we wish you all the best.

Mr. Keith Palmer: Thank you.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): There is now still around 15 minutes. MPP Glover, you're first up.

Mr. Chris Glover: I'll just ask one more follow-up question.

Thanks for the answers so far.

The sports events and initiatives budget is increasing by more than \$40 million, while inclusive recreation grants are receiving just \$3.3 million.

How is the ministry determining the balance between funding major events and funding everyday participation in sport and recreation?

Hon. Brian Saunderson: That picks up a little on the theme, I think, of MPP Sabawy's question.

The business model for the ministry is about—as I said, the priority is about creating inclusive, accessible sport for all residents. But part of the business model is making sure that we host events that can help to lift that sector. So it is a balancing act. We have to establish priorities. But for me, boots on the ground—it's about making sure we have the funding to provide accessible sport for all residents.

I think the sport hosting—there's the annualized funding, and then there are one-time events like FIFA. The metric changes year to year. This year, because of FIFA, those costs went up. I think you're going to see those costs come down next year. At least, we have an envelope, as we said, for the large events and for the sport-hosting events.

But the bottom line is, we're trying to make sport accessible for all Ontarians.

Mr. Chris Glover: So the \$40 million—and most of it going to the bigger projects this year—was because of FIFA?

Hon. Brian Saunderson: It was largely because of FIFA.

I'll pass it to the deputy minister to give you more of a breakdown.

Mr. Keith Palmer: Through you, Madam Chair: Yes, Minister, you're absolutely correct. The large portion of that increase was as a result of the FIFA World Cup.

Mr. Chris Glover: That's good.

Those are all my questions.

Thank you for all the responses today.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): There is still 12 minutes and 40 seconds—so MPP Cerjanec, if you'd like to go ahead.

Hon. Brian Saunderson: Is this injury time? I feel like it's a soccer game.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: It's injury time. We're in injury time here.

Mr. Chris Glover: This goes on forever.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): They're certainly passing the football or whatever around.

Go ahead.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Through you, Chair: Around the community sport and infrastructure fund—and this was a bit of a conversation at committee, at estimates, last year. I think the public, and rightfully so in some ways, is concerned about how money is awarded and given out, just given some past scandals with the Skills Development Fund. I think people have a reason to question money that is given out.

In terms of the applications that come forward for the community sport and infrastructure fund, is the ministry funding the highest-scoring applicants? Walk us through how that process of selection works for this ministry.

Hon. Brian Saunderson: I can tell you that although I wasn't at the table at the time—but speaking with staff, the recommendations were made to the ministry, and we adopted those recommendations. We didn't change any of them.

In terms of how those recommendations were made, I'll look to the deputy minister.

Mr. Keith Palmer: Thank you, Minister.

It would be remiss if I didn't really recognize my team behind me for providing a lot of support in preparation for these estimates, so I wanted to thank them for that on the record.

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In regard to your question, MPP Cerjanec, the process, as far as we're concerned, as officials, is extremely transparent and extremely robust and rigorous. The application process happens through an application portal that is accessible by those stakeholders who are interested in applying for funding. Those applications that meet the basic criteria—there are quite often applications that come in that are not all fully complete, to which we will engage those stakeholders. The complete applications are reviewed and assessed by our partner ministry in MTCG. They have a team of assessors who completely understand the weighting responsibility and the criteria that need to be reviewed. Those criteria components are built into the application process, so the stakeholders know what they are. Once the scoring is complete, the information is then sent over to officials within my office or members of our divisions, and they're reviewed for accuracy, compliance, criteria being met, everything pertaining to what an assessment should look like. That will then roll through my office. My office will review them again. We will then send them up to the minister's office for review.

The process, in regard to selection at the minister's office, is through recommendations by the officials, which we score from highest to lowest, and then the minister's office will make those selections. What we have seen in the last year is that the approvals and final sign-offs have been in line with the highest scoring all the way down. That level of transparency, to which we have engaged our audit team, has been extremely complementary in how that process took place.

As officials, we feel very, very strong in regard to how we're representing members of the public who are applying and the dollars that are associated to those who are successful in their funding responsibilities.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Thank you for providing that clarification and detail as to how these applications are looked at.

I do know that for-profit companies are able to receive up to 25% of the cost of a new build.

What was the decision to allow for-profit organizations to receive public money for this program?

Hon. Brian Saunderson: Well, we're trying to get facilities built, and it depends on the circumstance—but

the eligibility requirements were public and published in advance. I think we were very clear about that. As the deputy minister indicated, we had very rigorous and robust scoring mechanisms. So those opportunities would have been vetted. Really, at the end of the day, we're looking for the return on investment on the ground, making sure that the communities have the facilities they need.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I can appreciate that in some ways, except that—ultimately, we're distributing public money, and we're seeing, then, public money go towards for-profit organizations, when I believe there were about 400 community applications that were turned away just because the program isn't big enough. It does speak to the interest in the program.

As minister, will you be considering changing the approach of this program to ensure that we're putting public dollars, tax dollars, hard-earned tax dollars towards municipalities, not-for-profits, organizations that don't have a profit element to it?

Hon. Brian Saunderson: I would say that we will be evaluating our investments on the return on that investment and the impact for our residents.

I would look to the deputy minister to provide some background on that.

Mr. Keith Palmer: Thank you, Minister.

Through you, Madam Chair: I think that's a great question.

What is important to recognize across the province of Ontario is there are often situations where there is reliance on a private organization to provide sporting resources, and in the overall planning of this program, we have to consider that. We also have to think about opportunities where private sector organizations were partnering with municipalities, to which we did not want to just not consider them.

As we think about the large geographical area in the province of Ontario, we also have to think about what are the best resources that are available in those communities to be able to address the needs around sport and recreation. Sometimes a private sector organization is that person or is that body. So we wanted to make sure, within the overall program design, we did consider them.

I will also add that through last year's assessment, there were no private organizations that were funded. So there have been no dollars that have been attributed to those private sector organizations.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Around supporting athletes, recently—and I recognize it was changed—the Ministry of Education put in place an attendance policy at schools, where if you miss more than two unexcused absences, you can lose up to 15% of your mark, with exceptions at that time, when the announcement was made, only for high-level athletes. I recognize you weren't minister at that time, but I am curious whether the Ministry of Sport was consulted on that decision or not.

Hon. Brian Saunderson: Well, I can tell you this: In discussions with my predecessor, we've sought clarification from the Ministry of Education, and we're assured that it's not going to have any impact for student athletes. So, that being the case, we're happy with the situation.

I believe in the attendance policy, but I also believe it should not be a barrier for our young athletes in schools.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: About one in two kids in the province—their families can't afford to put their kids into community sport. Have there been any increases in the estimates to organizations with that mandate—to help lower-income families and their kids access community sport?

Hon. Brian Saunderson: We have, through our inclusive grassroots programming, allocated \$3.2 million in this year, and the funding is estimated to impact about 47,000 children across the province, to provide them affordable, accessible and inclusive opportunities in sport. I think since we've initiated this program, since 2021-22, we've supported approximately 150,000 kids across the province.

We work with other groups and charities—the Canadian Tire Jumpstart charities—and they have a number of partners and programs. We have the Canadian Women and Sport program, \$480,000; the Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment Foundation, \$330,000; the Jays Care Foundation—and I've seen first-hand how they've impacted both the community in my riding, in the town of Ivy, and Indigenous communities—KidSport Ontario, \$400,000; and Inclusion in Canadian Sports Network, \$100,000; that's this year. That Canadian sports network looks at increasing the number of Black, Indigenous and people-of-colour athletes, coaches and officials. So we are working in that space, and we're trying to address that. Those same individuals would also be able to participate in the after-school program. We think there are a number of opportunities there, and we're always looking for further.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Through you, Chair: Does the ministry have any participation targets for low-income, Indigenous and racialized youth right now?

Hon. Brian Saunderson: We also have Indigenous programs specific to the Indigenous community. If I look here, we are providing \$5.2 million in the upcoming 2026-27 year, through three various programs:

—\$1.3 million in annual funding for Indigenous Sport and Wellness Ontario, ISWO, to support recreational programs in their communities;

—\$1.45 million in annual funding for up to 27 First Nations through the Community Aboriginal Recreation Activator Program; and

—\$2.5 million in annual funding for the Youth Cultural Camps Program, for up to 10 Indigenous organizations and communities, to provide cultural community and leadership development in their own communities.

So we are working across a number of sectors to make sure that we give them equal opportunity.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: A 2026 University of Toronto study found that weekly sport participation was about 64% among white youth but about 19% among Indigenous youth, with cost being a leading barrier.

It appears as though Indigenous and youth recreation funding is frozen at \$21.1 million. And last year, there was about \$682,000 that was unspent. Do we know why some of that money was unspent?

Hon. Brian Saunderson: I will pass that off to the deputy minister, but I will say again, with the CSRI, of the initial \$200-million tranche, about 10% went to Indigenous communities. So this is definitely an area that we're working on and focused on. I think some of the programs that I just went through show that.

But I'm going to look to the deputy minister to give the background on that.

Mr. Keith Palmer: Thank you, Minister.

Through you, Madam Chair: It's important to note that there are several different methodologies of providing support to individuals in the province. It could be direct funding to sport, but it can also be—

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

Mr. Keith Palmer:—supporting organizations like the ICSN, the Inclusion in Canadian Sports Network, that are providing leadership training to individuals who are participating in sport from a leadership perspective, a coaching perspective, mentoring, modelling etc.

What we recognize—and I think you touched on this as well, MPP Cerjanec—is changing that culture in sport, where it's not just about “How much does a sport event cost?” or “How much does participating into a baseball program cost?” but “Are individuals seeing individuals who represent them as coaches, as trainers, as directors and coordinators inside of those organizations?”

I think what the province is trying to do is find that happy balance between providing financial supports at the ground level but also creating a pathway for racialized—being Indigenous or otherwise—leaders in the sports space to really mentor, model and coach those young children who are getting into sports. So it's more than just dollars and cents, but more around representation, reflection—just championing exactly what the province of Ontario looks like in regard to leadership in that space.

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

This concludes the committee's consideration of the 2026-27 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 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 2026-27 estimates of the Ministry of Sport carry? All those in favour, please raise your hands. All those opposed, please raise your hands. I declare that carried.

Shall the Chair report the 2026-27 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 the 2026-27 estimates of the Ministry of Sport to the House.

That concludes our consideration of this ministry's estimates.

I'd like to thank Minister Saunderson and everyone here today for their participation.

The committee now stands in recess till 1 p.m.

The committee recessed from 1203 to 1300.

MINISTRY OF TOURISM, CULTURE AND GAMING

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Good afternoon, everyone. The Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy will now come to order. We are meeting to consider the 2026-27 estimates of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming, for a total of two hours.

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

From the ministry, we are joined by the Honourable Zee Hamid, 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 from the members before we begin? 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 all yours.

Hon. Zee Hamid: Thank you, Chair and members of the committee. It's a privilege to appear before you today, as the new Minister of Tourism, Culture and Gaming, to discuss the important work of the ministry.

Our tourism, culture and gaming sectors are central to Ontario's economy, quality of life and long-term prosperity, shaping how we experience our province while safeguarding the places and people that make it unique. As Canada's leading travel destination and largest cultural producer, Ontario is home to iconic attractions, world-class festivals, cultural treasures and a thriving creative economy spanning film, television and beyond. These trends are complemented by a rapidly growing gaming sector that is driving industry innovation and economic growth. And I see even greater potential ahead.

At a time of tariffs and ongoing global instability, our government is protecting and promoting Ontario's competitive advantage, ensuring we remain strong, resilient and open to opportunity. Through exceptional dedication and leadership, my ministry continues to champion these sectors, turning Ontario's strengths and potential into lasting momentum and success.

In 2025-26, MTCG made strategic investments in major tourism, cultural projects and gaming initiatives to lay the foundation for the very ambitious work ahead. In 2026-27, funding for MTCG increased by more than \$232 million, reflecting the vital role these sectors play in protecting Ontario's economy.

By strengthening Ontario's position as Canada's top travel destination, we're maximizing tourism opportunities to attract more visitors and investment. And by investing in our cultural treasures, we're ensuring even more people can experience what makes Ontario so special.

From supporting the revitalization of Wasaga Beach and redeveloping the Nancy Island Historic Site to expanding and modernizing the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, reimagining Ontario Place, enhancing Toronto's waterfront and unlocking the Niagara region's full potential, we're preserving Ontario's natural and cultural heritage and creating opportunities that will last for generations.

And as Ontario's regulated gaming landscape matures, we're reinforcing our commitment to responsible gaming through continued investments in safer play.

Tourism is no longer just about seeing the sights. Now people travel for the experiences and memories that stay with them long after the trip is ended. In an increasingly fast-moving and divided world, my ministry's mission is to help create that sense of connection that travellers are seeking.

We experienced that atmosphere first-hand this summer, during the FIFA 2026 World Cup. The energy across Toronto was undeniable, and the benefits of hosting these six exciting matches extended well beyond the final whistle.

Global events showcase Ontario to the world, inspiring future visits and encouraging repeat tourism.

According to a recent study released by Destination Ontario, during the World Cup, visitors stayed an average of nearly seven nights, while more than nine in 10 reported strong interest in returning within two years. That momentum matters as Ontario remains Canada's premier travel destination for locals and visitors alike.

In 2025, our province welcomed 152 million visitors, generated \$37 billion in visitor spending and supported over 310,000 jobs in the tourism sector.

To build on this success, our government is investing over \$200 million in 2026-27, including:

- more than \$27 million for the festivals and event sector, including Experience Ontario and the Marquee Event Program;

- over \$90 million in operating funding for tourism agencies and transfer payment entities;

- \$82 million over four years for the St. Lawrence commission to modernize beaches and deliver much-needed upgrades to the campgrounds along the St. Lawrence corridor, as well as an additional \$8.6 million in operating funding;

- \$50 million to redevelop and expand the building and grounds of the historic McMichael Canadian Art Collection.

These investments also reflect our government's ongoing commitment to protecting the industries and workers that drive Ontario's tourism industry and economy. From restaurants and hotels to events venues, attractions, and catering companies, hospitality workers provide exceptional services, helping to create memorable experiences for guests while supporting tourism and strengthening local communities and economies.

That's why, earlier this year, we celebrated the first-ever Ontario Hospitality Workers Appreciation Day on February 23, recognizing the people whose hard work inspires visitors to stay longer, return often and recommend our province to others.

Beyond celebrating the people who power and personalize our tourism sector, our government is also advancing major legacy projects that will deliver world-class experiences, attractions and sights for generations to come.

When travellers think of Ontario, the Niagara region comes immediately to mind, with its iconic falls. The region boasts a \$3-billion tourism industry that attracts 13 million annual visits and 40,000 tourism-related jobs, reflecting the global appetite for Niagara as a destination people want to return to again and again.

In December 2025, our government launched the Destination Niagara Strategy, setting a clear vision to attract year-round visitors and encourage longer stays. To unlock Niagara's potential as a global destination of choice, we identified key pillars to achieve our ambitious goals: tourism attractions, world-class gaming, wine and culinary tourism, arts and culture, transportation development. This approach is already delivering results, with progress on key initiatives, including:

- expanding Niagara's gaming market by allowing new casino operators to bring further investment to the region. This milestone paves the way for additional gaming and entertainment opportunities in the region;

- transforming the Toronto Power Generating Station into a five-star boutique hotel, with construction expected to begin by the end of the month;

- broadening the offerings of the Niagara Parks Power Station to introduce new ways to interact with the historic landmark attraction; and

- supporting transportation access to Niagara region through expansion of the Niagara regional airport, air access feasibility study, QEW improvements and, of course, GO Transit improvements, including a new Grimsby GO station.

As part of this strategy, we have already made several strategic investments, including \$35 million over three years to rebuild the Shaw Festival's Royal George Theatre, and nearly \$2 million for 36 Niagara region festivals and events in 2025-26, including the Fan Zone by the Falls hosted by the Niagara Parks Commission during the FIFA World Cup.

And with the success of Niagara Takes Flight, we're seeing the extraordinary potential that can occur with the right attractions and services. Since its launch in August 2025, this immersive attraction has welcomed more than 477,000 visitors and generated over \$13.9 million in gross revenue.

Niagara is just one example of the destinations that define Ontario.

We're also making exciting progress on Destination Wasaga. Home to the world's longest freshwater beach, our government is bringing this region to the next level by investing nearly \$38 million, including:

- \$25 million to revitalize the Nancy Island Historic Site, enhancing its appeal to more visitors and preserving

it as a place of leisure, education and national pride for generations to come;

- \$2 million to the town of Wasaga Beach to support tourism planning and downtown redevelopment. The town has recently released a proposed master plan and ambitious vision for the future of its iconic shoreline;

- nearly \$11 million through the Municipal Housing Infrastructure Program to support the reconstruction of the Wasaga Beach area roadways project.

This ongoing work will elevate this iconic site into a global beach destination that celebrates and preserves local history while improving roads and supporting future housing.

Our government is also delivering on our bold vision to transform Ontario Place into a world-class, year-round destination with more than 50 acres of public space, family-friendly entertainment and improved access to the waterfront. After construction, this project is anticipated to support more than 2,000 jobs, contributing \$184 million to Ontario's GDP and attracting millions of visitors each year. As a centerpiece of Ontario's tourism, recreation and cultural sectors, this revitalization is creating a lasting legacy on Toronto's waterfront that unlocks the full economic potential of one of the city's most iconic public spaces.

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As a key part of Ontario Place, our government is also investing in the future of the Ontario Science Centre for the next generation of students, families and visitors. The final designs unveiled earlier this year reflect an upgraded science centre, marking the next chapter in a legacy spanning more than five decades. Key features include a 400,000-square-foot facility; a state-of-the-art mainland building; renovated and enhanced pods; and iconic Cine-sphere. I'm pleased to report that construction is already under way; we broke ground in May and remain on track for completion in 2029.

While progress on the new science centre moves ahead, the interim location at the Harbourfront Centre continues to operate, ensuring visitors of all ages still have access to high-quality educational programming.

Continuing along Toronto's waterfront, our government also invested \$2.2 million over two years in the Corleck to transform the space into a cultural landmark. As a celebration of Irish culture and Ontario's rich immigration history, the Corleck complements Toronto's vibrant waterfront as one of the most dynamic tourism corridors in the province and is expecting to have its grand opening this fall.

As work continues, we believe there are opportunities to better connect Ontario's major destinations by:

- bringing destinations and partners together to create a cohesive, seamless visitor experience;

- enhancing rail, air and water transit so destinations are easier to reach;

- creating magnetic attractions and programming that ensure vibrant and memorable visitor experiences;

- designing spaces that can be enjoyed year-round; and

- building for the future, with attractions that support communities and visitors for generations to come.

This is a pivotal moment and a once-in-a-generation opportunity to shape the future of our world-class destinations.

That's why we're making strategic investments in tourism and cultural infrastructure to enhance economic, community and visitor benefits. I already mentioned a few, such as:

- the McMichael Canadian Art Collection redevelopment;
- the St. Lawrence parks beach and campground revitalization;
- the AGO Dani Reiss Modern and Contemporary Gallery expansion;
- the Corleck;
- the Shaw Festival's Royal George Theatre;
- Ontario Place and Ontario Science Centre; and
- let's not forget, the OpenROM renovation and expansion.

Investing in capital infrastructure ensures Ontario's destinations remain safe, accessible and built to attract visitors from all around the world.

We're also helping more people experience the natural beauty and communities that make Ontario a place we're proud to call home. Spanning more than 80,000 kilometres across the province, our trail systems offer year-round adventures for people of all ages and abilities, whether your passion is mountain biking in summer, hiking among fall colours, or frosty winter snowmobile rides.

My ministry supports seven trail-owning and trail-managing agencies, including the Niagara Parks Commission, St. Lawrence Parks Commission and the Royal Botanical Gardens, providing an integrated approach to Ontario's recreation and tourism offerings. Looking ahead, we're working with other ministries and partners to strengthen the connections between trails, communities and tourism opportunities, and support local economic growth.

If tourism is what brings visitors to Ontario, culture is what entices people to stay. Our arts and culture connect us, reflect who we are and project our province's creativity and identity far beyond its borders. From beloved cultural institutions to internationally acclaimed artists, Ontario's cultural sector tells the stories that define our province. The sector is a major economic driver, contributing nearly \$30 billion to the province's economy and supporting nearly 280,000 jobs.

Ontario is home to the largest number of cultural producers in Canada and continues to lead the way in arts and culture. That's why our government continues to support the people, communities and organizations that help this sector thrive.

In 2025-26, we invested over \$1 billion in Ontario's cultural sector, including:

- five cultural media tax credits;
- the Ontario Arts Council;
- Ontario Creates;
- the Ontario Cultural Attractions Fund;
- the Ontario Trillium Foundation;
- community museum operating grants;
- public library operating grants; and

—operating funding for the Art Gallery of Ontario, Royal Ontario Museum and McMichael Canadian Art Collection.

Through our agencies and partners, we're ensuring government investments remain aligned with Ontario's priorities and deliver meaningful outcomes for communities across the province.

We're also investing in the cultural treasures that are stewards of our shared heritage. As home to Canada's largest and most celebrated cultural institutions, Ontario continues to set the standard for economic growth, education and civic pride. By investing in culture, our government is protecting the communities and traditions that define our province and bring people together.

Our world-class galleries and museums are central to that success, bringing history and art to life for visitors of all ages.

This spring, our government invested \$35 million over two years to support the AGO's Dani Reiss Modern and Contemporary Gallery expansion project, which is adding 40,000 square feet of new public space and increasing the AGO's footprint by 30%. More space means more opportunities for people to discover their next favourite masterpiece, while attracting even more people to the city and strengthening local jobs.

We're also providing an additional \$21 million per year in operating funding for the AGO and ROM. This marks the first permanent increase in provincial funding in nearly 20 years, bringing annual support to nearly \$70 million and giving both institutions the stability they need to continue delivering world-class exhibitions and programming. Together with our investments in the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, these supports are helping ensure Ontario's leading cultural institutions remain strong and sustainable for future generations. We will work closely with the AGO and ROM to support their ongoing contributions to our economy and culture.

Community museums tell the stories of Ontario's diverse communities and are powerful economic drivers, generating jobs, supporting lifelong learning and driving cultural tourism. Through the Community Museum Operating Grant Program, each year our government invests nearly \$5 million in approximately 166 community museums, helping them preserve our heritage and bring our stories to life.

Film and TV is something I want to talk about.

Following the global success of film and TV productions like *The Handmaid's Tale*, *Frankenstein*, *Heated Rivalry* and *Shoresy*, it's clear that Ontario is a world-leading jurisdiction for screen-based production. Ontario's film, television, animation and visual effects sectors are key economic drivers, supporting thousands of jobs and generating opportunities for businesses across the province.

In 2025-26, our government invested more than \$1 billion in cultural media tax credits to foster growth and support the film and television, interactive digital media and book publishing sectors.

As jurisdictions around the world compete for productions and investments, maintaining a strong and competitive business environment is essential to keeping Ontario the

leading destination for film and television investment in Canada. We will continue working to attract investment, support creators and producers, and reinforce Ontario's reputation as a leading destination for screen-based production.

As of 2021, Ontario is home to nearly 82,000 artists, representing 40% of Canada's artists—nearly twice as much as any other province. That talent is one of our greatest strengths and one our government continues to support through investments in the Ontario Arts Council.

In 2025-26, the Ontario Arts Council invested more than \$52 million in 212 communities across Ontario to support individual artists and arts organizations.

Our government also continues to invest in Ontario's music industry. Through Ontario Creates, we invest \$7 million annually in the Ontario Music Investment Fund to drive industry growth and uplift emerging artists and voices. When Ontario's music industry grows, so do local festivals and events, delivering benefits to artists, businesses and communities across the province.

This year, we invested \$1.5 million to deliver the 55th annual Juno Awards at the newly renovated TD Coliseum in Hamilton, supporting local jobs and elevating Ontario's profile on the global stage.

In 2025-26, our government invested more than \$28 million in Ontario's public library sector—including approximately 300 public library systems—to support in-demand services across the province.

We're strengthening broadband upgrades through the Connecting Public Libraries Initiative, which have improved 48 locations to date, including three First Nation public libraries.

We also annually invest nearly \$3 million in the Ontario Library Service to support services such as interlibrary loans across the province.

Lastly, Ontario's robust gaming sector works in tandem with our province's tourism and cultural industries to shape a competitive economy. As one of our province's largest non-tax sources of revenue, gaming in all its forms—from land-based and lottery to online—delivers significant value for Ontarians. In 2025-26, the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. and iGaming Ontario contributed more than \$2.6 billion in non-tax revenue, helping to support essential public services and provincial priorities. And since regulating iGaming in 2022, Ontario's online markets are supporting competition while keeping player protection at the centre of our work. As we move forward, our government continues to give this sector the dedicated focus it deserves to ensure it remains a responsible, innovative and community-benefits-oriented industry.

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Ontario's land-based gaming sector has evolved—

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

Hon. Zee Hamid: Time flies—into a network of world-class entertainment destinations, powered by strong partnerships between government and the private sector.

As I touched on briefly—and I'll jump to my conclusion, Chair, because we have so much to talk about.

I do want to thank all of you for your time today.

The places we visit, the stories we tell and the innovations we foster all contribute to what makes Ontario extraordinary.

This ministry's investments in tourism and culture programs, services and infrastructure are protecting and strengthening these assets for future generations, ensuring our agencies, partners and communities can continue to thrive while helping drive economic growth across Ontario. And as our gaming industry evolves and expands, we're matching that growth with smart investments and strong oversight.

Together, we're creating lasting opportunity by supporting good-paying jobs, standing up for Ontario, and delivering the world-class tourism, cultural and gaming experiences that make our province a destination of choice.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thank you, Minister, for your presentation.

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 the 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 start with the official opposition. MPP Shaw.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Congratulations, and welcome to your new file, Minister.

A lot of the questions that I'm going to be asking you today are follow-up from non-answers that we received from the previous minister, Minister Cho, who was, at the time, in your seat. I hope you will indulge me with some of the repetitive questions, but really, we're here to get clear answers for the people of Ontario, which is, as you understand, the precise function of the estimates committee.

I have a number of questions, but I'm going to start with the Ontario Arts Council. I appreciate that you talked about the Ontario Arts Council and the incredible work they do, referencing many of the artistic endeavours that happen across Ontario and acknowledging that this is an incredible part of our economy. It contributes to the GDP. And cultural workers are workers in this province.

But, Minister, it's another year and another estimates where the funding for the Ontario Arts Council is flat—except, I think, in 2018, your minister cut the budget. Since that time, the funding has remained flat. And as you will know, given that the cost of everything is skyrocketing—the unaffordability of living in this province—a flat line is essentially a cut.

My question to you, Minister, is, what goes into your decision-making, when you understand the impact the arts

have on our economy and on our workers, when you decide to keep their funding flat and not provide any appropriate increases?

Hon. Zee Hamid: We all agree that Ontario has a diverse and vibrant arts sector that contributes greatly to our economy, creates jobs and allows us to tell our story.

In 2025, our government provided \$60 million in operating funding to the Ontario Arts Council, which supports artists and acts across the province. But it's important to recognize that it's just one part of our support for the sector.

We have a lot of other funding available to the cultural sector, including, as I mentioned earlier, five cultural media tax credits—we've talked about the Ontario Arts Council, but Ontario Creates, Ontario Cultural Attractions Fund, Ontario Trillium fund, Ontario museums operating grant, and so on. So I think we need to take a look at the full picture when it comes to supporting the arts council. I do want to thank them for the work they do. In 2025-26, they invested \$52.3 million in 212 communities, providing 1,939 grants to individual artists and 1,001 grants to organizations.

Since 2018-19, if you look at the whole picture, OAC has invested a total of \$462.9 million through grants and professional artists and organizations and communities across Ontario.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: They do remarkable work. I would say, essentially, they're spinning straw into gold in this province. So we have a lot to thank the Ontario Arts Council for, because they're doing a lot of the heavy lifting that you're talking about. This is not a small-scale budget—\$60 million—and the Ontario Arts Council is the premier arts organization that distributes those grants and supports those organizations.

Minister, I don't know if you mentioned it, but are you aware of exactly how much, annually, the arts sector contributes to our GDP and how many jobs are related to the arts sector? Again, I'm asking very specifically, why would you not—if you know the number, as to what the GDP contribution is from the Ontario Arts Council, and arts in general, why would you continue to flatline their budget when, quite clearly, as you've identified, they're doing phenomenal work to keep the arts alive in Ontario?

Hon. Zee Hamid: I'll answer the second part first, and then I'll call a friend for the first part—the deputy minister, for the specific number.

It is important, like I mentioned, to recognize the full picture. In 2025-26, we invested over a billion dollars into Ontario's cultural sector. That includes funding for the Ontario Arts Council but also has a lot of other streams, through Ontario Creates, through Experience Ontario, through five cultural media tax credits—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: You've said that. I appreciate that.

You also have an option to switch out the question. You don't have to call a friend. That's one of the options you're referring to. So why don't I just switch out the question instead?

Another sector of our important arts and cultural contributions, certainly in our province, are the festivals, the events that people put on—the cultural festivals that make our communities so vibrant.

Under program transfer payments, there's an estimated \$3 million less budgeted this year for festivals. Why would that be?

Hon. Zee Hamid: Just to be clear, Experience Ontario approves \$27 million, including the marquee program—if we take out the Marquee Event Program, then it's \$20 million—which supports nearly 400 events. As I mentioned earlier, it's one part of our comprehensive investment in the arts and creative culture. This is just one part of it, which, as I mentioned earlier, supported nearly 400 events, including many events in my own riding. They're tremendous events that don't just bring communities together, but they allow visitors to come in, enjoy the festivities, go shop at local businesses and contribute greatly to our economy—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Minister, I know that, and I appreciate that. We all know that. Every MPP in Ontario understands how important these are. We all go to them. They're very important to our organizations. But we would also know that many of these organizations are cutting back, scaling back. Some of them, in our neck of the woods, have not even been able to put on these festivals—especially fledgling newcomer groups that are just trying to get off the ground.

I'm going to just leave it at that—but to say that to my mind, rather than cutting funding to cultural festivals in our communities, given how important they are to bring people together, to building communities that we all feel proud to be part of, your ministry should look again at your vote 3808 and try to consider an increase rather than a cut—

Hon. Zee Hamid: If I may, real quick—we do have a new capacity-building stream that will provide opportunities to support first-time event and festival organizers, specifically designed—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: When I look at that \$3 million less—is that where that money is coming from, then?

Hon. Zee Hamid: As I mentioned earlier—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Is it more money, or are you just moving it around?

Hon. Zee Hamid: I think to be fair, we have to look at the entire envelope of funding—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: And that's my question. Is it more money, or are you moving it around?

Hon. Zee Hamid: Nearly a billion dollars is actually more money. We can't—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: A billion dollars?

Hon. Zee Hamid: I said, nearly a billion dollars to support Ontario's cultural programming—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Okay, but I'm talking specifically about festivals and events.

I'm going to move on to another—and you've brought this up, which is the success story—and I agree with you—of the tax credits that we see in this province.

Hamilton is home to many productions. Everybody is pretty gaga about Heated Rivalry filming in Hamilton. I would also give a shout-out to the city of Hamilton, who have done a lot of the heavy lifting when it comes to attracting production and to making production go smoothly for companies that come to our city. So it's a success story.

What I want to talk about is extending these tax credits to the performing arts sector. As you know—or maybe you don't know; I respect that you're new to the file—the performing arts do not benefit from this kind of tax credit. Today, as an example, there's a group from the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres, who are in Ottawa today—Parliament Hill—to lobby for the extension of these tax credits to performing arts. You mentioned many of the organizations that would benefit from them, and I'm going to add a few. You talked about Stratford and the Shaw Festival—some of the big performing arts theatres that we all know about.

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Just indulge me for a second. In Hamilton, there's a theatre called Theatre Aquarius. They put on fantastic plays. And if I could give a shout-out to Theatre Aquarius—they just put on *Sisters of '78*, which is about the Fleck strike that happened in southwestern Ontario. It's a very important story to be told.

Theatre Aquarius strives so hard to put on these productions, and what they are looking for is some assistance from this government and from the federal government. For example, if we were to extend this tax credit benefit to performing arts, like theatres, it would certainly help them to increase the productions and the scale of the productions that they put on. We talked about the Ontario Arts Council, but in general, it would free up more money—as you said, overall—if there was a tax credit available to performing arts in this province. I know you've probably heard about this—or if you haven't, you are now, for the first time. So is this something that you think your ministry would consider, given, as you said, that we need to look at the budget as a whole and the overall funding—and that a tax credit would help to increase the overall funding available to arts in this province?

Hon. Zee Hamid: For the technical part of that question on performing arts, I would like to go to the deputy minister for the status of it and where we are.

Ms. Nancy Kennedy: Thank you for the question.

I am a fan of Theatre Aquarius as well. They're a very strong organization.

It is something we were familiar with. The theatre community has brought this up from time to time—of a tax credit similar to the film tax credit. Just to remind the committee, on film, we spend over \$1 billion as an untaxed tax credit program, so you can imagine that another tax credit of that size would be—we'd have to consider and do an analysis about whether that would be worth it from an economic perspective, in terms of how to support the arts. There's also a debate in the arts community about whether grants are a better way to go versus tax. So, certainly, it's something we're always looking at in the ministry, about how we do that. We're always conducting analysis with our partners, including the Ontario Arts Council and the theatre community—something that has come forward from the Shaw and others.

We've also been focused quite a bit on cultural infrastructure and capital for theatres. Shaw would be an example of that, where we've just invested \$35 million. So

we're going about it in different ways. We also fund Stratford and others through the Ontario Arts Council.

So, more to follow on that—but we're always doing a form of analysis.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I'm happy to hear that you're looking into it.

You referenced the Ontario Arts Council, and you will know that they commissioned a report on this idea. A lot of the information that you're talking about is there and is available.

Given the times we're in, when everyone wants to buy local and support homegrown Canadian productions, this would be the time that this government would want to step up and make sure that Canadian content is accessible and Canadian artists and performers don't have to go elsewhere to make a living. I know that this has happened in other jurisdictions.

I really do hope that this government moves on this, because there is so much to gain from that.

I will end this line of questioning with Theatre Aquarius as well, to show a perfect example of what a small theatre can do when they have the community behind them, which they do. They recently had a production called *Beautiful Scars*. It's an Indigenous story. It was produced and performed at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa—which is a pretty prestigious invite for Theatre Aquarius. It was a wonderful production. All of the board directors were there—and the performers—and the supporters, the investors, the funders said that this is an idea that they are all behind. So Theatre Aquarius is certainly an example where, if you were looking to have a case study to see how a tax credit like this would benefit a community—I can't think of anywhere more appropriate than Theatre Aquarius in Hamilton.

Hon. Zee Hamid: I would love to grab coffee with you and learn more from you about it. The offer is out.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Sure. I would love that.

Hon. Zee Hamid: Let's do it. Let's make it happen.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Come to Hamilton.

Honestly, that last play, *Sisters of '78*, was a phenomenal play.

Hon. Zee Hamid: Why don't we watch a play? My wife and I actually love watching plays. We've been to Hamilton a number of times.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Well, come on down.

Hon. Zee Hamid: Next time we're coming, I'll give you a shout.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Do that. Maybe I'll buy you a coffee. What do you think?

Hon. Zee Hamid: It's a deal.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: We could invite Jeff. Right, Jeff?

He didn't look so sure.

Again, back to the tax credit part of this: This is very niche, but please forgive me for this. We know that there are credits for Ontario book publishing. They came to visit me last year at Queen's Park. They visited all of us here last year at Queen's Park. They said that they're looking for some updates to this tax credit program which is very beneficial. There are two areas that are important to them,

and one is graphic novels—and I don't mean “graphic” as in the content; I mean that they are like comic book novels. This is the kind of thing that young people read a lot. I have grandsons. They read—

Hon. Zee Hamid: I have an embarrassingly large collection of graphic novels.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: There you go. So you know what I'm talking about.

Well, graphic novels do not qualify for this tax credit. The second thing that, in terms of Canadian publishing, doesn't qualify are books that have been translated, translated works. So if something has been translated, it doesn't qualify.

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: For example, if a book has been translated from French—say the book is in French and it has been translated—it doesn't qualify.

The other area that's very important to me is—when it comes to Indigenous stories, I think there is just not enough time here at this committee to emphasize how much we need to be doing for Indigenous arts in this community and how little we have done. So here's a small way that if we have books that are written, for example, in Oji-Cree, if they were translated, they should qualify for a credit—and vice versa, if they were in English and they want these books to be translated, that should be the case.

I hope this is an idea that you, as a new minister, would be very keen on up-taking. So I'm happy to hear what you have to say about this idea.

Hon. Zee Hamid: I'm always open to new ideas, and one of the things I'm—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): I'm sorry, Minister, but we're out of time. Maybe somehow you can figure out how to answer that later on.

We're going to the third party. MPP Cerjanec.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Through you, Chair: Congratulations, Minister, on your appointment.

Congratulations to MPP Beattie, as well, for his election in Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

I'll leave any commentary on Niagara Falls to maybe after the second round, because I'm sure MPP Gates might have something to say. So I'll do that courtesy there—but so to say I did visit his riding, and I attended the Shaw Festival this year. I will give a shout-out to one fantastic play, *Sleuth*. It is running there until October 9, and then it's actually going to be at the Harbourfront Centre from October 16 to November 1. It was very entertaining, excellent, and just a good example of some of the great production and stuff that we have happening in Ontario in our arts and culture sector.

I want to start off with the Ontario Science Centre.

Right now, the total public cost for Ontario Place has tripled from, I think, originally \$745 million to \$2.2 billion—a lot of money and a lot of provincial investment going in downtown Toronto. We see that the Ontario Place redevelopment vote line—I'll have to find the line here; I believe it's 3813, off the top of my head, that's there—has gone down, but the total public cost of the project has tripled to \$2.2 billion. Can you walk us through the spending and the

estimates around the Ontario Place redevelopment right now? And is anything being covered by other ministries? I'm having a hard time trying to find where that money is coming from right now.

Hon. Zee Hamid: Let's talk about Ontario Place first, because you started your question with the Ontario Science Centre—I like to touch based on that as well. I'll say the high level, and I'll go to my colleague the deputy minister to keep me honest with specific numbers.

A lot of numbers that you see right now are speculative in nature because we're still in the planning process of a lot of these things. Once we get to that stage, we'll have real numbers, and I will share numbers, down to every penny, accurately.

The \$2.2 billion or whatever number is there is kind of forward-looking, speculative in nature.

What I can tell you is that what we're doing is restoring the glory of Ontario Place, building it to a level where it will have more than six million visitors every single year coming in—including the science centre, including 50 acres of public parks, trails, beaches, a new marina, and a whole lot more, like bringing back the renovated pods and science fair and—

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Through you, Chair: We expect Ontario Place to open—when is that, 2029? Is that what we were projecting? That's three years away.

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Hon. Zee Hamid: It's opening in phases. So it's getting done in phases. As I mentioned in my remarks, the Ontario Science Centre is already under construction. It's slated to open up in 2029. But there are different phases for the rest of Ontario Place.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: So in terms of what we're spending right now that's indicated in the estimates, what does that look like?

Hon. Zee Hamid: We announced parking structures. We're investing in a parking structure.

Therme is investing \$700 million, upfront capital. A big chunk of that—actually, nearly \$200 million, roughly—will go towards the public realm, building 50 acres of park accessible for free to members of the public—as I mentioned earlier, playgrounds, parks, an interactive fountain, and a whole lot more.

We're looking at how to restore Ontario Place to its former glory and bring not just tourism but massive economic benefits that come from having 6.6 million visitors to the site.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I don't know if this is the time to punt it to the deputy minister around numbers.

What does the example of spending in the Ontario Place Redevelopment Secretariat look like in the estimates? What is being spent? I understand the government's lines of trying to reimagine Ontario Place. That's fine. But what is actually being spent right now—and are we expecting money being spent in other ministries, or is it within the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming?

Hon. Zee Hamid: Deputy Minister, can I go to you for specific numbers?

Ms. Nancy Kennedy: It's within this ministry, so I'm going to take you through some different numbers.

Just to build on what the minister said in terms of higher-order numbers that are public—you're right. With the Ontario Science Centre, that is just over a billion dollars on that building, and then we have \$198 million on parking. And then we have between \$200 million and \$500 million on the public realm—so that's like the public park.

In the estimates, on the Ontario Place Redevelopment Secretariat, you'll see it's \$167.3 million. There are a variety of things that are captured, and they're fairly technical. We have about \$51 million on something that we're working on to do with sewer pipes from the city of Toronto that flow into the lake, that we have to kind of augment for construction. We have soil remediation on the site; that's \$41 million. We have \$24 million in off-site servicing for the site, for construction.

There was an impact on the site and stopping construction for FIFA. We had to stop construction to allow everything that had to happen down there, so that cost some money that we had to pay the contractors. That was \$21 million.

We have money for the science centre, for their interim operation down at Harbourfront. That's \$21 million. They're going to be down there till 2029, until they move into the permanent site. I would say—if I can pause for a moment—it has been really good for that organization. They're in sort of that permanent interim location, and it has been transformational for Harbourfront because it has allowed that particular venue to reopen and to stay open.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Yes, they were going through some challenges.

Ms. Nancy Kennedy: They were. And now you see the Shaw is coming in there. They have a new CEO coming. So I'm very excited about that.

We have other funding for site preparation and servicing for construction. If you go down to Ontario Place right now, if you drive down there, it is a hive of activity. I already touched on the sewer. So that's sort of the breakdown. There's also consolidation.

How the money is booked from year to year depends on when the work happens. You have stuff that's happening right now. Some things have been reprofiled.

But all in all, you'll know that, generally, our capital budget as a ministry has increased exponentially, primarily because of Ontario Place.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: We know from the Auditor General's report that the Therme lease doesn't require Therme to make its promised \$700-million investment. Are we tracking how much they are investing? And are they on track to be making that investment?

Ms. Nancy Kennedy: Yes. We are very confident in them as a partner.

The early work has started on that particular site, so you can see activity that's happening down there now.

As you will recall, they were to meet a kind of financial test, and they did so, so we have no reason to be concerned about that with them.

I think it will be a beautiful facility when it's done. And they continue to be a productive partner.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: With the existing science centre building itself, do we know how much we're spending right now to maintain that building and keep it so it doesn't fall down?

Hon. Zee Hamid: I'll have to go back to you on that, I think.

Ms. Nancy Kennedy: That's actually the Ministry of Infrastructure—so that building falls under their backyard.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: We haven't made any decisions in terms of what we as a province want to do with that site, understanding that the city of Toronto owns the land—

Hon. Zee Hamid: Yes. I can tell you that we're talking to the city of Toronto about it. They own the land, and we'll figure something out. The discussions are ongoing.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Any updates? I think that last year it was at the same kind of status point, where there were discussions but then there was nothing else.

Hon. Zee Hamid: When there's something else, you'll hear about it. Discussions are ongoing.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Switching gears—talking about online gambling and advertising. It's a pretty big concern, especially impacting young men in the province. When you turn on the TV, watch any sporting events, the ads are almost non-stop, and even in-game, you're seeing—talking about betting statistics. You've got kids watching, and now they know so much more about online sport betting than I think you'd expect any kid to want to know.

Earlier this year, the Ontario Liberals introduced Bill 107, which was the Stop Harmful Gambling Advertising Act. The government voted down that bill. But a week later, the then minister, Minister Cho, said the province was very seriously looking at additional measures on the advertising side. That was back in May. We're now in October.

Can we expect any movement from the province to make changes to advertising for gambling?

Hon. Zee Hamid: Let's go back a little bit, because you had multiple things.

Online ads: I was telling my chief of staff a story about how I watched them with my 17-year-old, and it prompted a conversation with him. So I'm not saying online ads—not online ads, sorry; ads during gaming. I'm not saying it's a good thing. But it turned out to be good, at least in that instance, because we were able to have a conversation.

Actually, one of Minister Cho's big goals was responsible gaming, and he ordered a very comprehensive review, which we're now reviewing, of the entire gaming industry—including responsible gambling and online gaming.

One part that's really important to recognize about online gaming is, by regulating this industry and by giving a legal venue with guardrails, we've pulled over 90% of people away from the grey market, which is where they were.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: We know a Canadian Medical Association Journal study found that calls to ConnexOntario about gambling increased by about 144% after going down this road.

How much is the ministry spending right now on problem-gambling prevention and research, and how does that compare with the provincial revenue we've received from online gaming?

Hon. Zee Hamid: I will give you specific numbers—but it's impossible to know how the gambling calls would have increased under the grey market. My assertion is, under the grey market, we wouldn't have the kind of controls we have now, because online ads target people through websites that are not controlled by the Canadian government at all, or the Ontario government.

Since 2018, our government has invested approximately \$422 million towards responsible gaming, and that doesn't include additional funding by the Ministry of Health, such as their \$37.2-million funding for programs and services that are focused on gambling addiction and treatment support. We're continuing to look at it. It is something that we believe strongly in. I know that there's a balance between providing a legal venue to responsible adults while protecting them.

Regarding online gaming, iGaming's BetGuard program, which launched just in May, just a few months ago—4,000 players have already self-excluded themselves using that program. So that's one prime example of how removing players from the grey market has given us an opportunity to do something to protect a vulnerable population, that we otherwise did not have, and it's something that we'll continue looking into.

As I mentioned earlier, the comprehensive review that Minister Cho ordered that we're going through the results of right now—that will identify what's working, what's not working, what's working really well that we should do more of, and what's potentially not working as well that we should change.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: When do we expect that review to be complete and some sort of announcement on changes? I think there is an appetite to change the current approach.

We're going through another sports season of hockey, basketball, the NFL right now, as well. That's a lot.

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Hon. Zee Hamid: As I mentioned, we are reviewing the review. I can't tell you when it's going to be done, because I'm new in the role as well, and there's a lot for me to learn myself.

What I can tell you is that our government is committed—I'm personally committed—to making sure that we protect, especially, our kids; that we don't go down the path where, by removing adults from the grey market, we put our kids at harm. I think there's a balance that we need to strike. The balance is not a one-time thing, that you've done it and you walk away from it. It's something we'll have to review every few years, because the market evolves and people's habits and patterns change. It's something we'll have to keep looking at.

If you're willing to, just like MPP Shaw offered—if you buy me a croissant, we'll sit down and have a long conversation about it.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I'm sure we will.

Hon. Zee Hamid: She's already buying me coffee.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I know within our in-person facilities, if you self-exclude from one, you're self-excluded from all. For iGaming, that is not the case right now, correct?

Hon. Zee Hamid: I'll go to the deputy for the exact answer, but for iGaming, it is the case—but what's not the case is the cross-exclusion between land-based gaming and online gaming.

Ms. Nancy Kennedy: It is now. That's what BetGuard is about.

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

Ms. Nancy Kennedy: When you go on to an online site now, you will be excluded from all of them. This has been a really important innovation.

The minister is right; the next phase of this project, beyond BetGuard, is, how do we conjoin the land-based sites to the online sites? Right now, when you go into a casino and you self-exclude—you're right; on the land-based side, you're captured by all the casinos, you're stopped at the door. But we want to make sure that you can't gamble at all. That is the next phase of this.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: And that work is taking place? We anticipate that happening?

Ms. Nancy Kennedy: Yes. It will be complex, to be honest. But, yes, we are working on it, because it wouldn't make sense otherwise. It's the next phase of the project.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Will the government commit to a fixed share of online gambling revenue going towards addiction treatment and prevention?

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): You have 12 seconds.

Hon. Zee Hamid: Like I said earlier, we're looking at the gaming review and the recommendations that will come out of it. I just don't know where it's going to go right now.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): We'll now go to the government side. MPP Firin, please start.

MPP Mohamed Firin: First, I would like to congratulate Minister Hamid on the new role.

Congratulations, Minister.

I would like to thank Deputy Minister Kennedy and the team for being here today.

Minister, your ministry has a lot of ambitious projects that fall under your portfolio, including building a world-class global tourist destination right here in Ontario, whether it's reimagining Ontario Place—I've got two daughters who I feel have been cheated out of the opportunity to visit Ontario Place, as it has been shut down for many years. The Liberal government and previous governments have not done much on that site, so I look forward to seeing what you're able to do—or also doubling the tourism numbers in the Niagara region, through the Destination Niagara Strategy.

I know my colleague MPP Gates is here today. He's a champion for the Niagara region. I've seen him at many of our government announcements in Niagara, which shows that we're doing great work in Niagara.

At the helm of these projects, we need a prudent project manager with a keen eye for ensuring that our strategies remain on time and on budget. How does your previous experience align with this need? And what are you looking forward to, as well, in this new role?

Hon. Zee Hamid: Thank you for that question, MPP Firin.

Chair, through you: It's actually a really exciting role. People joke about how it's the ministry of fun, but to be completely transparent with you, it's serious work. It's serious work because our tourism, culture, is hugely important to our economy. As you heard in my early remarks, it contributes \$37 billion to our economy and creates 310,000 jobs. The cultural sector contributes \$30 billion to our economy and creates almost 300,000 jobs. There's a huge potential not just from being able to tell our stories and share our culture and share our values with others, but also in growing the economy. It's a huge part of our economy.

When it comes to my personal experience, during my council days, I chaired the town of Milton's budget more than any other councillor at that time. That gave me some experience in managing that money and figuring out how to manage very, very large budgets in complex situations where you're always competing against short-term priorities and long-term priorities, long-term investments. Also, I have a lot of experience, coming from the private sector and managing very large teams and large budgets, where on time and on budget is very critical.

More than that, my focus is to make sure that we grow this and look at it as an economic value, especially in the trade war situation that we're in. This is an industry that we can grow.

Maybe I shouldn't share this in the committee, but I just picked up a new motorcycle this weekend—yay me—which reminded me that two and a half years ago, just before I came to this role, I rode my bike around Lake Superior. If you've ever done that tour, if you go around it—there's so much beauty in Ontario.

Ontario is just as exotic as any other place on earth. One of my key goals in this role is to make sure we share that beauty with others, with people within Ontario—because a lot of people in the GTA haven't seen the beauty Ontario has to offer—and folks within Canada. Ontario is the prime destination right now, but we want to make sure that it gets bigger and better—and internationally as well.

Destination Niagara is a big part of that strategy—doubling tourism there, making sure we get both domestic and international tourists coming into Niagara. If you're used to taking a day trip to Niagara, how do we add value so that you spend the whole weekend there? If you're used to coming for a weekend there, how do we add enough value so that you spend your entire vacation there?

Also, we talked about Destination Wasaga. That will be a prime summertime destination of this province.

We haven't yet talked much about northern tourism, but that's what I was thinking about when I was sharing my Lake Superior story.

It is an exciting role, and I see it as a very, very serious business.

Thank you for the question.

MPP Mohamed Firin: Thank you, Minister. I'll now yield to MPP Grewal.

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

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: Chair, how are we doing for time?

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): We're at 10 minutes and 45 seconds.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: Thank you.

First of all, congratulations, Minister Hamid, on this new portfolio.

Hon. Zee Hamid: Thank you, sir.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: I'm happy to see you there. And I hope you tour the entire province with that motorcycle, not just a couple of nice places.

We were just talking about Destination Ontario and talking about Niagara Falls, Wasaga Beach and the revitalization this government is trying to do to our iconic, world-wide destinations. These have been destinations that have been known worldwide for people to come and visit, for decades upon decades upon decades. Finally, this government is recognizing the need for more investment and more attention to make sure we continue to have those destinations brought up to the 21st-century standard, to ensure we continue to be that destination for the entire world to look at. Our government has embarked on a bunch of major investments across Niagara and across Wasaga, as well as other locations in Ontario.

You were mentioning in your speech that Niagara attracts almost 13 million visits annually and supports 40,000 tourism jobs, which is huge for the economic driver in that particular region.

Would you like to highlight for us some of the strategies our government is going to be taking on to improve those tourist destinations, with the Destination Niagara project, with the potential of a new airport—how that's going to attract more conferences to our province and revitalizations in sectors such as Wasaga Beach, with the additions of new event spaces, new hotels and new tourist attractions? How is that going to help drive our economy in those sectors? And what is our government doing to really revitalize those spaces?

Hon. Zee Hamid: Thank you for the question, MPP Grewal. You and I will be talking a lot around your role as parliamentary assistant for transportation, because we have a lot of work to do there.

We're making investments, not just in improving these destinations, but we're looking at a whole 360 approach.

So when you talk about Destination Niagara, it's not just about doubling tourism in Niagara, doubling the number of visitors there, which is important, but we're also thinking about, how are people going to get there? That's why your ministry, really, announced a GO train expansion and we're building a new GO station in Grimsby.

Same thing with the new, reimagined Ontario Place—we're thinking about how we get folks there, not just with transit, which is very important. We're investing a tremendous amount of money in that to make sure people can get there through transit. But a family driving their kids from Renfrew can't take transit to go to Ontario Place. We've got to make sure that they can come and park there and enjoy the facilities, so that it doesn't just stay something that people in the urban area can enjoy.

I remember—and those of you who are my age, you might remember the same—I took my kids to the Ontario Science Centre every single year. We had an annual pass every single year. Even in the mid-2000s, you could see that it was falling apart and it needed maintenance. You could see corners and you could see things that meant—“Someone needs to fix this up, or this building won’t survive.” Unfortunately, that is exactly what happened.

Many of you guys—I won’t share the entire story in the interest of time, but the short version is, I actually proposed to my wife at Ontario Place, and she somehow said yes; I don’t know why, but she did, and here we are. I have a very warm spot when it comes to Ontario Place, and it broke my heart, the way we allowed it to—we deprived the people of Ontario of that, what was really a crown jewel. It is really our government that’s investing in it to bring it back to its former glory, to make sure that it stays a destination for generations to come—not just for Ontarians, but it tells Ontario’s story to everyone who comes to Ontario.

As you know, we welcome a lot of international visitors. Across Ontario, if you look at our tourism, we’re talking about 152 million visits. That’s a lot of visits. But we want to make sure that there’s synergy between them. When you’re coming to Toronto, you’re enjoying what Toronto has to offer. How do you learn about Niagara and get easily to Niagara, and then spend some time in Niagara? And if it’s the summer months, how do you go up to Wasaga? How do you go up to northern Ontario? How do you enjoy Science North in Thunder Bay? How do you see a festival or event somewhere outside of the city of Toronto, or even in the city of Toronto? We want to make sure we’re taking it as a whole approach, looking at it end to end, thinking about the visitor experience. As you heard my remarks, visitors are looking for experiences now—it’s not simply visiting a site; it’s experiencing something that stays with them even after they’ve left. That’s exactly what we’re building in this province.

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I talked about the economy—why it’s important for our economy, and how much it contributes.

It’s also important for us to tell our story. I would say that Canadians don’t spend a lot of time telling our story as well as some other cultures do, and I think it’s something we need to do better. We have tremendous talent in this province, in movies, TV shows and books, and everything coming out of Ontario—tremendous. Ontario is a world leader in this space, but we can do even better. And that’s what we’re looking at. We’re looking at, how do we bring visitors here and tell them the story of Ontario? Our entire investment into arts and culture is about sharing our shared values and sharing what makes us unique.

This Friday, I had the privilege of visiting Nancy Island and looking at all the history that happened there. I want the rest of Ontario to learn that history. That’s why we’re investing in the revitalization of that site—to put the new building there, to make sure that it’s more attractive for visitors who can come in and learn about our history that happened there, that most of us don’t know about.

It’s really important to share our history, to share our culture, to share our values. And that’s exactly what our

government is investing in. It’s really twofold—to summarize, growing the economy, protecting the jobs and growing those jobs, but also sharing our story and our values and our culture.

How much time do I have, Chair?

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

Hon. Zee Hamid: Let’s do one more question, then.

Sorry. I don’t know why I’m being Chair. I apologize.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): You’ve got a lot to say. Hold on.

MPP Smith would like to ask you a question.

Ms. Laura Smith: Thank you for the opportunity.

I want to congratulate the minister on his new role. He’s biting into it with quite a bit of vigour. I want to take his motorcycle and re-track it so that it goes up to York region, so we can talk about something that’s not too far away from my backyard.

You talked about a lot of things involving the Canadian experience, which is so important. Now, more than ever, we need to talk about our Canadian identity, and there’s no better place to do that, in my mind, than the Ontario McMichael Canadian Art Collection. I’ve been there many times. It’s a phenomenal place, and it’s the largest publicly funded gallery focusing on Canadian and Indigenous art. I’m going to do a shameless plug: Five members of the Group of Seven lived in Thornhill. And their work is also premiered at the art gallery. We’ve talked about how important it is for our identity. This gallery is actually temporarily closed for redevelopment so that it can be improved for generations to come.

I’m wondering if the minister would explain to the committee what our government is doing to support the McMichael in this mandate.

Hon. Zee Hamid: One of my regrets—I can say that publicly—is that I didn’t get a chance to visit the McMichael gallery before it closed.

Ms. Laura Smith: We’ll go.

Hon. Zee Hamid: We’ll make it happen.

What we’re doing now to make it better for both of us, MPP Smith, is that we’re investing \$50 million over three years to revitalize it. This is in addition to the federal government’s \$25 million—and hopefully they’ll put \$25 million more—and \$50 million in private donations. It really is an icon—and it’s not just about the gallery part; it’s the Canadianness of it, it’s the Group of Seven, it’s telling the Canadian story. And it’s the biggest collection, I think, of Canadian art. I think it’s something like \$700 million or \$800 million worth of collections—am I in the range? She’s nodding yes; I’ll take that as a yes. Once completed, it’s not just looking at it—but think of the businesses in the area.

The visitors to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection are expected to spend \$20 million a year in that area, as they visit. So think about mom-and-pop restaurants making meals and getting business. Think about coffee shops where MPP Shaw will buy me coffee and MPP Cerjanec will buy me a croissant. Think about other local businesses, and think about the experience. Think about the young kid going with their family and not just making family memories,

but learning about the Group of Seven. What a remarkable opportunity.

One of the exciting things that has come out of it is that while it's under construction, they have a partnership—announced just last month, in September—with ROM. ROM will be displaying 88 renowned paintings by the Group of Seven and other notable landscape artists of the area. Anyone who's in the city who hasn't had the opportunity to go up to York region—I would highly encourage to go check it out at ROM, and I'll be there as well. I cannot wait for this facility to open on time and on budget, MPP Firin—hopefully as your question was. It really is such a remarkable place. And just the history of the whole gallery, how it was donated—what a beautiful Canadian story.

Thank you for that question.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): There's a minute and a half left. MPP Beattie.

Hon. Zee Hamid: My problem is, I can talk about this for hours and hours and hours.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): We've noticed. MPP Beattie would like a question, though.

Mr. Jeff Beattie: I'll get the question in, and then I'll allow you the full platform to just dig right in there.

Thank you for the presentation so far, Minister. It's great to see you again.

I know there has been a lot of conversation in terms of film and television production across the province. You and my friend from Hamilton West mentioned a few of the productions that are taking place in Hamilton—The Handmaid's Tale, along with Heated Rivalry. I would add to the list The Boys, Reacher, The Umbrella Academy and, of course, Murdoch Mysteries. In addition to the initial economic impact that takes place during the production, what we're seeing is a lot of ancillary benefits, like spinoff tourism—I don't know the technical term for it. People are coming back now to see the famous pink tunnel at Shamrock Park and Ferguson Avenue in downtown Hamilton, to go to Commander Waterford's residence in the Durand neighbourhood in Hamilton.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): You have 40 seconds.

Mr. Jeff Beattie: I'm wondering, based on some of the troubles that we've been having economically with our friends to the south and some of the threats that have been made, can you drill down a little deeper, in the 30 seconds that we have left, in terms of what the government is doing to try to bolster and further grow this important industry?

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): You have 10 seconds.

Hon. Zee Hamid: We are blessed to have incredible talent in this province, and one of the best things we can do is highlight that talent.

I actually rewatched The Umbrella Academy recently with my son, because he has never watched it and I'm a nerd like that, which is why I have a collection of graphic novels, MPP Shaw—sorry, I think my time is up.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): It is.

Hon. Zee Hamid: I would love to—I'm cut off.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Yes. There's another round.

MPP Gates is going to start us off for the official opposition.

MPP Wayne Gates: Congratulations. I've already said that once already.

I'm going to make a little statement here. Many residents and local businesses have heard about Destination Niagara, but they know what it actually means to our region.

My questions today are on the Niagara River Line, the Fort Erie Race Track, the Niagara on-the-Lake Museum, the wine industry, and the cancellation of the Ferris wheel in Queen Victoria Park. I hope you and your deputies can provide much needed clarity for the people of Niagara.

Redeveloping Marineland is a great idea. The new hotel at the Toronto Power Generating Station, I think, is going to be a winner, and the new, taller observation wheel on Clifton Hill—they are great, great starts.

I've supported and worked with all levels of government on the 6.1% tax on Ontario wine sold to local wineries, and getting new capital funding for the Royal George Theatre development.

We need investment in tourism that makes sense and that works for the residents and the tourists alike.

A fully accessible all-season tram that runs through the heart of Queen Victoria Park—Minister, Niagara Parks has already signed a letter of intent with a private group to build, finance, operate and maintain this river line under a long lease. The residents made it clear that they didn't want any mega-attraction in Queen Victoria Park. The reason I know that is that I had a town hall meeting—we had 1,200 residents of Niagara, we had 13,000 petitions signed. They don't want anything in Queen Victoria Park. We found out that this is not transportation; it's an attraction. Niagara Parks says a deal still needs approval from your government. Where is the deal today?

Hon. Zee Hamid: I thought this question was going somewhere totally different. Thank you for the question, MPP Gates.

I think I'll have to call a friend for this. Through you, Chair: Deputy?

Ms. Nancy Kennedy: Thank you for the question.

Just backing up a bit, on the Niagara River Line and a letter of intent—we're still in a due diligence period right now, so that letter of intent was just really framing the discussions between Niagara Parks and the proponent on details. We're still within the period of those discussions. So you're right; final decisions haven't been made yet.

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Let me talk about the line and the intention of it. I would describe it as being part attraction, but part visitor transportation system. The idea is that—

MPP Wayne Gates: Can I reclaim my time, please?

I'm not going to buy that. It is not transportation. It is an attraction that is going to have five stations. It's going to run through the heart of Queen Victoria Park. So you can try to spin it off as transportation, but my understanding is that it is an attraction. I believe the cost to ride that attraction is going to be \$20 to \$30.

I'll ask my next question. How many years is the proposed lease for this attraction?

Ms. Nancy Kennedy: We're still in discussions. Nothing has been finalized.

MPP Wayne Gates: That's fine.

Why should the province—and I'm giving you some advice, seeing as you're still discussing—sign off on a long-term deal over public parkland before the public knows the length of the deal or the lease and the final terms?

I think this RFP went out in 2025 or 2023; I'm not sure, off the top of my head. Why has there been no public consultation—so the residents of Niagara Falls would have the opportunity, the same way that we had a public consultation with the Ferris wheel—on this tram that's going to run through Queen Victoria Park?

I believe that we need to do all we can to heighten tourism. I believe that we need the 40,000 jobs. I believe 13.1 million people are coming to the Falls. Do you know why they're coming? Because it's the Falls, because of the wine industry, because of all the other things that we have to offer—but having trams or a mega-ride go through the heart of public land in Queen Victoria Park?

I'll leave it at that. I don't need an answer. You know my feelings; I think they're very clear. I get passionate about it. I was passionate about stopping the second Ferris wheel in Queen Victoria Park. I'm just as passionate about this, and so are the residents of Niagara. It will be a mistake for your government to approve this.

Will you promise the people in Niagara that they will see the final proposal and have a chance to be heard before your government approves it?

Hon. Zee Hamid: Thank you for that question, MPP Gates.

I can tell you that because it's still going through due diligence, I actually haven't seen anything yet. So it's very difficult to make a speculative promise on something that you don't even know where it's going to go.

But what I can promise you, as I promised the other two MPPs, is that—you don't even have to buy me coffee. I'll just come to you, and we'll sit and chat all about it.

MPP Wayne Gates: Everybody wants to come to Niagara Falls, and we don't need a tram to do it, believe me.

This is a question maybe you can answer. This is on page 9 of the estimates—and I want to say that two hours for this important, important tourism in this province is not enough time to have questions and get answers. I think it's absolutely ridiculous. Your government should make sure that in the future we have more time to question. Even in fairness to you, Minister, as a new minister, two hours isn't enough time.

Anyway, Niagara Parks Commission—on page 9. “The Niagara Parks Commission, established in 1885, is mandated to preserve and enhance the natural beauty of Niagara Falls and the Niagara River corridor for the enjoyment of visitors and future generations”—which would be like my grandson, who's here watching today, by the way. Tanner is here. He's the one who draws all the cards you guys all see. That's Tanner.

Is that the correct mandate? It's in the estimates. It's word for word. Is that the correct mandate?

Hon. Zee Hamid: I apologize for this—I was too busy saying “hi.” Can you repeat the part that you read again, please?

MPP Wayne Gates: What's that?

Hon. Zee Hamid: The part that you read, the mandate—do you mind repeating that for me, please?

MPP Wayne Gates: “The Niagara Parks Commission, established in 1885, is mandated to preserve and enhance the natural beauty of Niagara Falls and the Niagara River corridor for the enjoyment of visitors and future generations.”

It's on page 9 of the estimates.

Hon. Zee Hamid: Yes. Based on what I heard right now, I would say it is the correct mandate as of—

MPP Wayne Gates: Pardon?

Hon. Zee Hamid: Yes is the answer.

MPP Wayne Gates: It hasn't been changed?

Hon. Zee Hamid: I don't know, actually. To be honest with you, you're asking a deeply technical question, and it is something that I would have to look into, if you want me to look at that.

MPP Wayne Gates: I'll take your answer as, it hasn't been changed and—

Hon. Zee Hamid: To be clear, I'm not making that claim. What I'm saying is—

MPP Wayne Gates: I'm not putting you in a box here. I'm just reading exactly from the words in the estimates.

Hon. Zee Hamid: Fair enough.

MPP Wayne Gates: But I appreciate your honesty.

Queen Victoria Park and the Ferris wheel: Minister, your government put a second observation wheel in Queen Victoria Park in the Destination Niagara plan. The residents came together to say they didn't want a second Ferris wheel in Queen Victoria Park, which was the original plan. They did not support it. And at the end of the day, they certainly don't want any attractions in Queen Victoria Park. It's because of the residents of Niagara, the province of Ontario, and visitors to Niagara Falls from all over the world, who signed a petition of 13,000 people—that helped stop it. We've had a private investor come forward since then. I already mentioned the town hall.

Before your government decided that Niagara needed a second Ferris wheel beside the falls, did the minister have a business case?

Hon. Zee Hamid: Do you know what? Actually, I like that question, so let me talk a bit about it.

The fact that the minister proposed a new vision—that's what led to a new observation wheel proposal by the private investor. I believe it will be the largest Ferris wheel in all of Canada. So that's actually a success story. Our government was very happy to look at that. See, we've achieved our goal, which is why we removed the proposal of the second Ferris wheel—because this Ferris wheel actually achieved the goal we were trying to achieve in the first place.

MPP Wayne Gates: I'm going to agree with you that it's a success story that it's on Clifton Hill. But here's what

you should have done. When you announced that in December 2025, you never had any consultation with Harry Oakes, who owns the Ferris wheel that's on Clifton Hill. It's what I'm trying to tell you—you should have consultation before you run out and say, "We're doing this. We're doing this. We're doing a Ferris wheel. We're doing a tram. We're putting more casinos in Niagara." Who did you talk to? Did you talk to the business owners? You didn't. You didn't talk to the hoteliers. What I'm saying is—I agree that the end result was good. How we got there—I'm saying you've got to thank the residents for standing up and saying, "This is a bad idea," but the bad idea should have had consultation before, so we wouldn't have had to go through what we had to, including having a town hall.

Hon. Zee Hamid: Just on the record, Chair—I'm not saying that our idea was a bad idea. That's not what I said. What I said was, because we had a vision, that vision generated discussion and ended up—

MPP Wayne Gates: I'll correct you. I said it was a bad idea.

Hon. Zee Hamid: Fair enough.

MPP Wayne Gates: I can live with a bad idea, pal.

Let me get on to the next guy. I've got a few more questions I want to get to as well.

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

MPP Wayne Gates: I've got five minutes left.

iGaming is destroying the brick-and-mortar casino business. The brick-and-mortar casinos have lost 10,000 good-paying jobs across this province, and Niagara has lost 25% of its business. Casinos like the two in my riding provide money for local health care, infrastructure and other services. iGaming pays a tax rate of 20%, while brick-and-mortar casinos pay approximately 35%.

Why is the minister supporting iGaming when the profits of these platforms are leaving the country and we are losing jobs across the province?

What you get with iGaming—never mind the fact that our children are gaming too long; even my buddies are in their Jockey shorts playing iGaming, betting the bills on Sunday afternoons.

With iGaming, you get no investment, you get few jobs, and the profits are leaving our province and our country.

We've lost good-paying jobs in our casinos over the years because of this government's iGaming policy.

Minister, here's my question. Minister, private online casinos went from \$855 million to nearly \$2.2 billion in just two years—your own OLG says some of that growth came directly out of brick-and-mortar casinos. You're now telling Niagara that casinos are part of the growth for tourism. Could you answer that, please?

Hon. Zee Hamid: Yes. That actually gives me the opportunity to share this: There are a number of things happening. Number one, as I mentioned right off in my remarks as well, we're very supportive of land-based gaming; in fact, we're so supportive that it's a big part of our Destination Niagara Strategy. I think there's a place for a resort-style, world-class casino and that experience that it provides.

On iGaming: It's really important to recognize that it was happening anyway. It was just happening through the grey market. And if we weren't involved in it, it would still be happening in a grey market. Your friends wearing shorts would still be betting. They would just be betting in a grey market, and then we would miss out on being able to regulate.

MPP Wayne Gates: You've already answered that. I've already heard that answer.

I'm saying that the reason casinos came to Niagara Falls—we had a vote. Can you imagine? We actually went to the residents of Niagara Falls and said, "Do you want gaming in your community? We believe it's going to create X number of jobs."

What I'm saying today is, because of iGaming, we're losing those good-paying jobs. People are losing their jobs. The numbers are going down. And what do we get from iGaming collectively? Are we getting more jobs? The answer is no. Are we getting more investment? The answer is no. Is the money going out of our area? The answer is yes.

What do you get with bricks and mortar? Not only good-paying jobs; the money goes back to the municipality, which then invests it in their communities.

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Hon. Zee Hamid: MPP, let's talk about that money.

We've actually increased the money we're getting from OLG, from \$2.247 billion in 2024-25 to \$2.369 billion this year.

As for investments coming into land-based gaming, I think it's premature to declare that investment is not coming, especially when we spend some time talking about how we're in discussion and we're seeking investment in Niagara region, because it's a big part of our tourism strategy. I'm not predicting where it's going to go—

MPP Wayne Gates: Let me reclaim my time, please.

I want to be clear: If you want to build more casinos in Niagara Falls, and there's an investor that wants to invest about a billion dollars to build a casino and build hotels, go ahead and do it.

What I'm saying is that the bricks and mortars, today, as we stand, are being hurt by iGaming. Maybe the combined overall betting that you're getting, because the tax revenue from the 25% is making up the 15% that you're losing from the 35% you're getting—the issue is, you're not getting any jobs from it.

I'm going to move on to something else, because I've only probably got a few minutes left—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): You have two.

MPP Wayne Gates: Niagara Falls just got \$4 million less in 2025—this is what I'm talking about—in OLG payments than they had before iGaming, because the bricks and mortar revenue is down. Bricks and mortars are down; jobs are down.

How much revenue have Ontario casino communities like Niagara Falls lost because your government moved gaming online? I respect if you could try to answer that later so I can get a couple of more questions in—because

there are a couple of important things that I think would help your Destination Niagara.

Minister, Fort Erie has been asking for slots back for years. In 2018, the Premier himself promised the people of Fort Erie—"Absolutely. We're going to get those slots back there." Eight years later, they still aren't there. I'm saying, as part of your growth—but you're saying it's Destination Niagara. The last time I checked, Fort Erie is part of Niagara. Put slots back in.

You don't have to answer these. I just want to get through them.

Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum: The feds have given us \$3 million. It's in the estimates. Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum needs \$2 million. Please take a look at that. That came directly from Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum. I've been there.

The wine industry is really struggling right now, with the tariffs and the alcohol ban that's going on. We need to support our wine industry and our craft brewers. We've got to make sure that we get more shelf space in the LCBO.

The last one I'll talk about is GO. During the World Cup—it might not just be tourism, but if you want tourism to come to Niagara Falls—they didn't add any trains to Niagara Falls during the World Cup. Do you know what's also interesting? They just cut—from three trains back down to one. Do you know why they're doing it? Because the CN—the tracks are so bad. So what I'm saying to the Premier and to the Prime Minister—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thank you. There is a little bit of time that will come to you guys afterwards.

MPP Cerjanec.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Through you, Chair: I appreciate the passion of MPP Gates.

Just to pick up on the GO train thing very quickly, actually, for Destination Niagara and the strategy there, the QEW is—it's very difficult to get to Niagara on the weekend. There's a ton of traffic. It's very, very frustrating. So, to MPP Gates's point, that expanded service to Niagara Falls is going to be critical if the province wants Destination Niagara to succeed—let alone all the other GO train issues that I have, that I talk to the Minister of Transportation directly about.

Hon. Zee Hamid: GO is not part of these estimates. So I can't really talk about GO.

But what I can talk about is, we are investing both in GO Transit and the road network, when it comes to Destination Niagara, because we understand that they're both a very important part of the story, as they are for the new Ontario Place.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I'll just flag for you, when you talk to the Minister of Transportation—the reason there's reduced service in Niagara and a couple of other places as well is that the contractor was not able to train and certify enough people on it. So there are so many pieces to this that if that doesn't happen, Destination Niagara is not going to nearly be where the province wants it to be.

What I want to talk about is Experience Ontario and festivals and events in the province—something that is

incredibly important and supports a lot of local businesses, local jobs and tourism throughout the province.

We see that the estimates from last year to this year for festivals, events and attractions are down from \$27.5 million to \$24.5 million, so about \$3 million less. But when I talk to BIAs, when I talk to festival organizers, what I hear from them time and time again is that their costs are going up. Their costs for acts and entertainment are going up. Their security costs are going up as well. Their infrastructure costs are going up. And there aren't necessarily any funding increases to support them in going through this.

So we're seeing a reduction in what's being given out to festivals and events, but their costs are going up. Is there a plan to change that, Minister?

Hon. Zee Hamid: That's a good question, actually. I was hoping to have an opportunity to talk about it.

Security, as you know—it's true; in certain areas, security requirements are going up, but it is a shared responsibility. They're generally provided by municipal police.

I can talk about personal experience. In my riding, there was a very, very awesome AfroJazz festival, funded not by Experience Ontario but by the Ontario Arts Council. I don't speak a word of French, but I still had a lot of fun, because it was great. Security was provided by Halton police, and I'm not sure what the arrangement was.

Funding level is something we're looking at every year. But what I highlighted earlier, which is really important to highlight, is that Experience Ontario is just one stream; there are a lot of different streams of funding. The AfroJazz festival I mentioned didn't come from Experience Ontario; it came from a different stream. The overall envelope has gone up, and it's really important to recognize that, because each line item, each stream, when we look at it individually—sometimes it can create a wrong story and impression about what's actually happening.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: What I'm hearing from some organizers is that they're making decisions on, "Can we even continue in the future?" Those are the conversations that I'm having with folks in the sector. They're very seriously considering that—because these are a lot of volunteer hours and energy that goes into a lot of these, and they're really struggling. So I want to highlight that for you, Minister, in your new role.

Talking about Destination Ontario marketing—the tourism industry of Ontario has been asking the province to increase Destination Ontario's annual marketing budget by \$15 million to compete with Quebec, with Alberta, with British Columbia, and to try to attract more international visitors.

I think we understand that about 20% of our tourism revenue right now comes from the United States. It's a little bit flat—understandably so, I think, with the situations. I think Americans have been pretty good, still, at coming over and visiting, so not necessarily taking it out—with this trade dispute that we have right now.

My question is, is the ministry thinking about our Destination Ontario marketing budget and what we can do to compete better with other provinces and attract international visitors as well?

Hon. Zee Hamid: Thank you for that question, because it was a question I had myself when I first started this role.

I can tell you that Destination Ontario, last year—honestly, getting ahead of the potential decline in US travellers, which, fortunately, we haven't actually seen—did a marketing campaign within Ontario for Destination Ontario to encourage more domestic travellers, and that actually worked remarkably well. The campaign generated almost 700,000 trips during summer travel season in 2025—I don't have the numbers for this year—and \$175.9 million in projected incremental spend. I think if you were asking for my personal opinion, I would love to double down on that, because I think there's so much to see in this province.

This is something I'm happy to share in this committee: My last family vacation—we took it in Alberta. I want more Ontarians to take their family trips within Ontario, because Ontario is just as exotic as any other place in the world. We have remarkable cities. We have beautiful natural beauty. We have great arts and culture. And the food scene is second to none. Our arts and culture scene is second to none. So there's a lot we can do in Ontario—and just attract domestic tourists as well.

Ontario is the leading destination in Canada, but we can be so much more, which is exactly why our government has different destination strategies around Destination Niagara and Destination Wasaga. And we'll continue working with Destination Ontario.

But non-partisan high-five—I do admire your passion for this.

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Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Thank you.

One thing I'll just highlight—and it doesn't necessarily fall under your ministry, but it definitely impacts the visitors who are coming, in particular, I would say, to Toronto and downtown Toronto. Frankly, I think the province and the city have failed, in some ways, in putting that best foot forward for folks who are visiting and who will be going to Ontario Place in the future and coming in. There's a whole issue of cleanliness in the streets. There's a whole issue of sense of safety on the streets, and adequately and appropriately addressing the homelessness crisis that's taking place in Toronto. So it's not your ministry by any means. But some folks I know who were just here recently and were having a drink—that was their comment to me.

The decisions that the government makes in other areas will have an impact on our tourism product. We do have a really great product, and I know it can be even better. So I just wanted—

Hon. Zee Hamid: Not to take too much of your time, but I actually do want to highlight one thing—specifically, to our ministry. I mentioned earlier—and I'm mixing things up; I might have mentioned it before this meeting. With FIFA Fan Festival Toronto—when Destination Ontario did a study, they found that nine out of 10 visitors want to come back to Ontario within two years. So, despite all the challenges, we're putting forward a really good picture. A 90% potential return rate is awesome. And now it's our job to make sure that we turn their intention into reality and make sure that they do come, they stay longer, they spend more money, and they see more of Ontario.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: And let's get the other 10%. How's that?

Hon. Zee Hamid: Well, we can't win them all.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: We absolutely can.

I wanted to switch gears and talk about public libraries.

Provincial support for public libraries is essentially the same in dollars as it was a decade ago, which really does mean a real cut—after inflation and population growth.

Our libraries across the province do phenomenal work, but they're also now doing work that wasn't necessarily within their original job description—especially our libraries—as we have an economic and affordability crisis in the province.

Is it the ministry's position that we're going to be continuing to keep funding for public libraries at the same level in operating grants?

Hon. Zee Hamid: I actually spent many years serving on the Milton Public Library Board, so I do understand. I have first-hand experience with the great work that not just libraries and library staff do across the province, but the tremendous value they provide.

It's easy to mistake libraries as just a collection of books, but they're so much more. In a lot of communities—including my own community, even though it's not that small a community—they act as community centres.

One thing that I was shocked to learn—I had never thought of it that way until I got to the board—is that on bad winter days, they actually act as heating centres for people who might not have good heating at home or who might be outside for long.

They provide tremendous value.

You did highlight that we committed to providing \$28 million to the library sector in Ontario this fiscal year.

Ontario has approximately 266 libraries representing 413 communities—but also 36 First Nation libraries, and we provide support to them as well.

If I can just take 30 seconds to highlight some other stuff—

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Sure.

Hon. Zee Hamid: I don't want to do a whole breakdown, but I do want to highlight that there's funding available.

There's a \$660,000 investment made to First Nations and rural communities through the Internet Connectivity Grant Program. I know that's a huge issue in our rural communities. There are still people in rural communities whose only source for high-speed, reliable Internet is the public library system. We increased that grant by \$78,000 last year, and it actually enables all First Nation libraries and four additional rural libraries to be eligible.

We've also been supporting broadband upgrades at rural, remote and First Nation public library branches, through a total funding allocation of \$4.85 million to the Ontario public library service. So 46 libraries have been upgraded to date. We understand that it's of really important value. It's really important for me to highlight that libraries are more than books, and this is a value that libraries add as well.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: The role that libraries played 30 years ago, with the Internet—I think there's another opportunity again today, with technology and AI and moving forward.

I'll leave the comments there and thank you for your response on that.

Hon. Zee Hamid: We'll talk about that over a croissant.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Absolutely.

Around film, television and digital media—big business in the province. And it's a little challenging right now.

My question: In terms of what the ministry is tracking, are we seeing a decline in the TV shows, movies and investment in Ontario right now? Are we seeing a decline, given the current trade situation with the United States?

Hon. Zee Hamid: Thank you, MPP, for that question. I don't want to mislead you, so I'll have to go back to the expert for that.

Deputy?

Ms. Nancy Kennedy: Yes, we are being impacted by what's going on with the US right now. We are in active discussions with the film sector on that, and it is a country-wide issue.

I think probably some of you know that the federal American government announced, a few weeks back now, the potential for a federal American tax credit, which, on top of what they might provide in certain states, is an issue—but not only that. I think it's fair to say the President of the United States is also kind of talking to studios, almost in a way to say, "Don't leave the country"—which is an issue similar to what we have with other sectors. So we are conscious of that. We are talking actively with our sector.

As I said, we have an open, uncapped tax credit program in Ontario, so that's a good thing.

And we're a bit different than BC, for example, that's very dependent on American productions. We're more blended here, so we have US productions coming in, but we also have a fair bit of domestic as well.

I would say, too, that part of our conversations are not just about the dollars and cents of the tax credit, but like a lot of our other sectors, we have to think about our sector and how we have more domestic production and what we need to do that, so we can be more independent from American investment. These are bigger conversations. We have Ontario Creates; they do an excellent job with the sector.

So we've been having those discussions. And there is an impact.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I think the other challenge that the sector is probably dealing with as well is AI-generated content. Is the ministry, with Ontario Creates, developing any kind of policy or approach to essentially change our approach, because everything has been happening so rapidly? When I talk to folks, I definitely feel for them. So I'm curious to see where we're at on that.

Hon. Zee Hamid: I'll have to go to the deputy for that as well.

Ms. Nancy Kennedy: Well, there was, interestingly enough, a very large meeting, federal-provincial-territorial, in Banff last year with the federal government, just on AI and culture—film would be one of those. You're right; the technology is changing. And film has always been hit with technology. Remember when people used to slice film when they were doing editing? And then that all changed.

More generally, I would say, with AI, it's a bigger question in the arts, about how much human content you need to produce a piece of art.

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

Ms. Nancy Kennedy: We're having those discussions, as a ministry, because it's an important piece of culture—what is it to be an artist? So what are we funding and how much human involvement—performing arts are safe in that regard. Film, music, I would say, are—and publishing, written, is something that we're just talking about more generally. I don't think we have all the answers to that. These are big public policy issues happening at different levels of government. But we are starting to try to have a discussion, as a ministry. And, Minister, we'll be dealing with you on that soon, because they're big questions.

Hon. Zee Hamid: MPP, it did come up in my very first event I attended as a minister, at TIFF. The concern there was less about AI use and more about how we make sure that artists get rewarded for the art they created that AI is now training, and then create—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thank you, Minister. I'm sorry. We ran out of time, but maybe you can pick it up.

I'll go to the government side. MPP Beattie.

Mr. Jeff Beattie: Chair, through you: I would just like to continue where we unfortunately got to lay off, and I think that it follows on the question from my friend from across the aisle in terms of—and I'm glad that it was mentioned—the domestic opportunities as well; I know that we're very reliant. We're very healthy when it comes to international productions, but we have seen an uptick, certainly, in the number of domestically produced film and television productions—I'm going to always say "in Hamilton," but I know that we want to say "in Ontario" as well.

Minister, if you could dig a little deeper—we've heard about some of the instability in the market right now caused by what's happening south of the border. Can you drill down on some of the ways that your ministry is working to increase film and television production and save this vital industry and the economic uplift that it provides for our communities?

Hon. Zee Hamid: Thank you for that question. I'll talk about it in several different parts.

The first part is, it's really important to recognize that Ontario provides an ecosystem that very few places on earth do.

Earlier today, somebody mentioned *The Boys*. I'm not sure who it was, but somebody mentioned the recording of *The Boys*—it was you. Maybe I shouldn't admit it, but I love that show. And the amount of VFX that goes into it, the visual effects, and these artists who create it—honestly, they're remarkable technicians. And that amount of talent—so it's not just acting, it's not just music; now it's visual artists, and it's special effects and everything else that gets created—the studios.

We have a remarkable ecosystem in this province that we need to highlight.

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We're also blessed that 35% to 40% of productions that happen in Ontario are domestic, so we're not as reliant on

American productions as some other provinces are. And we need to double down on that and support our local artists and local things.

That's exactly why you heard the deputy mention earlier that our film and media credit is uncapped; there's no cap to it. The more you come in, the more you produce, the more business you do in Ontario, the more your tax credit comes—I know that I summed it all up and I talked about roughly a billion dollars, but it can be more if more work is done. And we're happy to do that. So we have that support available. But it's not just about dollars and cents.

It's really, really important to support the artists and that culture. That's why we're all out supporting our culture. That's why I spent so much of the time earlier talking about telling our stories and sharing our culture—because that's about supporting the storytellers, supporting the artists, and supporting the folks who share our history. That's why my first tour outside of an event was to Nancy Island—because I wanted to go and learn about some of our history and see it first-hand. I want other people in this province to go see that as well.

And all that kind of plays into it—because you might have somebody who starts in Hamilton, at a small theatre. Actually—and this part is absolutely true—my wife and I once went to a small production in theatre; it was McMaster University students something, something, something. There were probably 20 people in the audience, in a very tight room, and they all turned around and said, “Who are you related to?” We were honestly not related to anybody; we just wanted to come watch the show. It was such a small production that my wife and I were the only two people who were not related to one of the performers.

By going to these shows and supporting these artists—they then go into bigger performances, and they then get work in television or film if they so choose, or other larger theatre productions.

So we do have a remarkable, remarkable province and an incredible industry that I'm very optimistic about, despite what's happening with the tariffs right now. I think this industry has a tremendous future. I'm very, very optimistic about it.

Mr. Jeff Beattie: That's fantastic. We do have a tremendous ecosystem and a thriving industry, and it sounds great to hear that we're going to continue to support it in such a fantastic way.

Chair, I'll turn it over to my colleagues.

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

Mr. Aris Babikian: Thank you, Minister, Deputy, for coming and sharing your thoughts and your insight with us.

Before I ask my question, I want to comment on the discussion going on regarding the film and TV industry and co-operation. I think there is great interest in Europe and other parts of the world to have a joint co-operation production of TV series and movies between us and them. Some of these companies, especially the one from Greece—they already have joint co-operation in Quebec, within the Quebec film and TV industry, and they would like to expand. The one advantage of this co-operation is that because we have so many diverse communities here in

Ontario, in Canada, and their histories are very telling and very enticing—to produce them and focus on them. I think that is something that could be explored more widely, and I will be quite happy to work with your ministry to identify some of these companies or issues.

My question is related to the Royal Ontario Museum. The museum is a jewel of Ontario's culture and heritage. Thousands of Ontarians will remember their time visiting, whether on school trips, growing up—or when visiting the downtown museum.

From places of observation to places of interaction, from archive preservation to active research centres—and how museums can better serve the public in a post-pandemic world.

What is our government doing to keep the ROM accessible to Ontarians, while ensuring its strong fiscal health?

Hon. Zee Hamid: Thank you for that question.

If I can go back to your previous comment, the deputy was taking a lot of notes—so it's taken, and I will reach out.

I should say that there are a number of European productions that I know of, off the top of my head, that have happened in partnership with us.

Again, I really hate giving you all my bad media taste, but—Resident Evil, I think, was a German production that happened with Ontario, and Silent Hill was a Canadian-French partnership. There were a number of productions that have happened. I don't want to give away all of my bad movie and TV tastes.

Back to the ROM: You are absolutely correct; it is a crown jewel.

Beginning in 2026-27, so, this fiscal year, the ROM will receive a total of \$42.53 million in base funding. That includes an additional \$15.25 million in provincial funding, as part of our \$21-million investment into both the ROM and AGO that we announced in April of this year, after the budget.

The part that I want to highlight, and this is something that if you came to the ROM for—I think it was our Christmas party last year. You would have seen some construction happening that is the OpenROM, that is expanding the museum beyond its walls. It is dramatically opening it to the public, with a new feel, and it will provide free access to the main floor—not just free access, but when you are walking on the street, from the streetscape perspective, it becomes very welcoming and very open. It will attract people to come in and take a look at it, who otherwise might not have been thinking about it. That is a really smart strategy. A lot of folks who otherwise would not have discovered what the ROM has to offer might just come and look at the first floor for free. They might go to the gift shop and buy a few things. And then they might learn about some exhibitions that are happening at the ROM. It encourages a greater sense of community in a thriving part of our city. It is really a core of our city.

So we are committed to supporting the ROM—along with the AGO and others—as one of Canada's leading cultural institutions.

As you know, the ROM is the—I don't want to misquote it, but I believe it is the largest museum in Canada. It is home to more than 18 million artworks and artifacts. That is something I learned about when we went there, during their Christmas party. They were talking about it, and it boggled my mind. It is such an incredible collection the ROM has that, frankly, we never get to see.

We have actually increased the base funding to the ROM; we are committed to it.

The last part I want to say—and I want to take more questions—is that the ROM is the biggest museum in Canada, even in terms of visitors. It sees 1.1 million visitors every single year. Think about it. That is a large number of people who come in and learn about natural history and everything else the ROM has to offer.

About a month ago, my wife and I went to see the bee exhibit. Again, I am telling way too many personal stories. My wife went and got two beehives after that. She wants to grow bees now. So I guess we are doing that now.

And if I may—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: The Speaker has bees on the roof.

Hon. Zee Hamid: That's right, but the Speaker's bees are doing a lot better than my wife's bees. We cannot find the queen, so I think she took off. That is what happens when you do not know what you are doing. But the ROM did inspire us to try it. That is a lot of value the ROM adds.

My middle son, when he was young, loved going there just to look at dinosaur fossils. He could identify a tremendous number of dinosaurs and fossils. And he developed this interest because of the ROM.

So there are a lot of stories to tell.

The ROM is really a tremendous facility that we are committed to protecting and supporting.

Thank you for the question.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): MPP Smith, there are five minutes left.

Ms. Laura Smith: Thank you, once again, to the minister and the deputy minister for being here today.

I'm going to ask the minister to get off the motorcycle and actually use another form of transportation, if he'll oblige me, if he'll allow us to take another kind of journey.

The northern parts of Ontario are key in the tourism sector and the film industry. We know that some of the most beautiful scenery in the province and natural resources are happening in northern Ontario, tightly knit communities—and our government knows the potential, about the growth that can happen in that area.

One of the things that I had the privilege of touring was driving through—and this was a few years ago—and revisiting the travels of the Northlander, which is something that's very exciting for our province. It was shut down by a previous government. I think that this is going to really connect our communities. Imagine, you're at Union Station, you get on a train; you can get to Timmins. This is going to be fantastic.

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I'm wondering if you could explain what our government is doing to support the tourism sector in the north as

we prepare to re-establish key northern infrastructure, transportationally.

Hon. Zee Hamid: Yes. I do want to share a story, but before that, I just want to run through some numbers real quick, because it is estimates, after all.

Since 2018, our government has supported:

—Science North in Thunder Bay, with over \$68 million in funding;

—over \$48 million in northern region tourism organizations;

—over \$36 million to the Ontario Arts Council for organizations and artists, through agencies in the Far North and northeast regions;

—over \$4 million allocated from Destination Ontario's operating budget, through marketing northern Ontario;

—over \$3 million in funding for 27 northern museums, through the Community Museum Operating Grant; and

—over a billion dollars to the Ontario Cultural Attractions Fund, to support cultural tourism.

That also goes back to my previous point, when I kept highlighting that—let's not look at a single line item; let's look at the investments overall, as a whole.

Unfortunately, I don't get a chance to ride my bike anymore at all, thanks to this job—but I do want to use that to highlight the tremendous trails we have, many of them in the north. We have 80,000 kilometres of trails in this province. Often, when those of us in the GTA think about trails, we only think about hiking trails and walking trails, or maybe, occasionally, mountain biking trails. But Ontario has a very large network of ATV trails—and snowmobiling. Snowmobiling is a very, very large sport in northern Ontario. It's something that we did a lot of work last year on, MPP, as you would recall—protecting snowmobiling in this province. It's a whole strategy.

As I mentioned earlier, northern Ontario is just as exotic as anywhere else, any other place. Northern Ontario is not even very hard to get to, whether it's by road, or now by Northlander, or even by flight. It's just something that we need to highlight more.

Destination Ontario had a northern marketing campaign. They allocated a certain part of their budget to advertising, specifically, for northern tourism, which I think is really important. It's something I would encourage them to continue, because we need to see more of our province.

I find that people who live in the north are a lot more likely to come south and visit us. Those of us who live in southern Ontario need to return the favour and go back north and give them some business, because this tourism, domestically, creates a lot of jobs.

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

Hon. Zee Hamid: I can tell you that the visitor-facing arts and culture sector in the Far North region, just through the Ontario Arts Council-funded grants—just that, a very small number of grants—generated \$12 million in GDP and created 127 full-time jobs. These are jobs that will allow people to buy a home, perhaps, or pay for their kids' school, pay for their kids' college. It's all done because of the support that we are providing.

I think if I were to leave with one message to my southern Ontario neighbours, it's that Ontario has so much beauty outside of the south as well. Let's just go up north. Go north, further than Barrie and Muskoka, and take a look at what Ontario has to offer.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): We'll now go to the official opposition. They have seven minutes and 40 seconds left.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Chair, as you mentioned, this is estimates. The purpose of estimates is to scrutinize the government's spending, to ensure good value for tax dollars.

And you're spending a lot of tax dollars. That's why the answers I heard earlier today about the development at Ontario Place were quite concerning to me.

I will note that the government's decision to close the Ontario Science Centre—that roof is still holding. So that doesn't hold water—that that was the reason we closed the Ontario Science Centre. Now the taxpayers are incurring an incredible amount of costs and debt.

As you know, this sweetheart deal with Therme—there was no public consultation. It was essentially sole-sourced. The Auditor General said that this deal was not transparent or fair.

One of the things that Therme was required to do is to spend \$700 million, which, I have to say, pales in comparison to some of the numbers that I've heard today, about what the taxpayers are paying. Correct me if I'm wrong, but I heard that we're going to be spending a billion dollars on the Ontario Science Centre—\$200 million to \$500 million in public realm; soil remediation, \$40 million; early works. There were a lot of big numbers being thrown around, but no answer as to how much Therme has ponied up yet.

So my question to you is, how much money has Therme actually invested—not a promise to invest, not down the road. How much cash on the line have they ponied up in comparison to, obviously, the billions and billions that Ontario taxpayers are on the hook for? When are they going to pony up, and when are they going to start doing something for this site that they have got a sweetheart 99-year lease for?

Hon. Zee Hamid: Chair, through you: There are a number of comments in there that I want to talk about.

I'll leave the part about the science centre roof—actually, let's just touch on it real quick. If a plane had a 10% probability of crashing, nobody would fly that plane. It means that in three years it might not have crashed, but it would still be hugely unsafe.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Okay, we'll leave that alone.

Let's get to Therme, please.

Hon. Zee Hamid: In terms of our spending—I think “spending” is the wrong way to put it; it's investment into our future.

Ontario Science Centre—\$1.04 billion, to be completely exact, which includes 30 years of maintenance and upkeep—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: But my question, Minister, was, how much has Therme contributed to date?

Hon. Zee Hamid: Right. That's a good question.

Therme is committed to \$700 million; out of it, \$200 million—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: And have they forwarded any of that money?

Hon. Zee Hamid: Well, I can't tell you about Therme's business plan and other stuff and timeline. But I can tell you that, as I mentioned earlier, the project is getting done in phases. So Ontario Place is getting done in multiple phases and—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Let's leave it at that, because I heard you not really address this in an earlier section. So I'm going to take from this that there's no clear answer as to whether Therme has actually written a cheque or reached into their pockets. They only seem to be reaching into the taxpayers' pockets at this point. And I'm going to tell you—

Hon. Zee Hamid: To be clear, it's an ongoing project, like I—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: It's my time—sorry, Minister.

Hon. Zee Hamid: My apologies.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: My concern, really, is that it's more beneficial to Therme to have this sitting on their books as an undeveloped site, because it fattens their bottom line. Once they start to develop, that may go away, because then they incur debt and then they incur risk. So I'm concerned that we're in a position where Therme could end up selling the lease rights—because they own those lease rights—or subletting to another tenant that has nothing to do with what your vision is for Ontario Place.

So my question is, can you, as the minister who's overseeing this promise, give reassurances to Ontarians, who are paying so much for this redevelopment, that Ontario Place, through Therme, won't be leased or subletted or utilized for Therme, for anything other than what they have been contracted to do?

Hon. Zee Hamid: You mentioned Ontario's taxpayers paying so much. Ontario's taxpayers are investing into their own future, into a facility that will be a crown jewel in Ontario that will generate an incredible amount of economic value, in number of jobs. In terms of the other projects, other sides of it, I did mention that it's being developed in phases. I think—and I don't mean it as disrespectful—it might be a little unfair to, in the middle of a project, call out one thing that might or might not have started construction, and then speculate about it. It is getting done in—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you, Minister. But I would say to you, what is unfair is that the Ontario taxpayers have no choice but to spend this money. They're not getting clear updates on the construction, and they're certainly not being reassured that Therme is not taking this deal—a 99-year lease—and using it to their benefit. That doesn't benefit the people of the province of Ontario. That, I would say, is what's extremely unfair. Minister, I have short time here. We can go over this at another time.

My question stands, and it hasn't been answered. This committee is not given any assurances that Therme has the secured financing, that they have adequate financing, or that they have forwarded any money. Not a single dime

has come from Therme, yet we're spending billions and billions of taxpayers' dollars, whether they want it or not. So I'm going to leave it at that, Minister. Sorry.

I'm going to move on to another thing. If you think I'm hot now, wait until we talk about the problem that is completely burgeoning in Ontario, which is gambling addictions with our young people in the province of Ontario. My colleague MPP Cerjanec asked you some very good questions about this. This is a serious mental health problem that we're facing in Ontario. And when I say "young people," I'm talking about underage young people, high school students; I'm talking about, especially, young men in our province.

Last year, when I came to committee—MPP Cho was the minister at the time—I shared some really awful stories, about Hamiltonians who had devastating stories about their kids who have been swept up in this scourge, if you will, of online gambling in underage students, and they really couldn't find the resources to help them. And this is backed up by—as you know, because I think you mentioned it, we have the Canadian Mental Health Association, who have shared with us some of the statistics. Give me a second while I find it. These are shocking statistics—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): You have just over a minute, just to let you know.

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Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you.

One in 10 students report online sports betting—that's in 2025—which is up from one in 100 in 2017. This is really just going out of control. One in five students report engaging in gambling. One in four students report seeing or hearing advertising for online gaming on a daily basis.

We ask—MPP Cerjanec did ask this, and I think it's really important—will the ministry commit to a fixed share of the billions of dollars in revenue that this province is earning, to resolving the problem, to supporting the agencies in Hamilton and across the province that are trying to address the concern that we're facing with our young people? Will you commit to that—because as I know, Hamiltonians are not able to seek the services that you're talking about.

And finally, this is in contrast to a government that spent untold hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars telling us that they are going to keep Ontario safe. But I'm sorry to say, Minister, that is cold comfort for parents in Hamilton whose young kids, high school kids, are facing a gambling addiction.

My question to you is, what are you going to do about this? What you are doing now is not adequate. I know you're looking at a review. The review should be done by now. How much money are you going to put forward?

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): MPP Shaw, there was a minute left. I gave you a warning. So the minister is not going to have time to answer the question.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I'm so sorry. I was on a roll.

Well, thank you very much—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): I don't know if you wanted answers, but you asked a lot of questions.

Now that the time is completed for the consideration of the 2026-27 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?

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, culture and gaming policy and 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. Vote 3806 is accordingly 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 is accordingly carried.

Shall vote 3811, major attractions, parks and operations, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hands. All those opposed, please raise your hands. I declare vote 3811 is accordingly carried.

Shall vote 3813, Ontario Place Redevelopment Secretariat, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hands. All those opposed, please raise your hands. I declare vote 3813 is accordingly carried.

Shall the 2026-27 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 that carried.

Shall the Chair report the 2026-27 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 shall report back to the House.

That concludes our consideration of the ministry's estimates.

I would like to thank Minister Hamid and everyone here today for their participation.

There being no further business, the—

Mr. Aris Babikian: Chair, point of order.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): MPP Babikian has a point of order.

Mr. Aris Babikian: Chair, and probably the Clerk also—they should consider the observation that I had today. I have been on various committees for eight years now, but this is the first time that I have seen where the witnesses are not allowed to answer questions. Our role is to answer questions and get answers from the witnesses. But what I have realized—question after question, without giving any opportunity to the witness to answer the questions. So I would like to leave this observation with you, and in the future—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): MPP Babikian, I'm sorry, but that's not a valid point of order.

MPP Wayne Gates: Should I answer?

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): No.

Interjections.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): MPP Gates, MPP Babikian, there are no mikes.

There's no further business. This committee stands adjourned until 1 p.m. on Wednesday, October 28—

Interjection.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): MPP Gates, do you hear me? You're not allowed to be talking.

MPP Wayne Gates: It's my bad ear. I'll say yes.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Oh.

There being no further business, this committee stands adjourned until 1 p.m. on Wednesday, October 28, 2026, when we'll consider the estimates of the Ministry of Infrastructure.

The committee adjourned at 1506.

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