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Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation

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Honourable Derek Bennett, MHA

RESOURCE COMMITTEE

Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation

Chair: Perry Trimper, MHA

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Appearing:

Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation

Steve Crocker, Minister

Jamie O'Dea, Deputy Minister

Ben Gardner, Assistant Deputy Minister, Film, Television

Carol-Ann Gilliard, Assistant Deputy Minister, Tourism

Christina Harrington, Assistant Deputy Minister, Arts and Culture

Jennifer Torrance, Departmental Controller

Caroline Orsborn, Executive Director, Celebrate NL

Adrienne Luther, Director of Communications

Also Present

Hon. Scott Reid, MHA, Minister Responsible for Indigenous Affairs and Reconciliation

Hon. Siobhan Coady, MHA, Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board

John Abbott, MHA

Jeff Dwyer, MHA

James Dinn, MHA

Eileen Anderson, Government Members' Caucus

Glenn Littlejohn, Official Opposition Caucus

Steven Kent, Third Party Caucus

Jennifer Peckham, Committee Analyst (A)

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Jeff Dwyer, MHA for Placentia West - Bellevue, substitutes for Pleaman Forsey, MHA for Exploits.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Scott Reid, MHA for St. George's - Humber, substitutes for Jamie Korab, MHA for Waterford Valley.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Jim Dinn, MHA for St. John's Centre, substitutes for Jordan Brown, MHA for Labrador West.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, John Abbott, MHA for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi, substitutes for Perry Trimper, MHA for Lake Melville, Chair.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Siobhan Coady, MHA for St. John's West, substitutes for Sherry Gambin-Walsh, MHA for Placentia - St. Mary's.

The Committee met at 9 a.m. in the House of Assembly Chamber.

CHAIR (Stoyles): Order, please!

Good morning. We're all ready to go, and this morning we are doing Estimates of the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation. We welcome everybody for coming this morning.

First, we're going to do the substitutions: for MHA Forsey we have MHA Dwyer, for MHA Brown we have MHA Dinn, for MHA Trimper we have MHA Abbott, for MHA Gambin-Walsh we have MHA Coady and for MHA Korab we have MHA Reid.

So, again, welcome and, of course, we have a little bit of housekeeping items. When you speak we ask you to wave so you'll be identified. Each time, wait for the light to come on, the tally light. Each time you speak we ask you to give us your name and position for the record so they can keep track of who is speaking. Please do not adjust your chairs, and the coolers are on

this side and right here if anybody would like some water.

I guess what we will do is, we have the minutes of the last meeting. I will ask for a mover.

J. DWYER: So moved.

CHAIR: MHA Dwyer moved and seconded by?

S. COADY: Seconded.

CHAIR: MHA Coady.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: Carried.

On motion, minutes adopted as circulated.

CHAIR: Now we're going to introduce the room, and we're going to start with MHA Dwyer.

J. DWYER: Jeff Dwyer, MHA for Placentia West - Bellevue.

G. LITTLEJOHN: Glenn Littlejohn, Political Researcher.

C. PARDY: Craig Pardy, MHA for the District of Bonavista.

J. DINN: Jim Dinn, MHA for St. John's Centre.

S. KENT: Steven Kent, Research Assistant for the Third Party caucus.

S. COADY: Siobhan Coady, St. John's West.

S. REID: Scott Reid, MHA, St. George's - Humber.

J. ABBOTT: John Abbott, St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

E. ANDERSON: Eileen Anderson, GMO.

S. CROCKER: Steve Crocker, Minister of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation.

J. O'DEA: Jamie O'Dea, Deputy Minister of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation.

B. GARDNER: Ben Gardner, Assistant Deputy Minister of Film, Television, Recreation and Sport.

C. GILLIARD: Carol-Ann Gilliard. I am the Assistant Deputy Minister for Tourism.

J. TORRAVILLE: Jennifer Torraville, Departmental Controller.

C. ORSBORN: Caroline Orsborn, Executive Director of Celebrate NL.

C. HARRINGTON: Christina Harrington, Assistant Deputy Minister, Arts and Culture.

A. LUTHER: Adrienne Luther, Director of Communications

CHAIR: Is that everybody?

Okay, before we ask the minister to bring greetings, I'm going to ask the Clerk to call the first group of subheadings, please.

CLERK (Beazley): For the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation, 1.1.01 to 1.2.03 inclusive, Executive and Support Services.

CHAIR: Okay, 1.1.01 to 1.2.03.

Now I ask the minister to start off.

S. CROCKER: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to everybody this morning for being here and, as a department, we certainly look forward to the opportunity to review the Estimates for TCAR. This is always an important opportunity, to go through the commitments that we've made for the coming fiscal year. I won't take a lot

of time but 2025-2026 will be another extremely busy year for this department. We're seeing very strong indications of a very successful tourism season.

This is the Year of Sport, which will bring a lot of opportunity for sport, culminating into the Canada Summer Games this August right here in St. John's. So a lot of exciting stuff is happening and, just so I don't forget at the end, I do want to take a moment to thank everybody here this morning from the department because it's their hard work that get us here and they put in all the time that goes into these binders.

As I said earlier, and I'll say now for the record, I think this is my 10th time doing Estimates. This is the first time the Minister of Finance has been present so I kind of feel like the Supreme Court judge is here this morning. So if I'm on extra tight behaviour, it's because I don't want to screw up something that I told her I was going to do or wasn't going to do.

So I'll turn it over to the Committee and look forward to the next 45 minutes or so.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister Crocker.

We're going to start off with questions. The first round of questions is 15 minutes and after that, every amount of questions will be 10 minutes, and we will go back and forth the same as in previous meetings.

So, MHA Dwyer, please.

J. DWYER: Thank you and good morning.

I thank your staff as well, Minister, for being here and for preparing the Estimates for the '24-'25 Budget – or to talk about that but also to talk the preparation of the '25-'26 budget. For you to say that you feel like you've got the Supreme Court judge in here, she's looking over my shoulder, so. I don't know, maybe I might get some Post-it Notes to ask the minister some questions. So I

don't know, maybe we'll be here longer than 45 minutes.

We have some questions and, like I said, we know that things are improving dramatically with our tourism sector and, again, with our culture, arts, recreation and heritage. It's nice to be able to carry on with the initiatives that we have and to create new initiatives to exalt our province.

I'll start off, Minister, with just general introductory questions, I guess about the department itself. Can you outline the department's attrition plan?

S. CROCKER: There is no attrition plan. I think the last time the department had an attrition plan was '21-'22.

J. DWYER: Were there any positions that were removed last year?

S. CROCKER: Yeah, so at the end of the year last year, end of employment, there were 93 of these, but those 93 would be everything from a 13-weeker coming to an end. We have a large seasonal staff when you think about the provincial parks and provincial historic sites. So, yeah, we do have a lot of people that retire, but our vacancy rate is below the 5 per cent mandated vacancy rate.

J. DWYER: Okay, perfect.

How many people are employed in the department? How many contractual and how many temporary?

S. CROCKER: So there are 107 permanent staff in the department, 54 temporary, 146 seasonal and seven contract, for a total of 314.

J. DWYER: Okay. Thank you.

Into the Minister's Office, 1.1.01.

Minister, on the Transportation and Communications, does this include the

minister's travel, and can we get a list of the trips and their costs and who travelled with the minister?

S. CROCKER: You certainly can get that list. It's something we'll have to get for you, it's not something that we would have at hand but, yeah, absolutely.

So, yes, this is the cost of the minister's office and the minister's travel for the whole year, the combination.

J. DWYER: Okay. Thank you.

Under Transportation and Communications, under 1.2.01, who does that cover outside of the minister's office for travel?

S. CROCKER: That would cover the entire executive. I think there are five senior staff that would be budgeted through that budget line.

J. DWYER: Okay, thank you.

Still in General Administration, 1.2.02: There's a significant discrepancy on Salaries from Budget to Revised of 2024-25, and the Estimate has increased. What is the reason for the discrepancy?

S. CROCKER: The discrepancy would be two vacancies during the fiscal year: the policy analyst and the director. Both are now filled and the increase would just reflect the salary plan increase, stepped increases and negotiated wage increases.

J. DWYER: Okay. Thank you.

Are we moving into –

OFFICIAL: No.

J. DWYER: No, okay. That'll be good for that section.

Thank you.

CHAIR: No further questions.

All right, MHA Dinn.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Minister, and your staff for taking the time to answer our questions.

General question: Could you provide us with an update on the process to opening a new mid-sized theatre in St. John's and how many people does a mid-sized theatre accommodate?

S. CROCKER: So the planning for the mid-sized theatre is a carry-over from – it's actually in the TI Estimates, obviously. There was \$8 million in '24-'25 and that carried over into this fiscal year. So again, the planning for that would be with TI, and I honestly can't tell you right now exactly what stage of the planning that that is at with TI. I know there has been some work done around an RFP.

The design of the mid-sized theatre and what we heard from the arts community and from earlier work that we've done around it, the number that we've always used is around 400. There are a lot of reasons why that number is used, and if you talk to the community, what they would tell you is – for example, the Arts and Culture Centre would hold approximately 1,000 to 1,200 people – to make a long-standing show, for example a theatre performance or a musical, you need time to span it out over and, in order to attract, you need that right size of a theatre that, you know, you can do 30 days because with a 1,200-seat theatre, it's too quick, too intense and that's the logic behind the design of a 400-seat facility.

J. DINN: If I may then, how would that compare to let's say the size of the Majestic Theatre? I'm just trying to – I forget the number of seats in the Majestic.

S. CROCKER: I think the Majestic Theatre is somewhere around 250, I think, of fixed seating. I do believe at the Majestic they do have some flex where they can bring

seating to the front of the theatre for additional seating.

J. DINN: Thank you.

A general question then with regard to the film industry and the effect of tariffs. I'm sure we get productions from outside and I'm just wondering how tariffs would affect the film industry here in the province.

S. CROCKER: So right now we haven't seen any effects. The current situation is actually extremely attractive for the US industry looking at Canada, certainly because of our dollar position. We've seen that growth and I think that's some of the opportunity we have when you look at some of the major Canadian filming locations. Whether it be Vancouver or Toronto, they're so busy right now that we're having people that probably wouldn't have looked at Newfoundland and Labrador.

We've set a very strong foundation for the film industry here now with the increases to the equity and the All-Spend Tax Credit. That's why I think we've now landed our first major Netflix series which will be filming here this summer. It will be the largest location production we've ever done. I thank the Minister of Finance. She raised the cap on the All-Spend, and it was highlighted in the budget this year, from \$10 million to \$20 million. That was primarily – not primarily driven but this Netflix series that's coming this summer was the driver behind that, because before we never had a show that would need a cap above \$10 million. Disney was about \$10 million, but Netflix will go much above \$10 million.

J. DINN: Excellent. Thank you. Maybe we could all get cameos.

S. CROCKER: Oh, sorry, just one more thing on that if you don't mind, MHA Dinn.

J. DINN: Yeah.

S. CROCKER: To your tariff question, there is some concern in the industry because the president has indicated from time to time that he could tariff the arts. We just hope he doesn't but that could be a challenge going forward.

J. DINN: Excellent. That's good to know.

Is it possible to have an update on the efforts to sell off Marble Mountain?

S. CROCKER: Sure.

We have an RFP that closed on Wednesday, Budget Day. Unfortunately, there were no expressions of interest in the sale or in the purchase for Marble Mountain. So as you would've seen in Wednesday's budget, there was a commitment to Marble Mountain. The operating budget for Marble Mountain increased by \$600,000. I think the operating budget at Marble Mountain next year now is about \$900,000. The reality is it has been that for quite some time. We were kind of always in a situation where they were short on cash and we were helping them out.

This is a right size of the budget. We will continue to, I guess, work to ensure that Marble Mountain can continue. It's a very important piece of infrastructure to the West Coast of this province. If you talk to the hospitality operators, it's extremely important and we can see it in our numbers that, on the West Coast, we have higher occupancy rates than anywhere else in the province in the winter months, but obviously it is challenged. It is challenged by climate change. We've seen throughout that the future of Marble Mountain certainly lies in more four-season activities.

J. DINN: If I may, we'll go to the next question: What are the four-season activities you're looking at?

S. CROCKER: There's tremendous opportunity in mountain biking. We're working with the Western Newfoundland

and Labrador – I'm going to get this wrong, but mountain biking I'm going to say coalition. They have some trails around that area currently and, last year, we actually worked with them to tie into Marble Mountain.

We've gauged the lightning lift right now to go to the top of the hill and return. Now the lift can go up; previously, the lift couldn't come back down with people on it because it wasn't gauged that way. It's now gauged to do that. One of the things we've looked at doing and are continuing to explore is actually putting rigging on the back of the chair lift so you can take your bike up

That is one of the things that we're seeing as a tremendous opportunity. It's the deputy that's helping me out very much here. The cruise ship industry is somewhere else.

Last year Corner Brook had a blossoming, booming cruise ship industry. Last year, we worked with the cruise lines to actually sell Marble Mountain as an excursion and it was their number one selling excursion on the West Coast – come to Marble; they take you to the top. We've, in the last number of years, constructed a beautiful new deck right on the top of the mountain. So you take your cruise ship visitor up, let them have the panoramic view of the Bay of Islands and you bring them back down and sell them lunch in the chalet. Those are the opportunities that we're seeing.

J. DINN: That's excellent. I visited Whistler years ago when I was with the NLTA, they're using the lifts in active mountain biking. They would come down, it was a fantastic way to use it year-round, and I know in some of these places they also have a restaurant at the top so you can eat there and look around or even, for that matter, hike up and come back down. Right?

S. CROCKER: Yup.

J. DINN: That's good. Maybe that's not only the solution for that ski hill, but even some like White Hills and the others as well.

S. CROCKER: Absolutely. There's no doubt about it.

You know, Marble Mountain typically, I think the goal was always to open Marble Mountain on Boxing Day. That was how it was in the past and you'd close down around now. We managed to get February 1 to March 31 this year; I think it was 57 or 58 ski days.

J. DINN: Perfect. Appreciate that.

Chair, has there been any progress in the proposal for the Eagle River Waterway Provincial Park in Labrador?

S. CROCKER: That's a challenging file, one that was actually on my desk first when I got in this department but we have to continue to work with our Indigenous partners on that file.

I'm going to turn it over to Carol-Ann I think, maybe for just a second, because I know she would be more involved in that file. We continue to work that file but it has to be done in step with our Indigenous partners.

C. GILLIARD: We continue, as the minister said, to engage with our Indigenous organizations but we have made some progress in doing some of the foundational work of ecological assessments, getting an understanding of the biodiversity in the region and we have advanced some of the work in preparing the maps and proposed boundaries and that type of thing.

It is slow progression but moving all the same.

J. DINN: Thank you.

That's it, Chair, for my questions on that section.

CHAIR: Thank you, MHA Dinn.

Any further questions, MHA Dwyer?

J. DWYER: No, I don't think so.

CHAIR: Not in this section. Okay.

I hear no further questions; I ask the Clerk to recall the grouping.

CLERK: 1.1.01 to 1.2.03 inclusive, Executive and Support Services.

CHAIR: Shall 1.1.01 to 1.2.03 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subheads 1.1.01 through 1.2.03, carried.

CHAIR: All right.

Moving forward, I ask the Clerk to call the next set of subheadings.

CLERK: 2.1.01 to 2.2.03 inclusive, Tourism.

CHAIR: Shall 2.1.01 to 2.2.03 carry?

We will start questions with MHA Dwyer.

J. DWYER: Chair, just at the start of proceedings, you said that Pleaman Forsey was subbed out for – but the next name that you said was Jim Dinn. I'm the one that's substituted for Pleaman Forsey. I just wanted to make sure that it was clear with Hansard, that's all.

CHAIR: Yes. Thank you.

J. DWYER: Okay, thank you.

Minister, recently your department announced new funding for air access and, shortly thereafter, the federal government announced additional funding for Atlantic Canada. Is that the Atlantic Canada tourism partnership?

S. CROCKER: No, that's an additional funding from the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency. I think Minister Hutchings announced that during the HNL Conference.

There's a commitment of \$2 million a year for three years through ACOA; so \$6 million in total. The design behind that is to address some of the challenges regionally in Atlantic Canada. I think from Newfoundland and Labrador's perspective, it certainly is an opportunity for us to grow or work to grow our intra-provincial travel situation.

Quite honestly, this announcement is made and now we're in a caretaker mode, so really we haven't had the time or ability to really delve into what it is we can do with that. We do know from work that's been done by the Council of Atlantic Premiers, they initiated this work maybe two years ago, and this is a result of the work that they've done as a group of premiers on reviving air access in Atlantic Canada.

We're very fortunate in Newfoundland and Labrador to have an airline that's actually based here, because if you think about connectivity, and I know the geography is not quite as challenging but if you think about the challenges around Atlantic Canada right now. In order to get to PEI for us, as an example, we either have to fly to Halifax or fly to Montreal and fly back so it's addressing some of those interprovincial challenges and, for us, it's an opportunity to address some intra-provincial challenges, I do believe.

J. DWYER: Where is that reflected in the budget?

S. CROCKER: The ACOA money wouldn't be reflected obviously in our money, but I think our commitment to air access is reflected into the commitment of the additional \$2 million this year that the minister announced for Vision 2026 and air access.

J. DWYER: So of the \$6 million allocation by the federal government, what's the province's share and where will it be directed?

S. CROCKER: To date, obviously, there hasn't been a formula based on that.

From our perspective, I think what we would want to see – and it depends on which part of the Island you're talking about. If you're thinking about Labrador, I think some of the focus could certainly be on connectivity with somewhere in Atlantic Canada, like better connectivity with Halifax for example, because Labrador has tremendous tourism growth opportunity and I think a lot of that would be based in Halifax. That would be something that might be interesting for Labrador but, if you think about the island itself, it's better connectivity on the Island itself to line up with what other airlines are coming in. It's really about building that extra leg on.

From the way we see it, if somebody flies in here from Toronto but their ultimate destination is Gander, how do we put that other segment on to their flight? How do we make sure that there's a seamless transition from an Air Canada flight from Toronto to St. John's to Gander. That's the type of thing that we see for the Island.

So again, it's not one size fits all on this Island because of our geography.

J. DWYER: To allude to your answer – you know, God bless him, Pat White just passed away this year – one of the things that he talked about was so important to the province for intra travel was the network and developing that network and making sure

that there are more options, and options I mean competition so it would cut down then on the price.

Out of the \$15 million allocated for tourism marketing, the base budget plus the \$2 million for Vision 2026?

S. CROCKER: Yeah, so that shows up as Purchased Services in 2.1.01. That's our base budget and 2.1.03 is the additional \$2 million in Purchased Services.

J. DWYER: That's going directly toward Vision 2026?

S. CROCKER: Obviously you're referring to Vision '26, but Vision '26 puts us out there. In order to be successful in Vision 2026, the biggest challenge that the Newfoundland and Labrador tourism industry faces is access, whether it's by water or whether it's by air.

If you look at all the goals of Vision 2026, the underlying goal is access, and that's why we seen it as a priority this year to blend the two, because in order to get to the desired goal of Vision 2026, access is the foundation. It's fundamental.

J. DWYER: Yeah, absolutely. I agree with that because even on the marine side, I mean, Marine Atlantic is really an extension of the Trans-Canada Highway for this Island, and I think that falls short, I guess, of people that are not using it for daily purposes, kind of thing. But recently, the federal government agreed to stop payment on the Confederation Bridge, but Marine Atlantic costs continue to rise.

Minister, can we expect the same treatment as our island friends in PEI?

S. CROCKER: I would say 100 per cent absolutely. Yes, we do expect the same treatment as anybody else. Those statements have been made, and I will challenge the next prime minister of Canada, the next Transportation minister,

the next Tourism minister that Canada's made up of 10 provinces and three territories, and we expect the exact same treatment.

J. DWYER: Absolutely.

S. CROCKER: Not only do we expect the exact same treatment, we expect the exact same treatment in a fair and modern way. It's not just about adding capacity and not keeping up to the standards that they develop. I'll give Marine Atlantic some credit. They've upped their game when it comes to the equipment that they're using to cross the Gulf, and we would expect that same type of equipment to be used going forward.

J. DWYER: In 2.1.02, the reduction in Purchased Services related to no Exit Survey being completed this year?

S. CROCKER: Sorry, MHA Dwyer, could you repeat the question?

J. DWYER: In 2.1.02, the reduction in Purchased Services, is that related to the no exit strategy survey? Because we had a robust one the year before, but it was less robust this year.

S. CROCKER: Yeah, that reflects the one-time funding for the Visitor's Exit Survey. We don't do a full-blown Exit Survey every year. You just add to that data. You collect your data and then you roll it and roll it and roll it until the time you decide, well, it's time to do another Exit Survey.

We will continue to do exit work, but we'll use the foundation that came out of this bigger, more wholesome survey to inform the next number of years.

J. DWYER: Okay.

S. CROCKER: Sort of like Nanos.

J. DWYER: Yeah.

So we have a fully integrated marketing program. Is this contracted out or done by core government?

S. CROCKER: The marketing program is done by our agency of record.

J. DWYER: Pardon, sorry?

S. CROCKER: It's done in conjunction between the department's marketing division and our agency of record, which would be Target Marketing and Communications at this time.

J. DWYER: That's what I was going to ask you. It's contracted out, can we get a list of contractors? Is it only Target Marketing?

S. CROCKER: So, it is. We have an agency of record and that is Target. We've just completed an RFP recently for the renewal of our agency of record.

J. DWYER: Okay. And they were successful again?

S. CROCKER: I'm not sure if that has been all compiled to date.

J. DWYER: Okay.

S. CROCKER: Yeah, it hasn't been awarded to date.

J. DWYER: Okay.

What would be the money in 2.1.03, Strategic Product Development? What is the money in this section – be it part of the partnership funding we have seen in your department, partnering with IET? Can you provide a list of these partnership announcements and the amounts allocated?

S. CROCKER: Yeah, that would actually be a question for IET because we only feed into their processes. They hold the money. When the departments split, the funding exercise went to IET.

J. DWYER: Okay. So this department's not contributing any money?

S. CROCKER: No, we don't put money in. I get quotes in our news release.

J. DWYER: We're the think tank.

S. CROCKER: And we do get eyes on, like if it's a tourism-related proposal, it does come to TCAR for comment. But we're not a funding agency for those announcements.

J. DWYER: Okay.

One of the things that I noticed that in the mandate it says about competitive tourism products which demonstrate long-term economic value. I think that's where we should be headed with a lot of different places in rural Newfoundland it's about ecotourism and giving people a longer experience in certain areas, as opposed to a day trip. It could be a two- or three-day trip with implements on the trails and stuff that we're developing all the time, obviously, through our funding.

When it comes to this funding, are we re-funding existing projects or are we funding new initiatives, and what's the percentage for each?

S. CROCKER: Again, I think it would be some would be both. We can certainly try and get you that number. That would be IET's information.

J. DWYER: Okay.

S. CROCKER: But I think we could certainly endeavour to get some of that information for you.

CHAIR: MHA Dwyer, your time is up.

J. DWYER: Thank you.

CHAIR: We're going to pass it on. We can come back for more questions afterwards.

MHA Dinn.

J. DINN: Thank you.

With regard to the access and opportunity, I'm just wondering with regard to the T'Railways infrastructure and upkeep of bridges in particular, some of them are probably nearing their best before date, or if not passed it. I'm just wondering is that maintaining that infrastructure?

S. CROCKER: Yeah, good question.

Again, we work very closely with IET on this and IET works with ACOA and the T'Railway Council. We fund the council every year. I think it's \$150,000 worth of core funding that we give to the T'Railway Council, and they maintain – because right now, I think we're talking about the provincial park, the T'Railway Provincial Park, right across the Island.

J. DINN: Yeah.

S. CROCKER: Last year, through IET and the T'Railway Council, and I think ACOA, there was a study completed about the short-term, medium-term and long-term needs of that trail. You're absolutely correct that we were challenged. Every time we have an environmental event, primarily on the West Coast, you know we have washouts, the culverts are old, so there's a lot of work being done here.

I think two budgets ago, we increased the capital budget for the provincial park system as a whole, which the T'Railway is a part of, from \$50,000 to \$500,000. So we are now able to do more and more capital infrastructure work, not only on the T'Railway, but in our provincial parks. But it's a crucial piece of growing tourism. We see it more and more all the time.

Marine Atlantic will tell you the number of ATVs that are coming across the Gulf to do the Newfoundland Loop continues to grow. This year we worked with the T'Railway

Council actually, through an initiative that they came to us for. They wanted to charge non-residents a \$100 permit, so now if you come from outside the province and want to use the T'Railway, the T'Railway Provincial Park, there is a \$100 fee, and that money goes directly to the T'Railway, and is directly invested back. That has been met with no – we were the only trail in Eastern Canada that didn't have a non-resident fee. So now we have a \$100 non-resident fee, and that money goes directly back into the T'Railway Council.

J. DINN: I'm thinking of the old railway bridges across the Terra Nova River, or even across the Northwest River. There are beautiful spots. So there is a plan, more or less, to replace them if they need?

S. CROCKER: Yeah, so the study was completed. It's all contemplated. It's all very expensive. But, again, we have a really strong relationship with the T'Railway Council, and we'll continue to do so. By using the T'Railway Council as, I guess, somewhat of a governing body, they've done a really good job in leveraging ACOA and IET funding to do work on the T'Railway.

J. DINN: Thank you very much.

Since the *Tourist Accommodations Act* was amended last December, is it possible to provide us with the number of units registered and you may not be able to do it now, but preferably by unit size and region of the province?

S. CROCKER: Yes, that's something, certainly, MHA Dinn, we can delve down into for you.

I think in April of 2024, when we started the registration process, there were 700 registered accommodators in this province. It's been tremendously successful to the point that right now, there are 2,700 registered accommodators in this province.

So we now have a registry that was 700, that's now 2,700.

J. DINN: Thank you very much.

In 2.1.02, Sector Research, how many visitors did we receive in 2024 from the rest of Canada versus other countries? How do these numbers compare with 2023?

S. CROCKER: I'll turn that to Carol-Ann for that breakdown if you don't mind.

J. DINN: Sure thing.

C. GILLIARD: Combined with air and auto, last year we had approximately about 443,000 non-residents come to the province, about 80 per cent of that number came by air.

The number that we don't have included yet is the cruise numbers, and that would bring us in another, it could be 50,000 to 60,000. We don't have that calculation yet. So it's over 500,000 non-residents that came to the province last year.

J. DINN: Is there a breakdown then, between those who came from the rest of the country versus those from outside?

C. GILLIARD: We have estimates on the origins of people coming to the province, yes.

J. DINN: Would it be possible to have those numbers?

C. GILLIARD: We can certainly get those for you.

J. DINN: Thank you.

I guess overall then, how does that number compare with 2023?

C. GILLIARD: In 2024, we were down slightly, about 3 per cent in auto and air; I don't have the cruise. We probably broke even when we add in the cruise numbers,

but just air and auto was down about 3 per cent.

When you look at visitors to the province, it's made up of a number of different traveller types: you have business travellers, you have visiting friends and relatives. When you look at the vacation market, which is what we're trying to attract with our marketing dollars, we've seen year-over-year increases in that market and that's actually making up for losses in business travel, business events and a downturn in meetings and conventions.

J. DINN: Are you expecting this year, considering the turbulence in the United States, an increase or a decrease or status quo?

S. CROCKER: Face for radio; voice for the newspaper.

Early indications are it's going to be a very busy season, what we're hearing from our operators. An interesting thing we're hearing from some of our operators who deal with our US market and, bearing in mind that our primary US market is the eastern seaboard, there's a keen interest from Americans living on the eastern seaboard to still come to Newfoundland and Labrador or to Atlantic Canada.

We're reassuring them in any way, shape and form that we can that we're still welcoming because that's the type of question we've started to receive is, you know, can we come to Newfoundland and Labrador? Are you still welcome? The answer is, absolutely; you are 100 per cent welcome.

J. DINN: Good.

One last question, then: Does the department currently have any projections or forecasts regarding the number of tourists that new air routes to Europe will bring here?

S. CROCKER: It's tough to forecast. We do know that last year's link to London Gatwick was extremely successful.

Early indications are very strong sales on all of the new routes this year, continued strength in London Gatwick, a strength in Dublin but, very interestingly, the new St. John's-Paris flight into the first six or seven weeks of that announcement was one of WestJet's top three selling new routes for this upcoming season. We see, you know, incremental – it will be a slow go I would think, but that first direct link and the first ever time that we now have direct connectivity to continental Europe is something that has a lot of opportunities for this province.

J. DINN: Thank you. I'm done for this.

CHAIR: All right, MHA Dwyer.

J. DWYER: Are we going to vote on this section, 2.1.01 to 2.1.03? We can vote on that if you want.

CHAIR: All right.

I see no further questions, so I ask the Clerk to recall the grouping, please.

CLERK: 2.1.01 to 2.2.03 inclusive, Tourism.

CHAIR: Shall 2.1.01 to 2.2.03 carry?

J. DWYER: No. We just did 2.1.01 –

CHAIR: We're on 2.1.01 to 2.2.03; do you still have questions on that?

J. DWYER: No.

AN HON. MEMBER: Yes, you do.

CHAIR: Yes, you do? Okay.

J. DWYER: Oh, 2.2.03. Oh, okay.

Yes, here we go.

CHAIR: Yes.

So you still have questions? Okay.

J. DWYER: I thought it was 2.1 – I wasn't hearing it right. I'm sorry about that.

CHAIR: You go right ahead.

MHA Dwyer.

J. DWYER: Thank you.

Sorry about the confusion there, I wasn't picking up on the second point.

S. CROCKER: No worries.

J. DWYER: I got your answer there about the RFP closing on Marble Mountain, is there going to be a new RFP issued and when?

CHAIR: MHA Crocker.

S. CROCKER: There are no plans to do a new RFP. The RFP was out; it was well publicized.

I would put it in this context: We went through that process; there was a lot of due diligence, a lot of effort put into that process. It obviously wasn't successful, but from where I sit right now and I think where we are as a government, we are open to interest for Marble Mountain.

So if you know somebody who has interest in investing in what I think has great opportunity as a four-season resort, please send them our way. We're more than interested to talk to whomever might be interested in a purchase of Marble Mountain.

J. DWYER: Is there a market value assessment of the facility and would there be a minimum bid for an RFP?

S. CROCKER: That's something that would have to come out in a negotiation. I'm going

to be frank with you, it would be really based on a business case.

The actual price tag on Marble Mountain, to me, has a lot more to do with what we can get of future economic value from Marble Mountain. If somebody came to me and had a good – I say me, but to the department – I would be willing to come forward with anything that continues a successful Marble Mountain.

I don't think anybody thinks that we're going to go out and get a major price tag for Marble Mountain, but I think, what we want for Marble Mountain, what we want for that region of the province, is the ability to continue to maintain the economic value. The 120 jobs, that's where I see the value in Marble Mountain.

J. DWYER: That was the reason for the question, really, was to extend the value, I guess, to whoever's going to be bidding, to understand that it is a four-season resort and that it does have great value.

Did Marble Mountain make any money this past season? You did indicate in the interview that the seasons are getting shorter.

S. CROCKER: No, Marble Mountain is obviously not turning a profit. The seasons are getting shorter, challenges around operating a ski hill are increasing – because of the economic value that it brings to the West Coast of the province and social value and recreational value as well, because it is a tremendous recreational facility for people who live on the West Coast, and people throughout the entire Island to enjoy. But it doesn't turn a profit, as you can see in the binder.

J. DWYER: It is absolutely a beautiful facility and, again, I hope we do get good value in return for our investment.

In recent years capital works has been going on at Marble Mountain. Last year

there was a significant operational issue at the mountain, yet the Estimates document indicates that the capital repairs came in right on budget. I ask, is this the actual capital repair number for the fiscal year?

S. CROCKER: Yeah, they would have to work within their capital budget. So they would submit to the department a capital budget plan. As was in Wednesday's budget, we've allocated \$850,000 for capital this year, so in the coming weeks we will get their capital plan for 2025-2026.

J. DWYER: So once they receive that capital, once the capital's exhausted, does the work just stop?

S. CROCKER: Well, obviously it's run by an effective board of directors and CEOs. So yeah, they budget within their means. Now, that's not to say that Marble Mountain may not come to us throughout the year and say, look, there's a capital expenditure here and here's a business case why we could do that capital expenditure. But yeah, right now they have an \$850,000 capital budget for '25-'26 and obviously they will have to plan within that budget.

J. DWYER: Are all our provincial parks now solar and carbon-friendly? And what is the capital cost to finish this work if it's not already completed?

S. CROCKER: I'm going to quickly turn to Carol-Ann, I think.

CHAIR: Carol-Ann.

C. GILLIARD: Yes, we made an effort a few years ago to get the last three parks off diesel generators. They were equipped with solar at that time. So they are.

J. DWYER: Okay. So there are no more ongoing equipment that needs to be bought for any more provincial parks to be off diesel?

C. GILLIARD: No.

J. DWYER: Okay, perfect, thank you. That's a great answer.

S. CROCKER: (Inaudible) tell the ADM she gives great answers. I don't hear you saying I give great answers.

J. DWYER: I'll save you for the end just in case, because you're doing more answers.

S. CROCKER: You do have the bouquet over there somewhere?

J. DWYER: Moving to Pippy Park, the doubling the capital budget for the park, is that for the preparations for the Canada Games and will these upgrades be completed in time for the games?

CHAIR: MHA Crocker.

S. CROCKER: Yes, so last year we invested \$900,000 – I was going to say \$900 million – for capital upgrades at Pippy and this \$450,000, this year, is to complete some of that work that's the addition of – this year, we're going to see a pickleball court – North America's fastest growing sport – some renos on Mount Scio Road, some new office furniture, an accessibility ramp for our front entrance and just some general repairs and maintenance around their headquarters and offices. This investment in last year's budget was about making sure the park is ready for 2025.

J. DWYER: Can we get a list of those specific upgrades?

S. CROCKER: Absolutely.

J. DWYER: Okay, thank you.

I'm stopping at that.

Thank you.

CHAIR: So you're finished for this section?

J. DWYER: Yes.

CHAIR: MHA Dinn, you don't have any further questions?

So I'm going to ask the Clerk to recall the subheadings, please.

CLERK: 2.1.01 to 2.2.03 inclusive, Tourism.

CHAIR: Shall 2.1.01 to 2.2.03 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subheads 2.1.01 through 2.2.03 carried.

CHAIR: All right, I'm going to ask the Clerk to call the next set of subheadings, please.

CLERK: 3.1.01 to 3.1.07 inclusive, Arts and Culture.

CHAIR: 3.1.01 to 3.1.07, and we're going to start the next round of questions, MHA Dwyer.

J. DWYER: Thank you, Chair.

Arts and Culture Centres: Are any of our Arts and Culture Centres in need of any significant repairs and are all up to code with our new accessibility legislation?

S. CROCKER: The physical properties are properties of Transportation and Infrastructure. So any upgrades or any infrastructure requests that we have for the ACCs go through TI.

There is always work that can be done. You know, we've leveraged some Heritage Canada money, I think, last year for some upgrades. We've been doing upgrades as we can, but in fairness, like all government infrastructure, there are always needs but we've made improvements.

I know in Gander we had a major challenge around air conditioning and HVAC that we were able to fix. We do address the needs as we can. Obviously, there's always work to be done, but I think our ACCs are operating in a very good fashion and are well positioned.

J. DWYER: Does any money come out of the TCAR budget to go to TI to get any of that work done?

S. CROCKER: So that would be in TI's budget. I guess, in a weird way, we're just the leaseholder when it comes to – we're the occupant. We're the operator of the facility but they are TI's buildings.

J. DWYER: So our funding when it comes to them is about programming and staffing more than it is about the bricks and mortar we'll say.

S. CROCKER: You nailed it.

J. DWYER: Okay.

S. CROCKER: We're the operator.

J. DWYER: Okay.

3.1.02, Arts, Heritage and Historic Development: Was the work on the Arts and Culture Centre at Point Amour Lighthouse completed and on budget and what work is ongoing for this fiscal year?

S. CROCKER: I would anticipate that the work in Point Amour would have been a TI project, but I would anticipate that it was completed and I would anticipate it came in on budget. It was a public tendering process.

J. DWYER: Okay.

Is that something you could provide?

S. CROCKER: Yeah, we could probably look into for you, MHA Dwyer. It's probably

a question of TI but yeah, we can probably see if we can derive it from them.

J. DWYER: Sure.

In 3.1.03, Newfoundland and Labrador Arts Council, why was there a \$3-million decrease?

S. CROCKER: There wasn't a decrease. It was a decrease year over year. They've maintained their \$5-million budget. That was an infusion for Year of the Arts.

J. DWYER: Was there any money announced for the Cultural Economic Development Program, arts infrastructure and the programming fund?

S. CROCKER: Absolutely, and you can turn around and say a big thank you to the person behind you because she did announce on Wednesday a \$1-million increase to CEDP this fiscal year, with an additional \$1-million increase to CEDP in the next fiscal year.

So, year over year, there will be a \$2-million increase in CEDP. In Year of the Arts, we introduced the AIP, Arts Infrastructure Program, as a pilot project. It was successful. We funded 90 projects. This year, we were able to make that a permanent program.

J. DWYER: Perfect. It's always good when there's money being set aside and the program works.

So our built heritage is still evaporating and, once again, there's no increase in the budget. Why is that?

S. CROCKER: You're right. We have many challenges around built heritage. We do quarterly meetings with all of our agencies and boards that are responsible for this department. They are ongoing conversations.

I could take about an hour to go through this answer but it's extremely challenging to make sure that we're focusing our funding in the right place when it comes to this. The executive director would sit here and he'd tell you the same thing. We're looking at ways now how to modernize that and I think that act is –

OFFICIAL: It's outdated.

S. CROCKER: Yeah, the act is decades and decades dated.

Other jurisdictions have been finding ways to minimize the loss of built heritage while realizing there's no way that we will be able to continue to maintain every single piece of built heritage. It's just impossible. So modernization of the act is certainly something that we're working with them now to review. Very similar to what we did last year with ArtsNL and their act to modernize it because, obviously, it does need a modernization.

J. DWYER: So we can expect some legislation in an upcoming session of the House?

S. CROCKER: I would say yes. In an upcoming session of the House you will see an updated act.

J. DWYER: Okay, thank you.

Celebrate NL: Can we have a list of the grants that have been given out under the program last year and can we get the expenditures included in that?

S. CROCKER: Yeah, absolutely.

J. DWYER: Okay, thank you.

The \$1 million for the Trail of the Caribou commemoration ensuring young Newfoundlanders and Labradorians remember generations of sacrifice; how many young students will benefit from this funding?

S. CROCKER: So this is, I guess, an announcement that Premier Furey made last year around the 100th anniversary of the War Memorial and the repatriation of the Unknown Soldier, that we would expand the program to 100 students starting this year.

We are actually on track to do that, and I want to take a moment to thank the deputy minister and all the staff that are planning that, simply because we're going from, I think, 32 students previously that would go on the annual pilgrimage to 100 students this year. So that is quite the challenge.

J. DWYER: A nightmare for logistics.

S. CROCKER: That's quite the challenge in itself, bearing in mind we need approximately, to accommodate 100 students, 40 chaperones. So this is a big piece of logistic work and, again, we've made the commitment in this year's budget to raise the funding allocation to \$1 million going forward. Again, this year's budget is the first time that we've had committed funding for Gallipoli, for Turkey.

J. DWYER: Yes.

S. CROCKER: Previously, we've done what has become now an annual pilgrimage to Turkey in September. Now we have permanent funding for that.

That program will not be the same as the pilgrimage because certainly the numbers and Turkey brings its own challenges when it comes to navigating and how you work in that system, but there is now a commitment here as well, to an annual pilgrimage to Turkey.

J. DWYER: Okay. So we're looking at 100 students benefitting, 40 chaperones and does the chaperones include the staff from the department?

S. CROCKER: No.

There will obviously be staff from the department present. The deputy minister, at the end of the day, is the lead tour guide but no and I don't put light to that. The department is certainly on the ground and takes its responsibility to these people seriously.

That is the responsibility of the people, because the department, we don't hold any of these student allotments in the department. Historic Sites Association is our biggest partner. We also partner now with the Rangers. We partner with the Royal Canadian Legion. So those are our three partners – oh sorry, yes. The minister behind you, Indigenous Affairs also now has a piece of it so we have four partners that provide us with the students.

J. DWYER: Last year was certainly a proud year for our province in the repatriation of our Unknown Soldier and the upgrading to our war memorial. What is the cost currently for maintaining security on our National War Memorial?

S. CROCKER: That's not information that I would have; that's a TI question.

Again, it's no different than any other physical asset of the province, it's in TI's responsibility.

J. DWYER: Would that be shared with the federal government?

S. CROCKER: No.

We do talk and have regular communications with the federal government on a number of initiatives around the War Memorial, but that is first and foremost Newfoundland and Labrador's National War Memorial so we won't cede any responsibilities for that one.

J. DWYER: Okay.

Last year – actually, with that 26 seconds I'll start at the next section.

S. CROCKER: If I could quickly add, we did last year add the National War Memorial to our provincial historic sites inventory. It is also now a provincial historic site so it will benefit from programs within our provincial historic sites.

J. DWYER: Okay. Thank you.

CHAIR: Okay, we're going to move on to MHA Dinn now.

J. DINN: Thank you.

3.1.01, Arts and Culture Centres: Is there any money under this subheading currently going to *Come From Away* for this year and how much did they receive last year?

S. CROCKER: Year one of *Come From Away*, I think our investment, MHA Dinn, was – I'm going to fool this up; I'm going to say it anyway – approximately \$1.5 million. In year one of *Come From Away*, we were the holder. We produced it. We invested a lot. We did upgrades in Gander. We sold out all shows.

Last year, the commitment to *Come From Away* was approximately \$1 million. You Are Here Inc. took over the operations last year of *Come From Away* and we provided them with a \$1 million grant. This year, You Are Here Inc. has received a half a million dollar investment from government, but I'll take a moment to just get this on the record: Michael Rubinoff, Jillian Keiley, the folks that have produced *Come From Away* in Gander, have done a tremendous job.

When we sat down with them three years ago and said the province now owns the only licensed production on earth. We have the only licence to do a licensed reproduction. We hold the licence and we entrusted them with the licence in saying we'll get you off the ground in year one. Year two, we brought them back to a million; year three, we're bringing them back to 500,000 and they're standing on their

own. Sold out; we have not had a show yet in two years that hasn't been sold out.

J. DINN: Thank you very much. That's excellent to hear.

Would it be possible to have, under 3.1.02, Arts, Heritage and Historic Development, a list of the facilities receiving funding and the amounts for each as well?

S. CROCKER: Absolutely.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Will there be any work budgeted this year for improvements to or restorations of provincial heritage sites? I think you said that – if I heard you correctly – it may not be able to maintain all built heritage, but I'm just curious as which heritage sites will receive improvements?

S. CROCKER: I think there are two there. There are provincial historic sites, which are our responsibility. Again, and I'm not throwing the load over on TI, but our provincial historic sites are actually maintained and property of Transportation and Infrastructure. They're provincially owned assets.

The built heritage piece is different. That's done through Heritage NL. Back to MHA Dwyer's question, their budget was maintained. So they will continue to work through their budget.

J. DINN: Thank you very much.

3.1.03, Newfoundland and Labrador Arts Council: I think you sort of addressed this in my colleague's question, but many artists were pleased with the \$2-million boost to grant funding in 2024 for Year of the Arts, because inflation had eaten away at the previous increases made by government. I know it was the Year of the Arts, but why not make that increase permanent?

S. CROCKER: Valid question, absolutely.

The commitment that we've made to the arts, it's been a commitment that hasn't been seen previously in the province, bringing ArtsNL up to \$5.5 million. They've done a tremendous job this year with taking a real hard look at their own programming and they're in, I guess, year one of a new structure. We met with them earlier this week. We're in a good spot. They were very pleased to see the additional commitment to CEDP, as well as the continuing commitment to the AIP.

We're working again, through that division, to align our programs to make sure that going forward – absolutely, budget increases obviously will become necessary, but, in the meantime, to align our programs so that we're getting the biggest impact from our dollars and making sure that the biggest beneficiary from the investments that we're making – close to \$10 million, I would easily say over \$10 million, in direct grants either through the province or through ArtsNL, to make sure we're getting the best impact and that that money is landing in the place we want it, which is in the pockets of artists.

J. DINN: Okay. So those discussions are ongoing.

S. CROCKER: Absolutely.

J. DINN: Okay, perfect.

With regard to 3.1.05, Celebrate NL, how many people are currently employed here?

S. CROCKER: Six.

J. DINN: With regard to security for the War Memorial, has there ever been any discussion with regard to the armed forces taking on some of those responsibilities throughout the year as well?

S. CROCKER: Those are ongoing discussions around a sentry program. I said in response to another question, we're not going to cede the authority for our War Memorial to Canada. But with that being

said, there are two National War Memorials in Canada, one in Ottawa and one in St. John's. So we do regularly remind our federal colleagues that we do expect a similar treatment to the National War Memorial in Ottawa.

So those are ongoing discussions.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Under 3.1.07, Arts and Culture Centres' infrastructure, are there any significant renovations planned for Arts and Culture Centres this year?

S. CROCKER: Again, significant investment in our Arts and Culture Centres would again come from Transportation and Infrastructure. Again, the staff at the ACCs have done a good job. I think we received \$1 million last year in Heritage Canada funding for some improvements.

We always look for those opportunities to do within but, obviously, major renovations, major capital expenditures would come from Transportation and Infrastructure.

J. DINN: If I may ask it another way. Have you identified any major improvements that Transportation and Infrastructure should carry out if you were the operator?

S. CROCKER: We would absolutely have identified them, and I can certainly get you a list of things that we would have identified.

J. DINN: Perfect, excellent.

That's it for me, Chair.

CHAIR: That's it for you?

MHA Dwyer.

J. DWYER: Thank you.

Just a couple of clue-up questions

Now that we've gone through the 75th Year of Confederation and the Year of the Arts, what are the final numbers that are accounted for now that these events are no longer active?

S. CROCKER: Sorry?

J. DWYER: Like, how much money did we spend on these events and was all the funding exhausted, I guess, is what I getting at?

S. CROCKER: Obviously, the funding pots would have exhausted on March 31, but we did invest, over two fiscal years, approximately \$16 million over those two fiscal years because there was investment in '23-'24 and '24-'25. Fiscal years fool me up.

J. DWYER: Yes.

The other one – so what other celebrations are Celebrate NL funding with their \$5-million budget this year?

S. CROCKER: The Year of Sport – they are the biggest single contributor to Year of Sport. You know, there are ongoing commitments. We're funding a cultural festival this year where we incorporate arts and culture into the Canada Summer Games. So we provided the Canada Summer Games with a half-million-dollar grant for that program. They're a funder of the ECMAs, which are happening here in a couple of weeks.

Any more, Carol?

J. DWYER: There you go.

CHAIR: Caroline.

C. ORSBORN: A big part of our mandate is event attraction, too, so we're looking at events to bring here to the province. As the minister mentioned, ECMAs is coming in May. Also, the Brier is a big event that we were very pleased to win that bid. So that

will be happening February 2026. That is part of this fiscal, so that will have to be paid out.

We also were successful with the Women's U18 Hockey championships, which will be happening in November, so that will have to be paid out this fiscal. There are a number of events we're also exploring with our partners right now and obviously, until they're announced, we can't say what they are, but we're working hard to attract events to the province.

J. DWYER: I know that there was an announced for the Allan Cup to be coming to CBS. Are we funding that in any way?

C. ORSBORN: No, we weren't involved with that.

J. DWYER: Okay.

Moving on to 3.1.06, last year you indicated that we were heading for a record-setting year. Did we achieve record numbers?

CHAIR: Minister Crocker.

S. CROCKER: At The Rooms?

J. DWYER: Yes.

S. CROCKER: Last year, The Rooms welcomed over 150,000 visitors, which was an 8 per cent increase over '23-'24 and memberships, more importantly, have grown by 19 per cent to 1,800 members in '24-'25.

The Rooms continues to be a success story without a doubt. Last year, thanks to MHA Abbott, we were able to provide funding through Transportation and Infrastructure for a five-year, \$5-million commitment for infrastructure upgrades.

J. DWYER: We were glad to work with Minister Abbott on that at that time, too.

Commitment to the Ocean Ranger legacy, is that reflected in the budget?

S. CROCKER: That's an ongoing discussion. That's a very important, very interesting project that's going to take some time. The Rooms has to be a very important part of that conversation. We have a person from the department who, I guess, liaisons with the committee, but that's an important project that we're continuing to work on.

This is early stages. There's some timeline in front of that yet. Transfer between museum to museum is not always simple and involves some negotiation.

J. DWYER: Yes, but there's also a lot of protocol that needs to take place and that's –

S. CROCKER: 100 per cent.

J. DWYER: When we were at the initial meeting at the Marine Institute I believe that one of the people, I guess, that were in the caucus of the government of the day committed to fully funding a certain project or to be on board and partner with this.

S. CROCKER: Certainly on board to partner and certainly supportive, but we have to figure out what it is, the infrastructure required.

For starters, it has to be a transfer from museum to museum. Museums will not transfer to government; they will transfer to a museum. So it will be, you know, the museum in Ottawa working with The Rooms. Some of these artifacts are quite large – extremely large.

So there's still a lot of work to do here. We want to be a part of it; we will be a part of it, but there is still a lot of work to be done here on how we actually do this and receive it. What the actual transfer looks like – there is some serious timelines in front of us.

J. DWYER: Yeah. The reason why I asked it under this subhead is for the simple fact that I know about the transfer from museum to museum protocols and stuff like that. It's very important that we get this right, but I think that this is the right place to have it.

I think the other thing is that, when we're looking at it, I think it needs to be housed in its own bricks and mortar type of thing as opposed to being lumped into something else, because I think it's something that, significantly, is a part of our heritage, but it's also something that's significantly changed the oil and gas industry.

S. CROCKER: Absolutely. I couldn't agree more.

The way I see this, you know, I'm not trying to do the vision of the committee or the group doing this but I think they see this in a lot of ways as similar to the sealing museum in Elliston in the way that this is not necessarily a project of government. This could be a project of government, industry, foundations and others and I think from my knowledge around this, that is a model that I think they're exploring, similar to the sealer's memorial museum in Elliston.

J. DWYER: I just want to be on record that we're committed to working with the Ocean Ranger Legacy group.

This is the second year of the government's five-year commitment for capital improvements at The Rooms. What are the capital improvements planned for this fiscal year?

S. CROCKER: Okay, so all I have at this point is the summary of last year's plan but, obviously, they would now work on their plan because, obviously, post-budget. They have to bring it to the board, and the board, I don't think has approved the capital plan yet for '25-'26. We can certainly provide that when it becomes available.

J. DWYER: Okay, I'd appreciate that. Thank you.

That's it for this section. I'll be ready for Film and Television next.

CHAIR: MHA Dinn, do you have any further questions?

J. DINN: No.

CHAIR: All right.

I ask the Clerk to recall the grouping, please.

CLERK: 3.1.01 to 3.1.07 inclusive, Arts and Culture.

CHAIR: Shall 3.1.01 to 3.1.07 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subheads 3.1.01 through 3.1.07, carried.

CHAIR: I ask the Clerk to call the next set of subheadings.

CLERK: 4.1.01 to 4.2.03 inclusive, Film, Television and Recreation.

CHAIR: 4.1.01 to 4.2.03; we will start the questions.

MHA Dwyer.

J. DWYER: How many jobs are believed to be currently active in our film industry in the last two years?

CHAIR: MHA Crocker.

S. CROCKER: I think the employment number is sustaining around 1,200 – 1,455 FTEs.

J. DWYER: Last year, we talked about how hard it was to capture the value in TV and film, yet we see glowing numbers all the time to support further investment. Can we see the analysis of how government calculates this value?

S. CROCKER: There is an ACOA report that we can certainly get you a copy of.

J. DWYER: Thank you.

Last year, we highlighted as well, that many of these productions were delinquent in terms of their payments as per these agreements. Have we received these payments and is government doing anything to recoup this money? What is still outstanding?

S. CROCKER: I know not of you speak. Delinquent in –

J. DWYER: Isn't there a repayment program for upfront costs?

S. CROCKER: The equity program?

J. DWYER: Yes.

S. CROCKER: The equity program returns –

J. DWYER: They get 40 per cent of their production costs, isn't it?

S. CROCKER: Yes, but that's a tax credit – that's an All-Spend Tax Credit. That's not money that they receive; that's purely based on receipt. They don't get that money until they provide us with receipt. If they don't spend it, they don't get it.

J. DWYER: So we reannounced also the \$10 million for continued support for the film and TV industry and it's an equity investment program. How many

applications did we receive and how many were actually approved?

S. CROCKER: There were 37 supported through the equity program in the last fiscal, four were large-budget series: *Hudson and Rex*, *Son of a Critch*, *Saint-Pierre* and *Reacher*. We had one feature film, 20 low-budget television films, seven documentary and six shorts.

J. DWYER: Was the program funding exhausted?

S. CROCKER: Yes.

J. DWYER: I'm moving on to Sport and Recreation.

There have been numerous announcements through our recreation sport and physical activity in the last few months. Increased money for Active NL is one example, but yet, we're not seeing this reflected in the budget this year.

Minister, what line should we look at to see the increases for Active NL, the four-plex study, the dome, Newfoundland and Labrador Games, Labrador Winter Games and the list goes on. Is the future funding in future budgets?

S. CROCKER: There's a lot in there I'm going to try and unpack: 4.2.01.10, you will see Active NL is reflected in that grant. Your next question was around the multiplex?

J. DWYER: The four-plex and the dome.

S. CROCKER: Again, that's TI. The four-plex, that's a TI investment; I think that was outlined in the budget on Monday.

When you go to 4.2.02, you would see an increase there for operations of the Fortis centre and the well-being dome. Yeah, in 4.2.02, that increase there in operating for the Newfoundland and Labrador Sports Centre would reflect the Fortis centre and the dome.

J. DWYER: Okay.

What about the Newfoundland and Labrador Games programs and the Labrador Winter Games?

S. CROCKER: The Labrador Games would fall into the Department of Labrador Affairs, and the increase to the Newfoundland and Labrador Games program would fall into 4.2.01.10. That was the \$350,000 increase.

J. DWYER: Okay.

There are a lot of people, I guess, talk in the street. There are some people who think that the Aquarena will be ready on time and others feel that it might not be. Will this facility be ready for the Canada Games and will our athletes be able to train there prior to the Games opening?

S. CROCKER: It will be ready for the Games.

I have to take a moment just to give MUN a big shout-out for the work that they've done in this. There are a lot of skeptics, a lot of people on the street that didn't think that MUN would ever pull this off, but they pulled it off. There's water in the pool. Things are looking shipshape down there. There's still some work to be done.

It's always our intention to support TeamNL, but I can assure you that we've made allocations if TeamNL needs to go outside to train, go outside to qualify, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador's responsibility to the Canada Summer Games is to TeamNL, and we will not shirk our responsibility to TeamNL.

J. DWYER: Is that money reflected in the budget this year?

S. CROCKER: Yes, it's reflected, actually, annually. We put money every year ramping up to Canada Games programs, every single year. It's a four-year cycle, and it

ramps as you get closer. So our program of excellence increases.

Our program of excellence is actually done independently, so sometimes there's some controversies around, you know, why didn't this team receive or that team. That's done independently on the, I guess, our version of Own the Podium.

J. DWYER: Okay.

Is the Aquarena then on budget, or had they gone over budget on repairs?

S. CROCKER: No, certainly not.

J. DWYER: So it was tendered, and then it came in under tender.

S. CROCKER: It's tendered, awarded and nearing completion.

J. DWYER: Okay.

Where can we find the \$500,000 that was announced for the Year of Sport?

S. CROCKER: Any money that was announced for Year of Sport is in Celebrate NL's \$5 million.

J. DWYER: Okay.

Then under your sports centres, the increase there, is that just salaries?

S. CROCKER: What tab is that?

J. DWYER: 4.2.02.

S. CROCKER: No, that's the increase of operations for the Fortis centre. Newfoundland and Labrador Sports Centre will operate once the Fortis centre is completed and the keys are turned over. It will be operated by the Newfoundland and Labrador Sports Centre as would be the dome.

J. DWYER: And that's the situation where it's going to be utilized for Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services in the daytime.

S. CROCKER: That's the dome.

J. DWYER: And then in the evening it's –

S. CROCKER: Yeah, the Sports Centre will utilize it as a turf facility, and obviously, the Sports Centre will also operate the new Fortis centre.

J. DWYER: And we're still staying away from being competitive with the private operators that were already in place?

S. CROCKER: Absolutely. There are tons of opportunity out there, and this is about more soft surface.

J. DWYER: Are capital expenditures on time and on budget?

S. CROCKER: Again, that's a TI question, but I know the Fortis centre is all but completed. I think TI is actually right now, if not already completed, doing the final walkthroughs of the Fortis centre, and we should actually have the keys to the Fortis centre in the coming days. Maybe two or three weeks.

J. DWYER: Okay.

One of the things that has come to my attention over the last couple years, I guess, is one thing that we don't really support going outside the province, nationally or internationally, is darts for their travel. I just think that that's a missed opportunity because they're going everywhere with the logos of Newfoundland and Labrador. Sometimes their whole shirt is draped of a Newfoundland flag.

I just think that the travel subsidy that has been afforded, I guess, to other sports teams that are representing Newfoundland and Labrador, both nationally and

internationally, I think that's a great opportunity that is being missed, not to help out our dart players. So I'm just wondering if we have any initiative to look at that.

S. CROCKER: That's something we can refer back to SportNL. Our funding for travel is done through the PSOs, and the PSOs, obviously, are governed by SportNL. But, yeah, we could certainly bring that back to SportNL for them to have a look at. But they are the governing body of the PSOs.

J. DWYER: My very last question, while I have 40 seconds left, is about our tourism enhancement fund. Has that been kept at the \$13-million level, or did we go back to the \$5-million level?

S. CROCKER: Tourism enhancement?

J. DWYER: Yeah.

S. CROCKER: That was a one-time program coming out of COVID.

J. DWYER: Yeah, and so the thing is, we're finding now with a lot of our hoteliers, that their shoulder season, I guess from Christmas to Easter, is a little bit drastic in many areas. Is there an initiative to help them get over that burden?

S. CROCKER: So that was a one-time initiative that we did coming out of COVID. That was a one-time program. Again, if a hotel operator was expanding or doing something in that area, that would be a conversation with IET.

J. DWYER: Okay.

S. CROCKER: But, you know, you did see supports in this week's budget for our hospitality industry, whether it's the important commitment to our restaurant sector. Our local restaurant sector is in a very precarious situation at the moment, and you did see the long, long requested from Hospitality Newfoundland and Labrador for the decrease at NLC. I can tell

you, industry is very thankful. That was a long-time piece of funding that they've been looking for a break on.

J. DWYER: Okay, that's it for my questions. But I'll have some closing remarks.

CHAIR: Thank you, MHA Dwyer.

MHA Dinn.

J. DINN: Thank you.

I know you've touched on this already, but with regard to the number of television and film productions that are expected to produce in the province this year – I know you've listed a number, but are there any new ones being proposed, other than, let's say, I think *Saint-Pierre*, *Son of a Critch* –

S. CROCKER: Rex.

Yeah, there's nothing new in the hopper that we're aware of this year. This is not a complaint; this is a good situation to find ourselves in. We need to continue to grow our capacity because when I came in this role four years ago, we were shooting one series at a time. We regularly now have *Hudson and Rex* and *Son of a Critch* filming at the same time.

Our industry is working really well together because last year, for example, *St. Pierre* shot pre-*Son of a Critch* and post-*Son of a Critch*, because getting the infrastructure that's needed to shoot these two big shows at the same time is challenging.

So we see great co-operation within the industry and the role for CNA and the film school, I think graduated 80 students last year. It's at pretty much capacity. The human resource challenge is there, and we need to grow that. What's extremely encouraging in that is the fact that we are now practically, other than the dead of winter, we always have something filming. This year, our industry is going to be able to accommodate what I would think would be

Rex and *Son of a Critch* filming pretty much at the same time as Netflix filming.

So it's stressful, I think, for the industry, but that's what helps grow the industry, and making sure that those jobs are not just one series at a time, but so those people can go series to series to series.

J. DINN: Thanks.

I had the opportunity to visit both the sets of *Son of a Critch* and *St. Pierre*, so it's pretty impressive, I guess, in the use of the buildings that are no longer being warehouses. I'm assuming at some point maybe there is infrastructure that – building their own, I guess, film production sites.

S. CROCKER: Yes, we've seen – and I'm not going to try and find the company name. The owners of *St. Pierre* actually purchased a very large building out off Topsail Road for their sound stage, and that's encouraging, when you see locals investing in buildings. That's a commitment to industry. I know Alan Hawco is a major part of that purchase, and others, but when we see that type of investment, when we see locals actually going out and buying these buildings, it shows a commitment to industry.

J. DINN: It's impressive indeed.

What's the budget for market development awareness activities out of this field, and the investment –?

S. CROCKER: Yes, so that's all done through PictureNL. They do a tremendous job. They attend trade shows and film events all around the world, whether it's Berlin, TIFF, Ireland this past year, London. So they travel the world selling Newfoundland and Labrador to perspective studios.

J. DINN: Perfect.

4.1.02, Newfoundland and Labrador Film Development Corporation, Capital: Is it possible to have a list of the film development companies that received funding, along with total amounts from this pocket?

S. CROCKER: Yes.

J. DINN: Some of the other ones have been asked and answered. One last question, then. There have been a number of high-profile cases of abuse in sports by coaches and other professionals. I'm just wondering what mechanisms does SportNL have to prevent such cases, and to deal with them properly once they arise?

S. CROCKER: Yeah, so that's a really good question and one that we talked a lot about going into Year of Sport and something that needs to be highlighted when we talk about sport.

Through an initiative of the federal government and my colleagues across Canada, the federal government mandated a third party mechanism. They offered one through the feds, but they also gave us the opportunity to go out and solicit our own third party adjudicator through SportNL.

We provided SportNL funding last year for safe sport. We'll continue that funding. But there is a new formal, third party complaint mechanism now in place.

J. DINN: Okay, thank you.

That's it for me.

CHAIR: Any more questions, MHA Dwyer?

All right, I ask the Clerk to call the final tally.

CLERK: 4.1.01 to 4.2.03 inclusive, Film, Television and Recreation.

CHAIR: Shall 4.1.01 to 4.2.03 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subheads 4.1.01 through 4.2.03 carried.

CHAIR: Shall the total carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation, total heads, carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report the Estimates of the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation carried?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, Estimates of the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation carried without amendment.

CHAIR: This is the conclusion of this session. I'd like to thank the minister and department and all the officials for coming today, and of course the Clerks for their time.

I ask the minister now if he'd like to have some closing remarks.

S. CROCKER: I'll turn it over to MHA Dwyer first, or MHA Dinn, or anybody else if they'd like to –

CHAIR: MHA Dwyer.

J. DWYER: Again, I'd like to thank the staff and I'd like to thank the minister for his answers today. They're not answers – like some are stats and stuff that yeah, you have to read out. But being in tune with the department and working with me on a regular basis, I really do appreciate it. It's a very open and forthright relationship that I believe in the things and the initiatives that we're doing.

Just one example was being at the HNL conference; it's such an important conference but just the spirit of what our operators are offering and the support that we're giving them, I think it makes a big difference with developing our industry and our department going from a billion-dollar industry to a \$2-billion industry, I think, in short time.

There are lots of good initiatives. There are lots of things that need improvement, and we can continue to work on, but the whole point that I'm trying to make is that as long as we keep the communication open, I don't think there's anybody got cornered on all good ideas.

Like I said, it's about working together and it's about making sure that the taxpayers' money, we're getting three nickels out of every dime, I guess. Like I said, that's a reflection of your staff and making sure that they're fiscally responsible.

Again, I'd like to thank everybody for being here, especially the Finance Minister because the increase in funding to this department is well warranted. But we would have gotten free coffee off the minister if it hadn't been for the NDP asking so many questions.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

J. DWYER: I'm just joking.

It was a great process and to do this year after year shows that the progression of the department and I'm glad where things are going and willing to work on anything else that we can support as well.

Thank you very much for your time, everybody, and I appreciate it.

CHAIR: MHA Dinn, closing remarks.

J. DINN: I think the record will show that we probably asked fewer questions than our colleagues to the left and certainly, last night, what drove us into overtime was not the NDP but, hey, who's counting.

I do want to thank the minister and his staff. I know that when we look at some of the other portfolios whether it's housing or health care, you know how crucial those are. I will say in sort of diversifying the economy and moving beyond, when you look at the basics of what we lived on, what we produce so far in our history this is about, I guess – not an intellectual but that kind of specialized skill that we will grow, we can only grow and it's a beautiful province that has so much diverse scenery, not only for visiting, but also for filming.

I guess the best part of looking at any film produced here is figuring out where the location is at the time, and if I really know it. It's impressive to go into some of these facilities and the film industry on Topsail Road is impressive, not only the actors, but the trades people and the professionals around there and you look at the skills that are being developed there.

Tourism, again, who would have thought that we would have a cruise ship industry here, but we do. The War Memorial is probably one of the significant highlights for sure. For me personally, I think being part of the delegation to Gallipoli was, well, one that still sits with me. Having students being able to go over there as part of the Trail of

the Caribou, I think is significant. It's not until we've learned about it.

I've been to Vimy Ridge. I've taught about when it came to Gallipoli or Beaumont-Hamel but it's not until you walk on the sands where young Newfoundlanders fought and died and you see people there not much older than those I taught in high school that you realize just the significance of the sacrifice.

To me, you are department that is the front-facing part of the province in many ways and you're bringing Newfoundland to the world. To me, that's an important part. I thank you for your work and for answering the questions today.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Minister Crocker.

S. CROCKER: Thank you to my colleagues this morning for sitting through the Estimates. I think this is the tenth time I've done this, and you never know if it's your last. Premier Ball always used to say, the best time to understand your department is through the Estimates process, to sit down and spend that amount of time actually having to review everything that happens in the department.

Listen, this department is a very important piece of the fabric of Newfoundland and Labrador. It's certainly been my pleasure to serve in this chair for almost four years, but again, thank you to the Committee. Thank you to the staff. They do all the hard work; I'm just the good-looking face of it all.

Again, thank you to everybody here this morning and thank you to the Committee and we look forward to continuing the budget debate in the coming weeks.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister Crocker.

That concludes the Estimates. The next meeting is Tuesday, April 15, at 6 p.m., and that's Environment and Climate Change.

I'm going to call now for a motion to adjourn

Moved by Minister Coady, seconded by MHA Forsey.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

Enjoy the rest of your day, everybody. Thank you for attending.

On motion, the Committee adjourned.