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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: Scott Reid, MHA

Vice-Chair: Craig Pardy, MHA

Members: Pleaman Forsey, MHA
Sherry Gambin-Walsh, MHA
Jordan Brown, MHA
Perry Trimper, MHA
Lucy Stoyles, MHA

Clerk of the Committee: Mark Jerrett (A)

Appearing:

Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation

Hon. Steve Crocker, MHA, Minister
Jamie O'Dea, Deputy Minister
Ben Gardner, Assistant Deputy Minister
Carol-Ann Gilliard, Assistant Deputy Minister
Gerry Osmond, Assistant Deputy Minister
Caroline Orsborn, Executive Director, Celebrate NL
Jennifer Torrville, Departmental Controller
Adrienne Luther, Director of Communications

Also Present

Hon. Paul Pike, MHA, Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development
Hon. John Haggie, MHA, Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs
Jeff Dwyer, MHA
Paul Lane, MHA
Glenn Littlejohn, Political Support, Official Opposition Caucus
Steven Kent, Research Assistant, Third Party Caucus
Dave Hamlyn, Government Members' Caucus

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Paul Pike, MHA for Burin - Grand Bank, substitutes for Sherry Gambin-Walsh, MHA for Placentia - St. Mary's.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, John Haggie, MHA for Gander, substitutes for Lucy Stoyles, MHA for Mount Pearl North.

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

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

CHAIR (Reid): Order, please!

(Inaudible) Vice-Chair.

CLERK (Jerrett): We can.

CHAIR: Well, let's do that. We will elect a Vice-Chair.

Any nominations of the Vice-Chair position?

J. DWYER: I nominate Craig Pardy.

CHAIR: Craig Pardy, okay.

Any further nominations?

Second time – any further nominations?

Third time – any further nominations?

The Member for Bonavista is now Vice-Chair.

Just a reminder to Members of the Committee and people from the department, departmental officials, that whenever you're about to speak, just make a motion or let people know that you're speaking. Wait for you light to come on and then say your name and position so the people that are in the recording area know who you are and where you are.

They're telling me to tell you not to make any adjustments to the chairs, and water coolers are located on north and south ends of the Chamber.

The Member for Placentia West - Bellevue is substituting for the Member for Exploits, Mr. Forsey. Minister Haggie is substituting for the Member for Mount Pearl North, Lucy Stoyles. The Member for Grand Bank, Mr. Pike, is substituting for the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's.

We have an unaffiliated Member and I think, before we begin, the Committee has to decide if – I'm not sure if the Member wants to ask questions today, but the Committee has to decide to allow the unaffiliated Member to ask questions today.

I guess we'll ask for a motion to that effect.

CLERK: It is up the Committee to decide.

CHAIR: Do we need a motion on that, or do we just ask for consent?

Any objections to that? No. Okay, so that's looked after.

We'll just move right into the Estimates now.

Does the minister have any comments to make?

S. CROCKER: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I do, just quickly.

I thank everybody for this morning. So that I don't forget in the end, thank you to the staff here on each side of me and behind me for their hard work. They're the ones that put all the time, I guess, from October until now getting ready for Estimates and the process, so thank you to them and thank everybody for the opportunity this morning.

2024-2025 is going to be an extremely busy year for the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation. We've taken on a large

initiative with Year of the Arts 2024, which, already, we've seen some great successes. Just last week, we hosted the Canadian Folk Music Awards, and that was a tremendous success. 2024 also marks the 75th anniversary of our Confederation with Canada, and we're going to take some time throughout the year to recognize that as well.

The other event that we are responsible for in 2024 is the 100th anniversary of the Newfoundland and Labrador National War Memorial in downtown St. John's. A lot of work is being done. As people would have seen just last week, the tomb was delivered for the repatriation of a Newfoundland soldier from the battlefields in northern France and that soldier will receive a full military burial on July 1.

Continuing from its success from 2023, *Come From Away* is returning to Gander this summer and we've already, to this point, sold about 40 per cent of the tickets for 2024. It was a full sellout last year in Gander. I think the Member for Gander would testify that it had a tremendous impact on the economy in Gander last year and we're expecting to see even bigger and better things this summer with added shows.

Again, the other important thing that the department is seized with at this point is our continued role in preparation for the 2025 Canada Summer Games, which are only now a little over a year away. We certainly look forward to that event here in St. John's and surrounding area next summer.

Our film and television industry continues to set records. 2024-2025 will be a new record, there is no doubt about it. We already have enough in the pipes to tell us that it will. Last year, our production activity was near \$100 million. We expect a double-digit increase in production in 2024-2025.

We see, now, the benefits of our new school just down the road here and the fact that it

is at capacity and a waiting list to get in. The students that are coming out of the programs at the new film school are going right into jobs right here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

With that, Mr. Chair, I will turn it over so that we can get into the Estimates of the department.

CHAIR: Okay.

Before we do that, I want to get everyone to introduce themselves, so we know who each other are. We will start with departmental officials.

J. O'DEA: Jamie O'Dea, Deputy Minister.

J. TORRAVILLE: Departmental Controller, Jennifer Torraville.

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

C. GILLIARD: Carol-Ann Gilliard, Assistant Deputy Minister of Tourism.

G. OSMOND: Gerry Osmond, Assistant Deputy Minister for Arts and Culture.

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

A. LUTHER: Adrienne Luther, Director of Communications.

CHAIR: Okay, we'll start here with the Members.

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

G. LITTLEJOHN: Glenn Littlejohn, Political Staffer.

P. LANE: Paul Lane, MHA, District of Mount Pearl - Southlands.

J. BROWN: Jordan Brown, MHA, Labrador West.

S. KENT: Steven Kent, Research Assistant, Third Party Caucus.

CHAIR: Okay, let's start over here.

D. HAMLYN: Dave Hamlyn, Government Members' Office.

P. TRIMPER: Perry Trimper, MHA for Lake Melville.

J. HAGGIE: John Haggie, MHA, District of Gander.

P. PIKE: Paul Pike, MHA, Burin - Grand Bank.

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

CHAIR: Okay, I'm Scott Reid, Chair.

Next, we have some minutes here from our previous meeting. I think we need a motion to adopt those minutes, do we?

The Member for Labrador West; seconded by the Member for Gander.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Passed.

On motion, minutes adopted as circulated.

CHAIR: We'll move right on and we'll call the headings for Executive and Support Services, 1.1.01 to 1.2.03.

CLERK: Executive and Support Services, 1.1.01 to 1.2.03.

CHAIR: Member Dwyer.

J. DWYER: Thank you, Chair.

Again, I'd like to thank the minister and his staff for preparing this and getting us to this point to debate the budget in Estimates this morning.

Just a couple of introductory general questions, I guess.

Does the department have an attrition plan?

S. CROCKER: The department doesn't have any further attrition targets.

J. DWYER: How many positions have been removed this past year?

S. CROCKER: Removed? None. I can run down through it if you want me to.

J. DWYER: Yes.

S. CROCKER: So the staffing complement is 317: 145 filled positions; 32 vacant positions and that was from May to September; vacant seasonal positions, 140; long-term funded vacancies, 11; 10 retirements; 69 resignations; 10 new hires; and, currently, there are 45 13-weekers.

J. DWYER: So those empty positions, are they preparing to be filled or —?

S. CROCKER: Yes, as we go through the hiring process, like every other government department, we are hiring.

J. DWYER: Some are seasonal, right?

S. CROCKER: Yes, exactly, because we have the parks, we have the VICs, we have the Provincial Historic Sites. Yes, 100 per cent. I guess, like every other government department, new recruitment is an ongoing challenge.

J. DWYER: How many retirements did you say you had?

S. CROCKER: Retirements were 10.

J. DWYER: Okay.

Under the Minister's Office, 1.1.01, there was an increase of \$42,000 between your budget and the revised for '23-'24. What was the reason for that?

S. CROCKER: Sorry, which line item? Oh, the overall budget you mean?

J. DWYER: Yes, the Salaries.

S. CROCKER: Oh, the Salaries, the \$42,000? That's an overall number?

J. DWYER: Operating Accounts, Amount to be voted.

S. CROCKER: Yes, overall most of that would be the additional travel.

J. DWYER: Okay.

So this year in the '24-'25 budget, it's down \$13,000. Is that a salary discrepancy?

S. CROCKER: This year's budget is actually up over 2023-2024. In 2023-2024, the budget was \$302,600, the revised budget was \$344,600, which was the \$42,000 that you would have referenced earlier and the revised budget this year is at \$331,400. So the budget is actually up, not great, but \$29,000 and that primarily would be the increase in the travel and communications budget.

J. DWYER: Okay.

So why is there a variance of \$100,000 in Executive Support? Is there a retirement or has a position been eliminated?

S. CROCKER: Are we moved on to 1.2.01?

J. DWYER: 1.2.01.

S. CROCKER: Leading up to last year, we had a contract position that was related to the Canada Summer Games. We no longer hold that position. In a lot of ways, our role

in the Canada Summer Games now really becomes our role and our responsibility to the athlete because the games committee is up and running. The games host committee now has received their final payment, operational payment from government in the 2023-24 budget. So, really, they're up and running now and they're a self-sufficient organization.

J. DWYER: Okay.

Why is there a reduction in the Transportation and Communications when you're over budget in '23-'24?

S. CROCKER: They went back to their historic level. One of the main contributors to the overage there last year was the trip to the UK to do the WestJet work. We had a number of executives that did that and we feel that we can get it back to \$61,500 this year.

J. DWYER: Okay.

Last year, you had a contractual position in Admin Support. I think it was an ATIPP coordinator, maybe? Does that position still exist?

S. CROCKER: Certainly, the ATIPP coordinator position still exists. I think that would come over in Corporate Services though, wouldn't it? You'd find the ATIPP coordinator over in Corporate Services, I think. Yes, the ATIPP coordinator obviously still exists.

J. DWYER: Okay.

The last one on this section is: Why did we spend \$13,000 last year in Purchased Services?

S. CROCKER: Oh, good question. We hosted the Canadian Council of Tourism Ministers' Conference here in the fall of 2023.

J. DWYER: Okay.

S. CROCKER: That's why it's a one-time spend.

J. DWYER: Okay.

In 1.2.02, why was there a \$50,000 decrease in Salaries compared to last year? Have you eliminated a position, either permanent or contractual?

S. CROCKER: That's in anticipation of vacancies and it reflects savings during the recruitment periods.

J. DWYER: Okay.

Can you explain why you paid \$31,200 last year in Employee Benefits and only budgeted \$17,000 in this budget?

S. CROCKER: Higher workers' compensation.

J. DWYER: Okay.

S. CROCKER: Higher than anticipated, sorry.

J. DWYER: No, I can understand that.

Why the increase in Purchased Services this year?

S. CROCKER: It maintains the same budget as '23-'24. It was the revised that was down, so we went back to historic levels. It reflects – that was copier, shredder cost and that type of cost. So, again, we maintained the budget at its current level from 2023-24.

J. DWYER: Okay.

Can you explain the Revenue - Provincial decrease of \$44,800?

S. CROCKER: That reflects repayment of petty cash and floats for the provincial parks for the season.

J. DWYER: Thank you, Minister.

That's it for me for this section, Chair.

CHAIR: The Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Chair, and I thank the minister and his team for being here today.

First question, when it goes to vacancies and stuff, what is currently the longest vacancy you have and are you having trouble filling full-time positions currently in the department?

S. CROCKER: I don't have an answer to what the longest vacancy – I can get that for you – I was going to say Jordan, but that wouldn't be correct. I will get that for you, Sir.

J. BROWN: It's my name; that's fine.

S. CROCKER: So, when you talk about vacancies, it depends on the division. I think lots of times in some of our tourism jobs, especially in the manager-type positions, it's tough to recruit. I think you will find that as we go through Estimates, in a lot of government departments, as salaries continue to increase, the job market is ever more harder to do.

Obviously, again, some of our seasonal positions from time to time are difficult to fill. Overall, I think it's a balance, but there are challenges in recruiting. We are always recruiting, and we do our best to keep the vacancies as low as possible. Obviously, if you look at provincial parks as an example, if we go into the camping season with vacancies, it costs us in overtime.

Those roles have to be fulfilled, so it's something that's always on our radar because obviously we're working within a budget. Something we are always trying to do is make sure that we don't have vacancies – especially vacancies that are costing us in getting our job done and also vacancies that are costing us in overtime.

J. BROWN: Perfect, I appreciate that answer, Minister.

Can we get an update on Vision 2026 and what initiatives we roll out this year through that program or plan or whatever it is?

S. CROCKER: Yeah, so I'll speak very high-level to it and then I'll probably turn it over to Carol-Ann because she does all of the really deep-dive work on Vision 2026.

One of the undertakings that we took on last year – and I think we've been successful – is trying to align the Vision and we've worked with HNL and our DMOs to get them at the same table. I think the DMOs play a very important role because they are segmented out into five different regions of the province, with their own responsibilities to their own regions, and then we have HNL.

One of the recommendations that came out of one of reports last year – I think it was the Goss Gilroy report – was that we form a ministerial advisory committee on tourism for alignment to work with the Vision. It was our conclusion that we didn't need a ministerial advisory committee.

We have Hospitality Newfoundland and Labrador which is the industry association for our province and we have our five DMOs who are already out there doing that work. So to create a ministerial advisory committee would just draw on those organizations for that committee. We brought them to the same table. We meet with them on a quarterly basis for this new alignment piece, still doing our regular meetings with the DMOs and HNL as individual groups.

That's one of the biggest things we did this year, and I think I'll turn it over to Carol-Ann to talk more about what they do on a very regular basis when it comes to Vision 2026.

C. GILLIARD: Thank you, Minister.

As the minister mentioned, the leadership review was a really key part when we initially launched the Vision, so last year we spent a great deal of time focused on setting up the new leadership structure.

The other initiatives that we work on – in conjunction with the Destination Management Organizations, we did a thorough review of our marketing strategy and made adaptations to how we do our advertising and our travel trade and travel media. We had launched the Tourism Experience Enhancement Fund to help support tourism operators last year and there was continued work with that.

We're also working with the Destination Management Organizations and Hospitality Newfoundland and Labrador on a number of key initiatives that is going to help for the next phase of the Vision, which would be around creating an experience excellence program. We are developing an equity diversity and inclusion strategy for the tourism industry, and we're completing an accommodation needs assessment because we know that there are gaps in the visitor journey and, obviously, air access is a really key initiative that we're constantly working on for Vision 2026.

J. BROWN: Thank you so much, deputy minister.

Where's the budget in the Estimates – where is all the funding for Confederation 75? Who's handling that in your department?

S. CROCKER: That's going to come up a bit later throughout Estimates. I can give you a breakdown and it will come up again. You'll see it as we go further into sections.

There's \$3 million directly earmarked for ArtsNL. There's \$4.6 million earmarked – and you'll see this a little bit later – for Celebrate NL, and there's \$3.2 million allocated to arts, heritage and historical Development.

So, in that, there's a blend of 75, and Year of the Arts.

J. BROWN: Okay, so it's –

S. CROCKER: Yeah, it will come up. You're sure to ask me questions when we get over to those sections. Again, we'll go through this, and I can certainly give you a copy of this, if you wish. Shows you sort of where the breakdowns are.

J. BROWN: Yes, I appreciate that, Minister. I guess it was sprinkled throughout different subheads.

S. CROCKER: Yes, it is. It will come up in other places throughout.

J. BROWN: Yes, for sure.

Currently, one other there, there's the search for a new, mid-size theatre in the city. How is that search going and what is the plan going forward for that mid-size theatre?

S. CROCKER: So the current situation for that process is it's currently in Transportation and Infrastructure, because obviously they will look after the construction. We're currently in a secondary consultation phase. There was a public consultation phase, I guess, last year at this time. Then we came out of that, that was reviewed – Transportation and Infrastructure obviously could speak to this probably better than I could, but they then took that information, they went out and did an RFP for a consultant.

The consultant is now out doing sort of a deeper dive into a consultation with direct interest groups like other theatres, major stakeholders and they will come back to us, hopefully, at least by the end of the summer and say: Look this is what this looks like. This is a sort of a brown box of what a theatre would look like. Here's where that theatre could be positioned. There is \$8

million, I think, allocated in the TI budget for land procurement and next phases.

So, again, we'll have to wait until that report comes back and that report will, sort of, give us a blueprint of what the requirement is, what it is we will hopefully build.

J. BROWN: Perfect. Thank you, Minister.

Given your recent trips to Japan and Berlin, are those two new markets that we're going to currently be advertising and trying to draw into this province?

S. CROCKER: Japan is an absolute new opportunity for us and a lot of that is, I think, related to *Come From Away* and the fact that *Come From Away* is now playing in Japan and for the first time and making sure we draw those connections. Because I think in the past, we haven't always drawn enough attention between *Come From Away* and Newfoundland and Labrador. So, yes, we are working on the ground.

In those markets – I'm speaking to Japan for a moment – we really work closely with Destination Canada because, obviously, the brand that the world sees is Canada, then we need to tag ourselves in there.

So, yes, we see Japan as, certainly, a market opportunity. Quite frankly, they are the type of tourists that we love to attract because they're high-spending, long stayers and have relative willingness to travel. We don't have to look any further than Prince Edward Island to see the success that they have. They attract approximately 10,000 Japanese travelers a year. If we could only get a fraction of that coming from Japan, it would be a tremendous benefit to our industries. So, yes, Japan there.

Berlin/Germany, Germany is already our number two target market in Europe. That was part of the mission in Berlin. Some of it was also film, but, yes, we see Germany as an emerging market and, quite interestingly, we see the German traveller as a

tremendous opportunity for Labrador. The German traveller are three-week travellers. They stay for approximately three weeks when they go to a destination. They're a drive traveller and so we do really well in Germany, already, but yes, it's growing opportunities in Germany.

J. BROWN: Yes, absolutely. When I was with the tourism board in Labrador, Germany was always our second, next to Quebec, as travellers in Labrador.

S. CROCKER: It is. They love Labrador.

J. BROWN: They do.

Is there any new markets that you guys are planning on travelling to this year to try to see – dip a toe in somewhere?

S. CROCKER: We always look at the Eastern Seaboard as an opportunity. The Eastern Seaboard, when we look at air access, direct air access, internationally or trans-border, the number one goal right now if you were to talk to St. John's International or even ourselves, would be direct access to the Eastern Seaboard – 18 million people living in a very small geographical region.

So, yes and no, we're always looking for new markets. That's one of the things we're exploring with the DMOs and HNL as well, is what new travel shows that we do. We're actually in Boston now? Yeah, we're in Boston right now for the first time in a long time at a show.

So yeah, we're putting our toe back in that market. We already do two shows, I think, in New York City, but we're looking at that Eastern Seaboard because it's also a drive traveller. There's a drive opportunity.

we'll continue to build on what we have. I don't see a Japan in 2024-2025, simply because obviously we still have a lot of work to do in that market if we want to really build something.

J. BROWN: I appreciate it, Minister, thank you.

CHAIR: Any questions from other Members of the Committee?

P. LANE: I've got one question, if I can, for the section that you're voting on. Yeah, just one question, that's all, on the budget line.

CHAIR: The Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

P. LANE: Minister, I just want to go back to 1.2.01 under Transportation and Communications. I think you indicated that the overage last year related to a negotiation or whatever with WestJet. Did I hear that right?

S. CROCKER: That was absolutely a good portion of it, yeah.

P. LANE: Okay. So was that just one meeting or multiple meetings or what was it?

S. CROCKER: We did a trade mission to the UK and did a trade show in the UK, which wouldn't normally be in our budgets. So that was that one. Obviously, there's some reflection there of increased travel costs, but the biggest chunk of that would've been the UK show in late January.

P. LANE: Okay, so it was a show and you would've been part of an exposition.

S. CROCKER: Yeah.

P. LANE: No, the reason why I was asking is I was looking at \$33,000 and said my God, you must've brought the whole department with you for \$33,000 for one meeting with WestJet, do you know what I mean?

S. CROCKER: No, no, it was five days of meetings.

P. LANE: Yeah.

S. CROCKER: It was a longer period.

P. LANE: All right, that's it, that's all I wanted to know.

S. CROCKER: Anyway, that would've been an awful expensive meeting.

P. LANE: Yeah, awful expensive meetings, that's what I thought, too.

CHAIR: Any further questions on this section? No.

CLERK: Executive and Support Services, 1.1.01 to 1.2.03.

CHAIR: Shall these subheads carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: Carried.

On motion, subheads 1.1.01 through 1.2.03 carried.

CLERK: Tourism, 2.1.01 to 2.2.03.

CHAIR: The Member for Placentia West - Bellevue.

J. DWYER: Thank you.

In 2.1.01, why are Salaries up \$163,000 this year? Is this a new position or a general salary increase?

S. CROCKER: The salary budget in '23-'24 was \$2,474,000 so the budget is actually up about \$14,000 this year.

J. DWYER: Well, the revised was \$2,325,000.

S. CROCKER: Right.

J. DWYER: And then the estimate is now at \$2,488,000.

S. CROCKER: Yeah, fair. That was a reflection of vacancies that we now have anticipated to have filled for this coming season.

J. DWYER: Okay.

Minister, last year you spent \$705,000 but you were budgeting \$106,000 less this year.

S. CROCKER: Again, yes, again that goes back to – we tested some shows last year that we probably won't continue this year. So we expect that travel costs will come back down this year. Obviously, travel costs last year were reflective of –

C. GILLIARD: (Inaudible.)

S. CROCKER: Yeah, true. The deputy is just keeping me straight here.

When we're going into some of these new shows, for example, there's actually a reflection here of London. There's a reflection for the show in Boston that I just referred to. There's a reflection – I think we did a second show in New York last year.

Now that we have done those additional shows, you will likely see us retract from some these because some of those shows were successful and some weren't. We anticipate not having as many staff on the road from the Tourism Division this year as we did last year.

J. DWYER: Minister, can you explain the increase in Purchased Services of \$408,000?

S. CROCKER: Yeah, one of the factors in there is our share of the ACAT, Atlantic Canada Agreement on Tourism. That's what it would be.

J. DWYER: Okay.

Can we have a list of the \$221,000 in Grants and Subsidies and who received it?

S. CROCKER: Yeah, the \$221,000? You sure can.

Is that the joint marketing agreements?

OFFICIAL: (Inaudible.)

S. CROCKER: Yes, I can certainly get you a list of those.

J. DWYER: Thank you.

S. CROCKER: Oh, here we go.

Do you want me to run down through them or I'll just provide them?

J. DWYER: You can table it if you want, I guess.

AN HON. MEMBER: Give us an example.

J. DWYER: Yeah, you can give us an example, I guess, so you don't have to read them all.

S. CROCKER: We fund Destination Labrador differently than we fund the rest of our DMOs, so this is the grant to Destination Labrador.

Also, we have nine regional visitors' centres throughout the province that receive funding from us. They're not operated by us, but we do provide subsidy funding to them.

I think it's \$71,000 in total for our regional VIC grants and our grant to Destination Labrador is \$150,000.

J. DWYER: Okay, that would make it up.

Can you explain the federal and provincial revenue that is at the Atlantic tourism agreement or –?

S. CROCKER: That's ACAT, yeah. That's the Atlantic Canada Agreement on Tourism.

J. DWYER: That's the one, okay.

In Revenue - Federal, why only \$540,000 of \$915,000 received last year? Will the remainder come this year?

S. CROCKER: That's just the cash flow. One fiscal versus another fiscal, what time the money actually showed up.

J. DWYER: Okay.

2.1.02, why the variances in salary line?

S. CROCKER: Wage increases and there were two vacancies throughout the year.

J. DWYER: Were there any new hires or step progressions or anything like that salary-wise?

S. CROCKER: There certainly would have been step progressions and negotiated wage increases were \$62,000 of that.

J. DWYER: Okay.

Can you explain the reduction in Purchased Services for this year?

S. CROCKER: That's just back to normal now because we did an exit survey last year – this year, we'll still do exit work but not at the level we did last year because we'll use this year's data to more or less add to and it'll be sort of a –

J. DWYER: And we're still going to 2019 –?

S. CROCKER: It is back to a normal exit survey this year versus, last year, we beefed up our exit survey because there hadn't been a full exit survey since 2016 and, coming out of COVID, we felt it necessary to go out – and, actually, further along here, we also did a deep dive into our marketing last year that we still haven't got the conclusions, but we know there's a challenge somewhere in the process.

We have the highest brand recognition in the country, very favourable brand recognition throughout Canada, but we

have a conversion problem. So we're trying to find out why – I liken it to a customer going in Amazon, putting an item in their cart that they like, but they're not clicking buy. We're finding that an issue there. And we're trying to really nail it down to find out what that issue is.

J. DWYER: Yeah.

Could you explain the reduction in the Operating Account?

S. CROCKER: There was an increase, I think, in operating – that's just the totals, right?

J. DWYER: Yes.

S. CROCKER: Yes.

So they are reflected in what would have been the salary plan. Anywhere you see an increase, there was an additional amount reprofiled from a grant program that no longer exists. So it's just the to and fro from each of the budget lines.

J. DWYER: How come the \$20,000 in Grants and Subsidies wasn't spent?

S. CROCKER: That was reprofiled up to Purchased Services.

J. DWYER: It was what?

S. CROCKER: Reprofiled.

J. DWYER: Okay.

Moving along to 2.1.03; can you explain the \$100,000 increase in Salaries for this year?

S. CROCKER: That reflects the current salary plan, includes negotiated wage increases and step increases.

J. DWYER: Minister, why is it necessary to budget \$1,794,800 in Purchased Services when you only spent \$1,193,000?

S. CROCKER: In that \$1.794 million, \$1.5 million of that would have been our commitment to air access, and we were able to invest \$900,000 from air access. We did not want to remove the \$1.5 million for air access because obviously, the bottleneck that we spoke about previously, from early indications, access is one of our greatest challenges.

Our tourists are 55-plus; they're not cost-conscious customers. They are upper income, middle-upper income. That's our target market, and we know that one of the major issues that we have is access, whether it's air access, marine access, rental car access, ground transportation issues. So we already know, without prejudging, what we're going to learn in our review. We know that the number one issue will be access.

J. DWYER: Could we have a list of the organizations that you provided grants and subsidies to and why were you over budget in '23-'24? This continues year over year, so why not use more accurate of a figure to reflect that?

S. CROCKER: In our opening remarks, I think Carol-Ann mentioned the tourism enhancement fund. There were some projects that were funded that weren't able to be completed and instead of going back to those tourism operators and saying you can't do your project – because all of these projects that we funded were totally worthwhile doing. So that was some of that.

J. DWYER: But I guess there was also an increase in materials and stuff if they had to utilize –

S. CROCKER: Absolutely. I'm just trying to find that again, sorry.

Really, the main thing in that pocket, typically, without that additional spending for the tourism enhancement fund, is our yearly contribution or our operating money to East Coast Trail and then there's a small portion

left for a market readiness subsidy program of \$15,000. The balance of that goes to the East Coast Trail.

So we don't anticipate any changes there this year. It would just be our funding to the East Coast Trail.

CHAIR: The Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Chair.

Going back to the air access question. Given the financial difficulties of some of the low-fare carriers that are currently happening in the country right now, how much money was given from the department to low-cost carriers this past fiscal year?

S. CROCKER: So we don't deal directly with airlines. Airlines are dealt with through the airport authorities. In my conversations, I think – I'm trying to think of the airline that folded.

OFFICIAL: Lynx.

S. CROCKER: Lynx. Yeah, so the only arrangements that Lynx had currently in the province was its arrangement with St. John's, and I haven't been made aware by the airport authority that they suffered anything in that.

Thank you.

J. BROWN: All right, perfect, thank you, Minister.

How many applications came in for the new Tourism Experience Fund, and how many applicants ultimately received through that fund?

S. CROCKER: I may have to get that for you, MHA Brown –

J. BROWN: Oh, that's fine.

S. CROCKER: – because that would have been last year. The overage was us saying to people that weren't able to finish their projects by March 31 for many different reasons – a lot of it, quite frankly, was supply chain, so a lot of the people who applied for that fund ran into supply chain issues of getting what it is that they applied for.

J. BROWN: Fair enough, yeah.

S. CROCKER: So we said: No, listen, carry it; we'll find a way.

J. BROWN: Perfect, thanks. No, I appreciate that.

Given we're talking about air travel into another province, is the department working on anything for intra-provincial travel between flights and ground transportation and that, given that most people come in through St. John's International and getting from there through the different regions of the province seems to be a difficulty? Is the department working on anything with intra-provincial travel?

S. CROCKER: So the answer is yes, we are. Again, we work with our airport authorities and the door is always open. I meet with the airport authorities as regularly as possible; we always keep the door open for them to come to us. Because typically, they're the ones with the direct conversations with airlines, but absolutely.

To that point, I think the fact that PAL is now a code-share, interline partner with Air Canada, I think there are opportunities. Again, whether it's St. John's, Goose Bay, Deer Lake, Gander, we work with them, and the airport authority are the ones that come to us when they are able to reach an agreement or some kind of proposal with an airline.

But yes, you're absolutely right, the connectivity issue – obviously, most of our arriving non-resident travellers come

through St. John's, and then it's how do you distribute them around the province. And one of the ways that we hope to be able to do that more efficiently in the future is that once the PAL system is fully integrated with the Air Canada system, it will be one ticket, which we haven't had previously.

So with that ability, once that reservation system is fully integrated, you will for example be able to buy an Air Canada ticket that takes you from Toronto to Goose Bay, without seeing your bag again; one check-in, one boarding pass, or separate passes but all through the one system. That will bring good harmony, we hope.

It should bring some of those costs down because there should be more availability. One of the challenges around intra-provincial travel – and I share this with all my colleagues that have, for example, northern territories. If you think about Ontario, Quebec, Manitoba as examples, and our colleagues to the north, intra-provincial or intra-territorial travel is extremely expensive, and one way of bringing those costs down is more flights, more seat availability.

So hopefully the PAL-Air Canada agreement will bring some relief and some more ability to distribute that non-resident travel across the province.

J. BROWN: Perfect, I appreciate that. It's a (inaudible) –

CHAIR: Sorry, just before the Member asks another question, the people down in the Broadcast Centre have asked that Members speak up a little more, a little closer to the mic, maybe. They're having some microphone issues down there, so they just wanted to ask Members to do that.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Chair. Absolutely.

Under the 2.1.04, Marble Mountain Development Corporation, obviously we've seen \$1.3 million on top of the normal \$300,000 that they're getting. Can the minister explain the increase there?

S. CROCKER: I certainly can.

Last year, if you go to the next page, or the next line item, I think you'll see that there wasn't any capital allocated in the 2023-2024 budget for Marble Mountain. We didn't get very far into last fiscal year when we realized that that was probably a mistake on our part, in all fairness, so \$800,000 of this was transferred from Financial Assistance to Marble Mountain for capital work last year.

The remaining \$500,000 was actually recently transferred to Marble Mountain. As we all would have seen, Marble Mountain has had a very rough year, including the wash-out of, I guess, late February. So \$800,000 would have been over for their capital program, and the \$500,000 was actually assistance for some of the weather-related events that they had.

Also, they did get the Black Maria back up and running this year, and there were some costs – I don't know if it was overruns, but there were costs there that weren't seen.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Minister.

Given that with Marble, is there any likely of a sale to the private market of Marble Mountain or are we going to just keep it as a provincial asset?

S. CROCKER: So we are in the process again of going back to market with Marble to see what opportunities might be out there, what interest might be out there. We continue to invest in Marble. Marble is an important contributor to the West Coast economy, especially obviously in the slow winter season.

There's no doubt about it, Marble has a huge infrastructure deficit. There's a commitment I think, a page on from here, of a million dollars again this year for capital work. That will continue. We believe that there is a role for Marble Mountain. There's been a lot of interesting work done at Marble around four seasons, and what we do to keep Marble going, more than just the three or four months in the winter that we can do it. We will go back to market.

J. BROWN: Yeah, perfect.

Given the drastic change in the weather on the West Coast of Newfoundland from time to time and from season to season, is there any work on more mitigation work on Marble Mountain, for obviously, flash flooding? We obviously seen that on the mountain. Obviously, we've seen in the past different issues with the mountain when it comes to weather. Is there any more planned work for that –?

S. CROCKER: Marble Mountain actually last year, for example, before this, done it. They went out and I think acquired a lease on an excavator, as an example, because they wanted to do more ditching. They wanted to prepare longer. You're absolutely right. They want to hold their snow longer; they've invested in snow-making equipment because man-made snow lasts longer.

So yeah, they've been working on that, but unfortunately, we can't budget for flash floods. But they have been working on mitigation, and one of it was the lease of an excavator so that they have their own piece of equipment to continue ditching on a regular basis.

J. BROWN: Perfect. Thank you so much, Minister.

Under Parks there, one question there – Eagle River plateau watershed park, how is that project coming along?

S. CROCKER: We're still in discussions. It's a challenging file. We're committed to doing it, but there's still a lot of conversations being had. I don't know, Carol-Ann, if there's anything you want to add to that; I know it's something that you spend a fair bit of time on.

C. GILLIARD: The conversations are continuing. We are having conversations with the two Indigenous organizations, as recently as last week. So we are continuing to have those productive conversations currently.

J. BROWN: Perfect. Thank you so much.

I'll leave it there for now and I'll pass it on to my colleagues.

CHAIR: Okay.

The hon. the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue.

J. DWYER: Thank you, Chair.

Last year was a good year, actually, for Marble itself, but what can we expect financial-wise this year? I know that we ran into a couple of anomalies, but are we anticipating getting back to the 2019 levels?

S. CROCKER: Obviously, that's crystal ball. We would hope very much so, we hope that this past winter – because I think we had one of the shortest seasons we've probably ever had, or at least for a long time, but it's really hard to tell. It's really so weather dependent. But again, they're working to diversify. They're working with the cruise-line industry to provide a cruise tour.

Last year, one of the things they invested in was the ability for the lift to actually do a return of passengers, because the lift was only geared to bring people up, not bring people back. They invested last year to re-gear the lift and to build a lookout on the top of the hill and sell an experience to cruise ships, because Corner Brook has a

tremendously growing cruise industry. So one of the things that they're hoping to do is to get into that market.

Just a week and a half ago or so, we met with the mountain bike association on the West Coast. We're hoping to tie Marble into the existing trailway, the existing mountain bike trailways on the West Coast. So I think that's what we're focusing on, that's what Marble is focusing on right now, is ways to create revenue in non-traditional seasons where there are opportunities to pay up, or to accommodate when they have that bad winter season.

J. DWYER: I heard you earlier say that we're getting ready to shop Marble again.

S. CROCKER: Yeah.

J. DWYER: Are there any current interested parties that have been asking about its availability?

S. CROCKER: Look, it's like anything, we always get people kind of looking: What's the plan? What's the interest? Obviously in our world, though, we have to do it through a formal RFP process.

J. DWYER: Yeah.

S. CROCKER: So we hope there are, but our commitment is clear, we are not willing to hold a garage sale.

J. DWYER: No.

S. CROCKER: If somebody wants to acquire Marble Mountain, they will have to come in with a plan that shows a long-term sustainability plan for Marble Mountain, not just some type of yard sale.

J. DWYER: Still with Marble, last year, here in Estimates, you said work was being done on the decking and the new cabling for the lifts, et cetera. Was all that work completed or is it still going on?

S. CROCKER: Yeah, so the lift was up, the Black Mariah was up and running this season.

J. DWYER: Yeah.

S. CROCKER: The hill developments are nearing completion. I think last year we ran in – because a lot of those were geared towards the cruise industry, by the time they were completed, I don't think they were able to capture what they had hoped last year from the cruise industry, but I know they're hoping to really have that ready to go this season.

J. DWYER: So those tourists for the cruise industry are outside of the ski season, we'll say.

S. CROCKER: Yeah, absolutely.

J. DWYER: They're like a different shoulder.

S. CROCKER: Yeah, they're August-September.

J. DWYER: Yeah. Okay.

Was there any other work completed last year, besides the things we just talked about?

S. CROCKER: Yeah, there was some work done. There was a groomer replacement; there was the excavator that I referred to earlier; the hilltop development, which would be primarily focused on the cruise industry was done last year; Black Mariah was finally up and running; there were some investments in conference equipment; and a lot of general maintenance. The huge deck on the main lodge requires constant improvement and the Villa, we continue to invest, to redevelop the Villa because the Villa was closed for a number of years.

J. DWYER: Yeah.

S. CROCKER: And it's a source of revenue on a four-season basis, if we can get the Villa back up and running.

J. DWYER: Cool.

Is there a list that the corporation can provide of the work that was completed and what's left to be completed?

S. CROCKER: Yeah, we can provide that. It was just the stuff that I just went through.

J. DWYER: Yeah.

S. CROCKER: So again, in the subsequent page, you will find a million dollars there for capital projects. Their 2024-2025 capital plans is obviously continued maintenance around the main lodge and the Villa, also equipment replacement.

One of the things that they're hoping to develop this year out of the capital is trailer park campsite development, more designed towards the RV traveller. It's kind of like an overnight RV park – I guess it would be somewhat of a competitor for Walmart, in the way that wouldn't be go seasonal camping, but it would be a transit site for –

J. DWYER: For like hookups and stuff.

S. CROCKER: Yeah, exactly. Yeah, just overnighting.

J. DWYER: Okay. Yeah.

S. CROCKER: I mentioned earlier about the mountain biking. There is an investment that we can make around mountain biking that would tie us into an existing mountain biking trail in the area. So that's one that we're going to work with the mountain bike association to try and get tied in because then there is a world where we actually, for a small investment, put bike carriers on the back of the ski lift and then you can actually bring your bike to the top of the mountain and intersect with the trails that connect up there.

J. DWYER: Once you get going with that, I think natural progression would be to get a competition to come.

S. CROCKER: Absolutely.

J. DWYER: Moving on to Park Operations, 2.2.01, there was a reduction of \$30,000 in Salaries. Is that a seasonal position possibly or –?

S. CROCKER: Sorry.

J. DWYER: No, it's okay, take your time.

S. CROCKER: Paper is catching up on me.

Sorry, what was the question again MHA Dwyer?

J. DWYER: There's a reduction in \$30,000 in Salaries.

S. CROCKER: Increase?

J. DWYER: Sorry, yes.

S. CROCKER: Yes, no worries. That's the negotiated wage increases in the current plan and there's \$10,000 there that reflects students and overtime requirements of the parks.

J. DWYER: Last year, you spent \$97,800 of a projected budget of \$152,900, yet you budgeted \$152,900 again this year in Transportation and Communications. Why is that?

S. CROCKER: Well, that was lower than anticipated travel costs. But I fear that if we were to bring that budget back to \$97,800, next year whoever is here in these chairs will be saying well, why did you under budget. The Estimates from the parks themselves are that's what they need so instead of under budgeting, we went back to the traditional level.

J. DWYER: Okay.

You over spent in Supplies, yet once again you're reverting back to the same figure as '24-'25, why is that?

S. CROCKER: Because it's a minor cost, it's \$40,000-ish but we're confident that working – they do a good job managing their money as you can see in the travel-related costs. We provided them with that budget in the past and we're confident that they can get their costs back to that level.

J. DWYER: Okay.

Why the \$1.2-million reduction in Purchased Services this year?

S. CROCKER: Oh yes, that's the Main Gut. One million of that was in our budget last year for the removal of the Main Gut trussell. There was weather-event money in there related to Fiona and obviously the Main Gut trussell is gone now.

CHAIR: Yes, it is.

S. CROCKER: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Finally.

J. DWYER: Why the \$1.3-million reduction in Operating Accounts?

S. CROCKER: That was the \$1 million from Purchased Services. That was just the total, right? So that would have been the \$1 million we just talked about for Main Gut, and the \$250,000 for Fiona.

J. DWYER: Who received the Grants and Subsidies? Do you have a list?

S. CROCKER: So \$148,000 goes to the T'Railway Council and \$6,500 for our membership in the Canadian Parks Council.

J. DWYER: Okay.

Can you supply us with the stats for each provincial park? Like, how many sites in each, the bookings, vacancies rate last year.

S. CROCKER: Yeah, we certainly can.

J. DWYER: You can just table it.

S. CROCKER: Yeah, because it is a lot of numbers.

J. DWYER: Thank you.

Last year we discussed some of our parks going solar and becoming carbon neutral. How did this go?

S. CROCKER: Good. So all of our parks are off diesel, other than backup. All of our parks now are either solar or on the grid.

J. DWYER: Okay.

And my good friend for Bonavista will like this question because I'm asking about Lockston Park. Are they still under a boil order?

S. CROCKER: I'll have to get back to you on that one.

J. DWYER: Okay.

I tried.

S. CROCKER: But you would be pleased to know that there is funding again maintained in this year's budget. I think last year we increased the funding by \$500,000 for parks infrastructure. Unfortunately, one of the challenges that we've been having around parks infrastructure is the T'Railway and washouts. We have major rain events and we ended up having to go in and do rescue work.

But kudos to the Newfoundland and Labrador T'Railway Council. They've done a very good job at leveraging ACOA money, IET money and actually getting a lot of work done. And work that is going to hopefully reduce the number of washouts. That way, we can now get that infrastructure money directly into our parks.

Up until last year's budget, the annual infrastructure budget for provincial parks was \$50,000. We increased that last year and maintained that increase last year to \$500,000.

CHAIR: We'll move to the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Chair.

I guess continuing on the theme of T'Railway; is there any work being done on promoting the T'Railway as a destination opportunity for that unique tourist, I guess, the one with the ATV?

S. CROCKER: Absolutely.

That tourist number is growing and growing by the year. A tremendous opportunity because we have a one-way trail system that most jurisdictions can't really offer. We talk to Marine Atlantic about this on a regular basis and we talk to the T'Railway Council about it.

The T'Railway Council is actually working on a bit of a marketing program now through IET. The fact that you can off-load an ATV in North Sydney, put it on the ferry, come to Port aux Basques, trek across the Island and go to Argentia without having to backtrack is a very unique product and absolutely we do market it.

We'll continue to market it. We do this in a lot of ways in partnership with the T'Railway Council. They have the expertise and, quite frankly, for the amount of funding that we provide them, they do a tremendous job.

J. BROWN: All right, perfect. Thank you.

My old man did it last year, so I wanted to ask if it was something because it was word of mouth advertising, I guess, for him. I'm not seeing any advertising or anything like that in Tourism –

S. CROCKER: That's what I ask the crew over in Tourism all the time. We don't see it because we're not supposed to see it.

J. BROWN: Okay, that makes sense.

S. CROCKER: Right, so we see this as a huge opportunity on the Eastern Seaboard and, quite frankly, Eastern Seaboard Quebec, but there is a tremendous opportunity for that type of tourism.

J. BROWN: Okay, perfect. I guess that makes sense. I'm not seeing the advertising directed towards me because it's not for me, but I'm just making sure that there is someone out there seeing an ad for the T'Railway.

S. CROCKER: Yeah, there is, absolutely.

J. BROWN: Perfect. Thank you so much for clarifying that, Minister.

I'm going back to Strategic Product Development. I'm just wondering with the Expedition 51 unrolling now in Labrador, where is that funding from the province located and how much are we giving towards that project with Quebec?

S. CROCKER: That's the DMO, right? I'll turn that one to Carol-Ann.

J. BROWN: Oh, perfect. Thank you.

C. GILLIARD: We support Destination Labrador, so they would be the primary lead with Expedition 51. I don't believe that there is any direct funding from our department, but we work through Destination Labrador and under their MOU.

J. BROWN: Yeah, okay.

So that's like an indirect funding?

C. GILLIARD: Yeah.

J. BROWN: You give it Destination Labrador, then they work with 51 with Quebec.

C. GILLIARD: They work with them.

S. CROCKER: (Inaudible) and I've seen them selling it at different events. Randy and the people at the Labrador DMO, that's one of the things that they are constantly selling.

J. BROWN: I seen the new road highway signing in the last year.

S. CROCKER: Yeah, they're very keen on that and I think it's a tremendous opportunity.

J. BROWN: Perfect. No, absolutely.

I guess, another one, the last one – given through Park Operations, is there any talk of expanding, maybe, the footprint of some of the parks, given that the volume is significantly up in a lot of the parks in the province?

S. CROCKER: That's not something that, quite honestly, we focused on, on expanding. A number of our parks used by our non-resident visitor. Cheeseman, on this side of Port aux Basques, would probably be one of our largest parks used by the non-resident visitor.

So we are looking for opportunities because that non-resident visitor is changing a little. Earlier we mentioned the German traveller. We are finding ways whether it's season extension, investments in promoting our provincial park system. Because there's been a reversion back to the more nature-based camping versus we all see the large trailer, the large seasonal camping establishments.

The provincial parks are not that. So to make sure that we're there – because COVID created, I think, a new back-to-nature type of parking, camping. People are

gone back to tents. They're gone back to more traditional methods and that's where the provincial parks fit very well.

Some of the investments that we'll make this year in the provincial parks, because we find what that visitor, that camper, is looking for is a good-quality comfort station, laundry services, and that is what they're looking for. They don't need much more other than good, clean comfort stations and laundry facilities. The other one that continues to be a challenge, but we work on it, as we can, is connectivity in our parks.

J. BROWN: Perfect.

Just one last one. The proposed hiking trail down the Northern Peninsula, where's that to in here and how much funding throughout – how is it going to be funded and how long is it going to take to complete this venture?

S. CROCKER: I think the timeline of the venture is about 10 years. Right now, we're piloting a piece about 10 to 20 kilometres in Parsons Pond north. The initial investment from there, a lot of the initial investment is coming through IPGS, but we do have people working on it.

Our park development staff spend some time on that project and, right now, the project is doing well. It's going to take a lot of time, because obviously it's a big chunk. One of the things that we find, again, our traveller, our target market has a very keen interest in hiking and trails. The East Coast Trail is either number one or number two. When we do exit surveys, we always find that one of the main attractions that we find here on the Avalon Peninsula is the East Coast Trail. People want trails.

J. BROWN: Perfect. Thank you so much, Minister.

I'm done with this section.

Thank you, Chair.

CHAIR: I think we'll go to the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

P. LANE: Thank you.

I don't have any line by lines, Minister, but I do have a couple of questions.

S. CROCKER: Yep.

P. LANE: The first one, I guess, is just a bit of a comment, I heard you talk about the theatre, the mid-sized theatre. I just wanted to put it out there, I know where you can get a piece of land, you don't even have to procure it. It's sitting there, ready, ripe for development and it actually happens to be in Mount Pearl North –

S. CROCKER: Oh, okay.

P. LANE: – not Mount Pearl - Southlands so it's even more of an incentive.

Anyway, Team Gushue site, City of Mount Pearl, if you're not aware, is putting up a new facility there at the old Tin Can.

S. CROCKER: I think the mayor and I –

P. LANE: They'd love to have a theatre.

S. CROCKER: Yeah, I think the mayor and I have had this conversation.

P. LANE: And you could get the land for nothing.

So I just want to rehash a couple of issues that I've brought – I bring it up every year, I guess I'll keep bringing it up – hotels.

S. CROCKER: Yeah.

P. LANE: There's not really a shortage – well, it depends on where you go, if there's a shortage, I suppose, in some of the more remote areas. But I'm thinking even some of the larger areas, say in Central Newfoundland as an example, there's an

abundance of hotels in Gander and there's some in Grand Falls and so on.

Quantity is not necessarily the issue, but quality is definitely an issue. There are a lot of the standard hotels we're all familiar with out there, I wouldn't say that they've had much investment probably over the last 50 years. I'm sure that a lot of them, the rooms are probably the same; it seems like the same carpet and décor that might have been there 20 or 30 years ago with no investment whatsoever.

They may be clean and so on, but if we're trying to attract tourists and we're advertising and stuff like that, it would be nice if we could up the quality a little. I know they're private businesses, but I'm wondering what, if anything, is being done or what discussions are being had, maybe some tax incentives if necessary, something to try to elevate the quality of some of those hotels.

S. CROCKER: Absolutely, and that was the entire premise of our Tourism Enhancement Fund, we invested almost \$5 million, which was leveraged 15 –

OFFICIAL: Thirteen.

S. CROCKER: So we invested \$5 million through the Tourism Enhancement Fund that actually leveraged \$13 million to do just what you just talked about.

P. LANE: Okay.

S. CROCKER: It's a really good point, and we hear it all the time. Quality assurance is something that we're working on with the DMOs and HNL because I couldn't agree with your statement more – that reinvestment. Lots of times it's chicken and egg, you know they need to see commitments. Look at Gander last year, they had a very successful summer, sold-out hotel rooms, probably greater than they had maybe ever in that peak season.

It's an initiative of ours, without a doubt, to find ways to make sure that we improve that quality level.

Yeah, I can't say much more but you're dead on to an issue.

P. LANE: Okay. Thank you, Minister.

Another one, I just wanted to bring up again this year is the issue around signage. I know at one point in time – this is going back a number of years ago, I think it called TODS or something was the name of it and they were looking at putting in new signage. I just find that it may not be too bad if you're on the highway in the sense of the signs telling you where the communities are, whatever, but a lot of times if you go off the beaten path and you're looking to find certain tourist locations or whatever the case might be, historic sites, whatever the case, the signage is not great.

There might be a sign saying this is this direction but you head down that direction and then there might be a road and a road off that and a road off that to get there. A lot of times you might have to stop and ask somebody or, if you're from there, you probably have an idea where it's to, but I know if I was a tourist driving around trying to find these spots, it would be pretty difficult.

I compare it to when you leave Newfoundland, as an example – and I'm not saying everywhere else is perfect and we're not, I don't mean it that way, but there's no doubt there are a lot of places I've been to, from a tourist point of view, the sign takes you – there might be a dozen signs getting you to exactly where you're going. Every single turn in the road there's another sign, another sign getting you there and we just don't have that.

I find even the signage to the airport sometimes can even be a challenge compared to other places. So I'm just wondering what comment you could make

about signage and what might be happening there or what the plans might be.

S. CROCKER: Yeah, so TI undertook a very extensive sign cleanup last summer. They removed thousands and thousands of illegal signs around the province because I think we had a sign litter problem without standards. So I think I've noticed in my own region the increase in people using TODS simply because of the cleanup.

I know our mapping signs, the theme routes – for example, The Baccalieu Coastal Drive – have been all redone. Only just yesterday I noticed that the one in Whitbourne is finally replaced.

So TI is putting a lot of effort into signs. There was a lot of work that had to be done. It's really getting our operators to buy into the fact that painting your location on the back of an old two by two election sign is not the way to advertise. Right? We've seen far too much of that and TI, like I said, removed thousands of those last summer. That's step one.

We do our piece with TI marketing from Tourism's perspective, but we need more and more TODS, you're absolutely right. I think we're going to see more and more going that way.

HNL raises your concern with us quite regularly and we're working with them. It's a piece of them, actually, in lots of – and they're very supportive of TODS and of making signage standardized, but it's getting to the membership and saying listen, if you're going to do sign, you've got to do it this way. It has to have a standard.

P. LANE: Thank you, Minister, for that.

Like I say, TODS is one piece but then there's also –

S. CROCKER: Yes.

P. LANE: – once you get off that beaten path and you're down into an area and there might be a road off a road off a road to get there, then you need those smaller signs to complement it, like, clear, bold with an arrow so you know exactly where you're going to get there. In my experience, driving around, that seems to be lacking as well.

Minister, again, just sticking to Tourism here, I brought this up as well, you know, but the quality – I just wanted to look for some commentary on the quality of the attractions. Again, I've spent a fair bit of time over the last number of years, as I'm sure you have in your role, checking out different parts of the Island, different attractions and so on. There are a lot of locations that I've noted that have been in disrepair and so on.

I know some of them probably may have been put there by a municipality, but if you look up in the tourist book and it says, oh go see this attraction. When you get there it's, literally, falling to pieces and it's really not fit to go to. You might drive for several miles with an expectation of seeing something nice and when you get there, it's like a total disappointment.

There are a lot of great things, don't get me wrong, but I wonder has there been some sort of an inventory taken of all the attractions in Newfoundland to try to understand: if we can't maintain all of them, then maintain some of them well, as opposed to keeping things and advertising things that are really detrimental to the tourism experience.

I guess that's just been my observation, year over year, and I still tend to see that. I just don't think we're doing ourselves any favours. I know a lot of these things may have gotten put there, perhaps on some of these employment grants and so on, they'll get a grant, find a project to do and you do it.

That's all wonderful once it's built, but unless there's going to be funding to maintain it, year over year, then all you're doing is you're starting out with something nice, people are going there, then it deteriorates over time. Eventually, people show up there and the thing is falling apart and it's a negative. You're better off not having it at all, than to have something falling to pieces.

S. CROCKER: Again, you're absolutely right because there are these stranded projects that some development – so some RED board in 1992 funded, they built a trailway, as an example, and the RED boards are all gone. They built a trailway. The trailway is still semi-advertised, people still expect it, but it hasn't been maintained.

You know, we work with the tourism guide the best we can to make sure that anything that we advertise in the tourism guide does meet a standard. They have to be registered with us. So that is there and it's providing the movement. We have a lot of operators in our province who are in lane one and they want to stay in lane one; lane three – I'll steal this lane analogy – we've got to move more and more people to the premium product because, again, that's what our customer is looking for.

They're looking for a true experience; they want an experience in tourism now. They've moved away, quite frankly, from a lot of the things that we thought that they wanted. They want a good trailway that's well-signed, that's safe.

Just today, actually, we started a position in the department. We hired a manager who is now specifically responsible for strategic initiatives and one of our strategic initiatives is moving people. Getting our tourism operators that are investing and want to invest, to gradually come over here to that experience level because we're selling a product and we've got to make sure that when the customer gets here, they get what they bought.

Lots of times, quite honestly, that's been challenging. It's always tough choosing winners and losers, but there are regions of this province that are going to be successful in tourism and there are regions of this province that are not going to be successful in tourism. Understanding that and understanding why a region is not going to be successful in tourism – I use this all the time in my own constituency – one thing you will find in tourism, or that I've found, is anywhere you find a very successful fishery, you won't find great tourism, because they're competing for the same HR, the same human resource, right, and it's tough to have the two.

But if you look at some of our gems in tourism and I look at the Member for Bonavista, as the fishery somewhat – you know the Bonavista history and the Bonavista Peninsula and its tremendous fishing history, as fishing kind of moved out of the Bonavista region, tourism backfilled it and Bonavista has become one of our gems in tourism. So that's the areas that we have to make sure that we're still getting that market development into.

C. PARDY: (Inaudible.)

S. CROCKER: Yeah, no, no, and I hear the Member say that the fishery is still bustling, but Bonavista was an example of how they captured from 1992, forward.

I wasn't saying there was no fishery, Member.

C. PARDY: No, no (inaudible).

S. CROCKER: But yeah.

CHAIR: Your time is up.

Thank you.

We'll move to the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue.

J. DWYER: Thank you.

Last year, we spoke about the T'Railway extension or the piece from basically Clarenville to Argentia needed some work.

S. CROCKER: Yup.

J. DWYER: There was different washouts and stuff like that. Has that work been completed?

S. CROCKER: Yup.

J. DWYER: Is it now continuous from Argentia to Port aux Basques?

S. CROCKER: Unless there is a development recently. There are no issues on the T'Railway right now, are there?

OFFICIAL: No.

S. CROCKER: We address them as fast as they come up.

J. DWYER: So Clarenville to Argentia now is, like –

S. CROCKER: Now, Argentia to Whitbourne wouldn't be in the system, right?

OFFICIAL: No.

S. CROCKER: Yeah.

J. DWYER: Okay.

S. CROCKER: The provincial park runs Port aux Basques to St. John's.

J. DWYER: Okay.

One of the things we just talked about making sure that our product is looking good and ready to go. One example I think I could bring to your attention is how important it was during COVID, even, about the trail in Chance Cove in my district, yet the roads are – people get a little upset, I guess, because you're beating your car up to get to this trail that is world class.

I mean, you go out on the back of this trail and it looks like Costa Rica, but to get there – and I've asked for the last five years for that road to be improved, but it doesn't seem that Transportation and Infrastructure – while they do have so much to do with the Tourism department, they're not working hand in hand on that side.

So I would just like to see if we have a product that we're selling, then let's make sure that the infrastructure to get there is viable.

S. CROCKER: We feed into the Roads Plan every year and then that's what we feed into. We hear from our VICs, if the road to Bonavista or if the road to Gros Morne or the road to Lewisporte – we hear it and it comes back quite clearly in our exit surveys, that is always a very high-ranking issue with our tourists for sure.

J. DWYER: Try and get Chance Cove on your list.

Moving on to 2.2.02, the Pippy Park Commission, last year we were told there was a negotiated wage increase, therefore the rise in the Grants and Subsidies. Is this the case for the increase this year as well?

S. CROCKER: Yes, it is. That \$20,000, that's wage increases, yes.

J. DWYER: Okay.

2.2.03, C.A. Pippy Park Commission, again, is this the nearly \$1 million invested into Pippy Park from the budget? When will this work be done and when can we expect its completion?

S. CROCKER: This reflects some capital investment required around comfort stations and some of that is certainly in preparation for the Summer Games, because we expect Pippy Park will play a role next summer. So I would expect to see this work done this fiscal year.

J. DWYER: Okay.

That's it for me for section 2.

CHAIR: No further questions for this section?

I'll ask the Clerk to call the headings.

CLERK: Tourism, 2.1.01 to 2.2.03.

CHAIR: Shall these headings 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: I think before we move on to next headings, we'll have a short break for maybe – what time is there now? Let's come back 10:40. Is that good? Okay.

Recess

CHAIR: Order, please!

Okay, thank you.

We're ready to go again, if everyone is, so we'll call the next heading.

CLERK: Arts and Culture, 3.1.01 to 3.1.07.

CHAIR: Okay.

The hon. the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue.

J. DWYER: Thank you, Chair.

In 3.1.01, Transportation and Communications, you spent \$367,400, but you're only budgeting \$121,700 this year. Why, and can you explain the reduction in

Purchased Services from the budget of '23-'24 to the budget of '24-'25?

S. CROCKER: Most of what you're going to see here was *Come From Away* related, and obviously last year was our first year doing *Come From Away*. We actually housed *Come From Away* last year. We did it as the province through the Arts and Culture Centre, so we ended up having to pay the travel costs for *Come From Away* last year. We paid for set for *Come From Away* last year.

We had hoped, last year, that *Come From Away* would have been a set-up entity this year. They are now. That's why you're seeing it going back to traditional levels. *Come From Away* now is now operated by *Come From Away You Are Here Inc.* So we no longer are the operators. The province is the licence holder, but for want of a better word, we now sublet the licence to *Come From Away Inc.*, these –

J. DWYER: So we're actually seeing revenues then?

S. CROCKER: Pardon?

J. DWYER: We're actually seeing revenues from it then?

S. CROCKER: The revenues come through the ACCs. They would be the same this year in the ACC system as any other – TaDa! just did *Jersey Boys* at the ACC. *Come From Away* would work in the same way now. We would sell their ticket. We would retain a portion in a contractual relationship. So, last year, because we were actually doing it in the department, it didn't get transitioned out. We had to carry the costs.

J. DWYER: Okay.

3.1.02, Arts, Heritage and Historic Development: Why the \$1.2-million increase in Purchased Services?

S. CROCKER: That's YOTA. Gerry?

G. OSMOND: Yeah.

S. CROCKER: Yeah, that's Confed 75 and YOTA.

J. DWYER: Okay.

Why, in Revenue - Provincial, did we only receive \$3,800 of the \$150,000 budgeted last year?

S. CROCKER: What line, sorry?

J. DWYER: In Revenue.

S. CROCKER: Provincial revenue, \$150,000, it seems –

G. LITTLEJOHN: That was a misprint, Minister, sorry.

S. CROCKER: Mr. Littlejohn must have got your binder ready for you.

G. LITTLEJOHN: I'll take responsibility.

J. DWYER: Why is the total for Arts and Culture Centres down \$1 million?

S. CROCKER: In Purchased Services?

J. DWYER: The total for the Arts and Culture.

S. CROCKER: What happened last year, due to the success of *Come From Away*, we had to move \$1 million into the ACCs. But we haven't got to do that anymore because, what happens, you buy a ticket at the ACC, the money goes into general revenue.

We still pay for *Jersey Boys*, but that's why you see the large Purchased Services when it comes to the Arts and Culture Centres because it's money in, money out. If you go down to Revenue - Provincial, we pay it out to a third party. *Come From Away* now this year will be a third party.

J. DWYER: Okay.

S. CROCKER: So that's what causes that fluctuation in money. We've budgeted, this year, additional revenue to offset – if you look down at provincial revenue, we have our revenue up by \$1 million this year. That's to offset the cost or the success of *Come From Away* and the ticket sales.

J. DWYER: Okay.

3.1.03, Newfoundland and Labrador Arts Council –

S. CROCKER: 03, sorry?

J. DWYER: 3.1.03.

S. CROCKER: Yes.

J. DWYER: Can we have a list of all the funds allocated here and any additional funds they may have received?

S. CROCKER: So we don't have that. It's available online. They're a Crown corporation operated independently from us. You can go onto their website and get a listing of who they grant their money to.

J. DWYER: Yeah.

S. CROCKER: That's all juried money or, most of it, is juried money and we don't have input into how that funding is allocated,

J. DWYER: Okay.

I think we've discussed earlier about the \$3-million increase in the budget allocation. Is that just for the Year of the Arts?

S. CROCKER: It is.

J. DWYER: And that will cover everything? Like, is that –?

S. CROCKER: So there will be other funding. We announced, a couple of weeks

ago, an expression of interest process but individual artists, whether you're a visual artist, a lot of troops and stuff with –

J. DWYER: Yes.

S. CROCKER: They write their proposals into an individual author. They actually go to Arts NL for their funding.

J. DWYER: Oh, right. Yes.

3.1.04, Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador.

S. CROCKER: Yes.

J. DWYER: On our built heritage, there's no increase in their budget. Why is that?

S. CROCKER: I guess, you know, it's a very important piece of our heritage. But this reflects the reality of what it is we can actually afford.

J. DWYER: Okay.

Can we have a list of those receiving grants and subsidies in that?

S. CROCKER: Again, that's not done through us. It's on their website, I would assume. We have no direct input in their funding allocations.

J. DWYER: Okay.

3.1.05, Celebrate NL Inc.

S. CROCKER: Yes.

J. DWYER: Can we have a list of the grants for that one as well?

S. CROCKER: You can, yes. Absolutely. I have it here. Do you want me to go down through them or we can provide it?

J. DWYER: Will that include the expenditures?

S. CROCKER: It will include the grants – who we grant it to.

J. DWYER: Okay.

Are you just going to table it?

S. CROCKER: Yes, we might have to go back and do some work on it for you, MHA Dwyer, but we'll certainly get that piece for you.

J. DWYER: Okay, no problem. I appreciate it.

S. CROCKER: Adrienne is recording what it is, I'm promising you.

J. DWYER: Yeah.

Can you explain the \$3.3-million increase in this budget? Would this be the 75th anniversary funding as well?

S. CROCKER: And the Year of the Arts.

J. DWYER: Oh, and the Year of the Arts.

S. CROCKER: Yeah.

So, again, \$3 million for ArtsNL, \$4.6 million for Celebrate NL and Arts and Heritage, \$3.2 million.

J. DWYER: Okay.

3.1.06, The Rooms Corporation of Newfoundland and Labrador: Can you explain the increase in Grants and Subsidies to The Rooms?

S. CROCKER: Negotiated wage increases.

J. DWYER: Okay.

How many employees are presently working at The Rooms and are there any vacancies or new hires?

S. CROCKER: There are 43 full-time employees and there are 4 permanent

seasonal staff. I'm not sure of their vacancies. Again, Crown corporation, but we can certainly see if we can endeavour to get that for you. I do have a chart here that doesn't show any vacancies currently.

J. DWYER: Okay.

Can we get the visitors stats for The Rooms last year?

S. CROCKER: Sure.

It's probably –

J. DWYER: In your estimation, are they comparable to pre-COVID?

S. CROCKER: Last year, they had their best year ever, and strong signs coming into this year as well. They're doing a tremendous job. Actually, they welcomed 130,000 people in '22-'23,

OFFICIAL: '23-'24.

S. CROCKER: '23-'24, sorry.

J. DWYER: Yeah.

3.1.07, The Rooms Corporation of Newfoundland and Labrador: Is this monies announced in the budget?

S. CROCKER: It is. It's a \$1-million-a-year capital budget commitment for the next five years. So it's \$5 million overall. The Rooms will be 20 years old next year. This is the first time that they've received capital. It's the first time they've actually been able to receive capital. They used Canada arts grants funding to do a lot of the work.

But some of the work that's actually starting – some of the repairs now, they can't get through Canada arts grants – Canadian Heritage grants. This is work for this year. They have identified windows, doors, roof work, an engineering study on the roof because, obviously, that's 20 years old.

This is just a proactive approach so that we don't end up having a huge infrastructure deficit at The Rooms in five to 10 years. So the commitment is \$1 million a year for five years.

J. DWYER: Okay.

What work will take place at The Rooms this year? Are we to understand that this is the first instalment of the \$5 million announced in the budget, and what other work will take place over the next four years? I know you alluded to that, but what's on schedule for this year, really?

S. CROCKER: Yeah, on schedule for this year, I think, is a study on the roof. Obviously, anybody that's seen The Rooms, you can realize the roof is a big challenge for sure. Some exterior door work, some window work this year, some public space painting, replacement of some carpet, replacement of hot water tanks, replacing of a blowdown tank – whatever that is. There's a lot of end-of-life items that they see needing to be replaced.

J. DWYER: I'm no engineer, but I think a blowdown tank is something to do with the air conditioning.

S. CROCKER: Okay.

J. DWYER: Okay, that's it for 3.

CHAIR: Okay.

The Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Chair.

So right now, under Arts and Culture, there's one thing – I know in the past the department was looking at all monuments and statues in the province, doing inventory and doing all that work. Can we get an update on that project?

S. CROCKER: Yeah, quite frankly, this year we have been fully focused on the War

Memorial restoration. I haven't got much change from last year, simply because the focus this year has been the National War Memorial with the same staff that we have. That's been a very busy project, whether it's the War Memorial or the repatriation of the remains. So it has been paused, to say, this year, while we get this 100th anniversary project looked after.

J. BROWN: Yeah, perfect. I was just looking for an update on that.

I know also, under the Truth and Reconciliation, there was a Call to Action for provinces to make a public space memorial to the victims of residential schools. Has our province worked towards that project yet?

S. CROCKER: We, as a department, haven't received any direction on that.

J. BROWN: No worries. Perfect, thank you so much.

One that's probably, I guess, close to you – can we get an update on the Heart's Content UNESCO World Heritage Site?

S. CROCKER: Well, you wanted me to give short answers –

P. LANE: Call Tolson.

S. CROCKER: Call my cousin Tolson and he will certainly fill you in.

He will too, eh, b'y?

AN HON. MEMBER: We get three hours.

S. CROCKER: Yeah, exactly. Right? Should have brought Tolson in to explain that.

It is on track for UNESCO status in likely '27-'28. A project very close to my heart. We entertained a group from Valentia last year that came over and did some work. We'll actually be going to Valentia this June to continue that work.

Quite honestly, we are a lot further ahead in our site preparation than they are. So we're working closely with them. The beauty is Tolson had another museum in the basement, that we'll be actually loaning a lot of what Tolson has collected over the years to Valentia Island.

J. BROWN: Oh, okay. That's good. That's fantastic to hear.

Another I'm going to mention is Trinity Loop. I know an RFP and everything went out for Trinity Loop. Are we going to see that restored?

S. CROCKER: I think that was more of a Crown Lands challenge. That's not something that this department was tasked with.

J. BROWN: Okay. I guess that is a question for another department on what we're going to do with Trinity Loop.

S. CROCKER: I think Trinity Loop now is land. Unfortunately, I think that's what's left there, is land.

J. BROWN: Hard to hear but thank you –

S. CROCKER: I think. I haven't been then there in many, many, many, many years.

J. BROWN: No worries. I know it is technically an historic site, though; isn't that correct?

S. CROCKER: No.

J. BROWN: No? It was never given a heritage –?

S. CROCKER: No.

J. BROWN: All right. Okay, perfect.

Another question on Arts and Culture Centres. I know my Arts and Culture Centre is getting a new roof, but is there any other

capital projects on other Arts and cultures centres throughout the province this year?

S. CROCKER: I'm going to turn that to Gerry because I think there is. Because I think we just got some federal money, didn't we?

G. OSMOND: Yes, absolutely. We work actively with the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure on a long list of needs at our six centres. So, each year, there are projects prioritized. Your roof in Labrador West being one of those.

We are working this year, in conjunction with the Department of Canadian Heritage, on some upgrades across the province, and you'll see perhaps more occupational health and safety projects being prioritized in that manner. But, yeah, we have an active program in conjunction with TI and, each year, we try to pick up one or two projects.

J. BROWN: Thank you so much.

Right now, with Arts, Heritage and Historic Development, is there any new provincial sites being added to the list this year?

S. CROCKER: I think there is one that we're looking at doing some work around and adding. I think it would be premature for me to – because there is a process it has to follow. But there is one we're looking at adding to the inventory, yes.

J. BROWN: Perfect. No, that's always good to hear, protecting stuff.

Are there any sites this year that need any large maintenance work that will be done on any of the existing provincial heritage sites?

S. CROCKER: Again, these are conversations that we had with TI. I know the lighthouse in Point Amour needs some serious investment. We're always working with TI. If you look at the provincial historic sites in the Bonavista region, there's always a commitment, there's always need for

more infrastructure or more capital works money, but we prioritize it and do the best we can with what we have.

J. BROWN: Perfect. Thank you so much, Minister.

Going with the Newfoundland and Labrador Year of the Arts, was there any positions created because of the Newfoundland and Labrador Year of the Arts just to administer that?

C. ORSBORN: There weren't positions specifically for that, but some of the positions in Celebrate NL have been heavily focused on that.

J. BROWN: Okay, so they're handling that?

C. ORSBORN: Yes.

J. BROWN: Okay.

S. CROCKER: Just to add to Caroline's point, one of the flexibilities that we have with Celebrate NL, they spend a lot of time working on projects, which would've been Come Home Year. They spent a lot of time last year on *Come From Away*. This year their focus – so their focus changes and employees just change the focus as they're mandated.

J. BROWN: Okay, perfect.

So they handle all that kind of work?

S. CROCKER: Yeah, exactly.

J. BROWN: All right, perfect. Okay, that makes sense.

So they're also handling Confederation 75 as well through Celebrate NL. They're also handling that file for different projects?

S. CROCKER: They are in conjunction. They work closely with Gerry's division because Gerry's division would actually have some traditional funding programs, for

example, that we wouldn't go outside of. So, yeah, we sort of divvy the work up between the two divisions.

J. BROWN: Okay. So is there anything else that's being handled by Celebrate NL for any projects or funding besides those two, I guess, years of?

S. CROCKER: Normal project attraction. One of Celebrate NL's mandates is external attraction. So they're constantly bidding projects, bidding events. They would've played a major role last week in the Canadian Folk Music Awards. They will play a role next year in another substantial event here in the city.

That event attraction is a constantly moving file and it's one we're learning a lot about.

J. BROWN: Okay. Perfect. That's my final question for this section.

Thank you so much.

CHAIR: Do you have any further questions?

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

P. LANE: Just a couple of quick ones.

I just wanted to pass it along, I've had a couple of residents over the last while reach out to me and they just wanted to put it out there that they think it would be a good idea, if at some point in time, to consider a year of the cod or whatever, given our historical ties to the fishery and so on. A lot of events could be focused on – I guess it could be any kind of fish but cod, in particular, and the history around that and, like I say, a lot of dinners and stuff that are whatever – codfish is always good.

So anyway, it wasn't my idea but –

S. CROCKER: No, it's fair.

P. LANE: – no doubt it's a great tie to our province. It's an important part of our history.

Minister, I've got a general question and I can tie it into anything I suppose. I'll tie it into the Arts and Culture Centre but it doesn't just tie into the Arts and Culture Centre. It's the whole issue around access and accessibility in all of our spaces, really, but ensuring that our Arts and Culture Centres, for example, are accessible; ensuring that any events and festivals are accessible.

I've been down to Lumsden Beach. They've got a great job done. They've actually got like this great big mat or whatever you want to call it that rolls out onto the sand so someone in a wheelchair can actually go right down and experience the beach.

When we're talking about tourism, and you talked about the fact that the demographic that's coming here to Newfoundland and Labrador is not young families per se, unless they're coming to visit Nan and Pop, of course, whatever. Beyond that, it's an older demographic and we know with older demographics are going to come accessibility issues. It doesn't have to be but that's a demographic that, generally speaking, the older you get the more accessibility issues you're going to have.

So there's a tremendous market, when you think about tourism and you think about the number of people, not just here in our province, but across the country and around the world for that example that have accessibility needs.

What a great tourist draw to be able to say, you can come to Newfoundland and Labrador and you can experience the ocean, you can experience the parks, you can experience our culture and so on. We are known for being accessible, having accessibility to all of our facilities indoor and outdoor; working with our tourism industry,

like with hoteliers and so on to have, what I'll say, truly accessible rooms.

Because even now there are hotels that will bill themselves as being accessible, but if you were to talk to someone in the community, they will say it's billed as an accessible room but it's not really accessible because how can you have an accessible room on the fourth floor of a hotel? If there was ever a fire and you can't use the elevator, how does someone get down there in an elevator or down the set of stairs in a walker and so on?

So if you're going to have a truly accessible hotel room, as an example, they should be on the bottom floor, they should have the wide doors and all that kind of stuff.

So again, if you talk to people involved with COD NL and these groups, they will tell you that we still have a lot of challenges around accessibility and that not only is it the right thing to do to make it accessible for our own citizens and so on from a human rights point of view, but from a tourism point of view there is a huge, huge market of people out there that could come here and drop their money, quite frankly. That's what it's all about, bringing new money into the province, if accessibility was a focus.

So I don't know if that's something you guys have ever really talked about, if you've consulted with COD NL or other government departments on that, but it's something I wanted to just throw out there

S. CROCKER: No, it's a really good point. I think Gerry alluded to it in his comments a few moments ago when we talked about investments at the ACCs this year, and accessibility is a primary focus at the ACCs. You think about the ACCs and the age of those buildings, bricks and mortar. Bricks and mortar is tough, but it's important that we continue to find ways to make the ACCs more accessible, everything more accessible.

One of the things that I'm hoping to see, we announced an arts infrastructure program in the budget, \$2 million, and we're hoping to see in that a lot of community groups when it comes to the arts come in. One of the things that we've made a priority in that fund is making community facilities, art facilities more accessible.

When it comes to tourism, you're absolutely right. It's tough when you're dealing with some of the historic properties that we have in this province, but certainly anything that can be done is important. I think that is something that we look at when we rate a facility: accessibility is always important.

Because you're absolutely right, that older demographic is looking for the accessible room, the wide doors, the shower handles. Lots of times some of those improvements aren't the huge capital cost that you would suspect, and sometimes small things can do a lot to help. Obviously, there are some structural issues.

We were a part of the core mandate of government when it comes to accessibility and just recently finished reviewing – all of our agencies had to do accessibility reports and they're all completed now. So it's a focus of every branch.

P. LANE: Thank you, Minister.

The last question I've got, and it kind of goes back to earlier, but I'm sort of limited in my time here.

S. CROCKER: That's fine.

P. LANE: This will be my last question now, we'll move on, but can you comment on what is being done, if anything, to address the issue of rental cars, the lack of rental cars, the high cost of rental cars. I know it continues to be a challenge. I'm not saying there's any easy fix or easy answers. We all know there isn't.

But I'm just wondering what, if anything, is being done because there is no doubt about it, it's one thing to get people to come here, to fly them in or whatever, but nobody's going to come here if you can't – I don't know about you, but when I book a vacation or whatever –

S. CROCKER: Yeah.

P. LANE: – I'm booking my rental car before I arrive. I get off the plane and I pick up my rental car. If you can't do that to come to Newfoundland, then you're not going to come here. Having people driving around in U-Haul trucks is not the answer either. So I wonder if you could just comment on that.

S. CROCKER: Yeah, we meet quarterly with the rental car companies because it's always been an issue. I think if you go back, maybe to *Hansard* from this conversation last year, maybe even the year before, it's always an ongoing concern.

I had a conversation with the chair and the executive director of Hospitality Newfoundland and Labrador just this morning on it. They as well keep in regular contact with the providers. I won't even get into the fact that we're an island and transferring cars is practically impossible.

But just earlier this morning, I actually went online to book a rental car in three different locations from July 12 to July 20, and it was all done at airports: St. John's was \$1,250; Halifax was \$1,150; and Pearson was \$1,000. In my conversation with Hospitality Newfoundland and Labrador, they had just done a jurisdictional scan around Atlantic Canada; we are on par with Atlantic Canada. I'm not saying that that's the goal.

The other thing that we've done in the past and will continue to do is work with the airport authorities, because lots of times they have little nuggets or leverages that they can use to entice the rental car companies to give them a break on

something, whether it be a slot at an airport or something. So we're open to suggestions from the airport authorities and, again, we meet regularly with the providers, but it's a challenge.

Turo was an initiative – that was the rental car sharing program that HNL spearheaded a couple of years ago. It still exists and I think it has its challenges. It hasn't really taken off in the way that we would've hoped that it would.

But yeah, absolutely, it's one of the access challenges, without a doubt.

P. LANE: Thank you.

CHAIR: Any further questions under this heading?

Okay, seeing no further questions, I'm going to ask the Clerk to recall those headings.

CLERK: Arts and Culture, 3.1.01 to 3.1.07.

CHAIR: Shall these headings carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: Okay, the motion is carried.

On motion, subheads 3.1.01 through 3.1.07 carried.

CHAIR: We'll move to the next set of headings.

I'll ask the Clerk to call the headings.

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

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue.

J. DWYER: Thank you.

4.1.01, Newfoundland and Labrador Film Development Corporation: Is this increased \$400,000 announced in the budget? Is this a new position and why is it needed?

S. CROCKER: Yeah, these are two new positions that were created last year. Last year, we were able to fund them internally. This year, obviously, we've committed to the positions again.

As the industry has grown, the staff complement at the film corp has had to grow. Three years ago, they were administering a \$4-million equity fund, now they're administering a \$10-million equity fund. They have new tax credits. So it's really a reflection of the growing industry and their staff complement had to grow along with it.

J. DWYER: In 4.1.02, again the Newfoundland and Labrador Film Development Corporation, last year we talked about how hard it was to capture the value in TV and film, yet we're seeing growing numbers all the time to support further investment.

Can we see the analysis of how government calculates its value?

S. CROCKER: So there are some ACOA studies that we can certainly provide.

J. DWYER: Okay, thank you.

Can we have a list of the companies who benefited from the program?

S. CROCKER: Yeah, absolutely. Again, they're Crown, we don't have any influence on their funding applications, but we can certainly get that from their reporting.

J. DWYER: Okay.

4.2.01, Sport and Recreation: Why has Purchased Services increased by nearly \$454,000?

S. CROCKER: So this increase reflects funding from NLSchools that was previously a grant that we would give to the school district when there was a school board. Now, with the school board coming into government, that program will be administered through TCAR.

J. DWYER: Okay.

The Operating Accounts is up as well, is that the same reason, for the same amount?

S. CROCKER: Yeah, that's the \$455,000.

J. DWYER: Yeah.

Grants and Subsidies are down nearly \$1.5 million. Why is that?

J. O'DEA: End of Canada Games (inaudible).

S. CROCKER: Thanks, Jamie. She got it rehearsed; God love her.

That's the end of the Canada Games funding. So our commitment to the Canada Games now has been fulfilled.

AN HON. MEMBER: That's the operational side, Minister, right?

S. CROCKER: Yes.

J. DWYER: Can you explain the federal contribution of \$378,000?

S. CROCKER: That's a bilateral with the federal government –

OFFICIAL: (Inaudible.)

S. CROCKER: Oh, supports ParticipACTION, sorry.

J. DWYER: Can we get a list for the Grants and Subsidies?

S. CROCKER: Absolutely.

J. DWYER: Okay.

4.2.02, Newfoundland and Labrador Sports Centre Inc.: Can we assume the increase here is salary increments?

S. CROCKER: Yes.

J. DWYER: Okay.

S. CROCKER: That \$7,900?

J. DWYER: Yes.

S. CROCKER: Yeah.

J. DWYER: 4.2.03, Newfoundland and Labrador Sports Centre Inc. again: Is this new dome announced in the budget?

S. CROCKER: Yes, that's the dome. That's just the grant that we provide now to the Sports Centre Inc.

J. DWYER: Can I ask some general questions?

S. CROCKER: Sure, I'll give you general answers.

J. DWYER: As long as they're short.

Minister, air access continues to be an issue for our province. The government is investing another \$3.75 million.

Can you explain who will receive this funding?

S. CROCKER: So it is up to \$3.75 million.

J. DWYER: Yes.

S. CROCKER: So obviously that reflects the agreement between St. John's International Airport and WestJet. It reflects agreements that the Deer Lake Airport would have. It would anticipate or reflect other opportunities that will come forward from the airport authorities.

In 2024, we will see seat capacities that will exceed 2019. St. John's is going to exceed 2019 by about 25 per cent. Deer Lake is going to exceed 2019 by 30-plus per cent.

MHA Brown raised it earlier that we're working on some stuff right now about interprovincial connectivity. The airport authorities have been working extremely hard in securing routes, and kudos to them. They do a great job in getting out and selling themselves around the world and trying to encourage airlines to come here.

So that's our commitment, up to \$3.75 million.

J. DWYER: So does that number come down as we fill the flights and stuff? Like, if there is –

S. CROCKER: That is one of the factors that could factor into this. Lots of times, that's our commitment, but you also have to bear in mind there's also a commitment from the airport authorities themselves. Lots of times when you see an announcement, whether it's the WestJet announcement on the West Coast – WestJet is going to fly a direct Deer Lake this summer to Toronto, and they're actually, I think for the first time, going to fly a Deer Lake direct to Calgary. So those things come with price tags, but ones that are important.

J. DWYER: Okay.

So why don't government have a representative on the air access committee? We know HNL does, but why not government?

S. CROCKER: We do.

J. DWYER: We do?

S. CROCKER: Yeah, we work very closely with HNL and the airport authorities on air access.

J. DWYER: Okay.

Now that we have had a year of new Airbnb regulations, what's been the feedback from HNL, municipalities and certified tourism operators and the Airbnb owners themselves?

S. CROCKER: We've had a tremendous response. So much so, we actually just had to come out a couple of weeks ago and bring in a short delay. Not something we wanted to do, but when we started on March 31 of last year, we had 750 registered accommodators in this province. As of today, we're at 21?

OFFICIAL: Mm-hmm.

S. CROCKER: We have tripled to 2,100 registered accommodators in the province, and that's a very important piece of quality assurance. MHA Lane talked about quality assurance earlier on. This is a very important part of ensuring that when you put your head on a bed in Newfoundland and Labrador, there's some form of regulation, there's somebody knows where you're to.

So the take-up has been great. We're currently doing a project with HNL where they're helping us get through the backlog. Not only get through the backlog, they're actually out – not knocking on doors but actually going out and finding operators that may have missed it or have not registered and said hold on now, you need to become a part of this.

Quite frankly, the platforms, as well, have been cooperative. When we get there, they will change their platform that if you're not registered with the province, you will no longer be able to advertise on their platforms.

J. DWYER: When we see the increase in Airbnbs, obviously that's taken up a lot of our rental market and stuff like that, and we're finding that there are housing issues. Is there going to be any regulation on how many?

S. CROCKER: I think the new regulation that we brought in supports that to a certain extent, but I think the other thing is – and you can see a lot of that falls into the jurisdiction of municipalities. I think Bonavista, as an example, the municipality has brought in some regulations where you can only have a number of Airbnbs.

Because I tell you, and I know the Member for Bonavista knows this better than I do, but I think the challenge in Bonavista was the fact that something that was an Airbnb was giving staff that had to be brought in nowhere to stay, and those kinds of arrangements.

So a lot of that can be left to the municipalities, but we're willing to work with anybody on it, because these regulations are important, not only for safety, but for housing.

J. DWYER: Yeah.

Is there a long-term strategic tourism plan which includes marketing attraction development and accommodations?

S. CROCKER: I think the Vision covers off most of those points; and I think, again, we've commissioned this in-depth review of marketing, because marketing obviously has changed. The way people get their information has changed.

So we work closely with our agency to make sure we're following the trends, and pivoting, not pivoting too quick to make a mistake, but again changing with the times. That's always something that we're working with, with our agency.

J. DWYER: One of the things that I've brought up here actually through petitions and stuff like that is the fact of Wi-Fi service for our tourism – not only the operators, but for our tourists themselves, because when we have those great experiences, being able to relay it in real time to somebody might attract them to come here as well.

So I'm just saying that we've already heard over the last four or five years that we're trying to improve cell service and Wi-Fi and all this kind of stuff, but it doesn't seem to be getting to all rural parts of the province that have tourism operations and stuff. I'm just wondering, are you working with IET to get that done?

S. CROCKER: Absolutely, and I think IET can certainly speak to this. When you're dealing with the corporations that we're dealing with when it comes to cellular and the change of cellular, unfortunately, those big carriers are retracting on investment and pivoting their investment to other means with low-level satellite. Yes, 100 per cent, IET is aggressively at that. We'll work with municipalities. I think we've just upped – it was a 75-25 program. Now it's a 90-10 program.

So we're putting it out there. It's just finding the partners and finding the way to get it done. You're absolutely right. I think to add to that, IET has just announced an avenue or an EOI or an RFP to fund cell coverage on stretches of highway that don't have a municipality attached. So it always an important piece.

J. DWYER: Okay. Thank you, Minister.

I'll come back to some more questions.

CHAIR: Okay.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

J. BROWN: Thank you, Chair.

I guess the one I'll ask is: How many film and television productions are expected to be produced in the province this year?

S. CROCKER: There are 61 commitments. I know we have a renewal on *Son of a Critch*. We have a renewal on Rex and we have a renewal on *SurrealEstate*. We have one more exciting opportunity that hopefully we're getting close to.

So yes, 61 productions we've committed to so far this year.

J. BROWN: Versus how many last year?

S. CROCKER: Thirty-nine.

J. BROWN: Okay. So we almost doubled.

S. CROCKER: It's an amazing growth spurt in the industry, for sure.

J. BROWN: Excellent. Perfect.

What is the budget here for market development awareness? Is there anything we're budgeting to bring – I know, obviously, we're doubled this year, but are we doing any marketing to the film and television industry? Are we increasing our marketing to the film and television industry to get more in here?

S. CROCKER: So, yes, 100 per cent and kudos to Laura Churchill, the film commissioner for the province. They do a tremendous amount of marketing around the world. Every day, they attend many, many shows around the world.

Every time that I've had the opportunity to get to a show, the excitement around what we're doing in Newfoundland and Labrador with the aggressive tax credits – our tax credits, now, are on par with the Ontarios of the world, the BCs of the world. We fashion ourselves lots of times after Manitoba. Manitoba took their industry and grew it to about \$400 million.

PictureNL has done a great job in actually leveraging federal money through ACOA for their marketing initiatives. They've done a tremendous job in selling Newfoundland and Labrador because there's not much good to have these new tax credits, to your point, if you're not out telling the world that we have these tax credits.

J. BROWN: That's actually fantastic to hear.

I know that most of the film and television usually is Eastern Newfoundland right now. Are we doing any work to get film and television work done in, say, more of the Island and Labrador? Are we doing any work to spread it out a bit more or are we just sticking to Eastern Newfoundland and the Avalon?

S. CROCKER: We market Newfoundland and Labrador. The reality is, I guess, when they come to the market, the infrastructure is in St. John's. NIFCO is here. Studio availability or space is here. The Bonavista region has done really well, it has become a hot spot. But, yeah, we're open to filming everywhere.

I think *Alone* – was it *Alone*?

J. BROWN: Yeah.

S. CROCKER: *Alone* was filmed last year in Labrador. There are challenges when the industry comes here. They're looking for the necessities of doing it. I think there was a film shot last year on the Tablelands in Gros Morne.

J. BROWN: Okay.

S. CROCKER: So we would encourage them to go everywhere. Our marketing material that we use, when we do film shows, highlights the entire province.

J. BROWN: Okay. No, that's good. I just wanted to make sure because I know it is concentrated in this region, but obviously –

S. CROCKER: It is. It's capacity in lot of cases.

J. BROWN: I guess talking about capacity and stuff, you mentioned earlier in your opening remarks about the Film and Media Production Centre for the College of the North Atlantic is up and running. So that is 100 per cent, fully up and running now?

S. CROCKER: And at capacity, with a waiting list.

OFFICIAL: Seventy-seven students.

S. CROCKER: There are 77 students there currently.

J. BROWN: Seventy-seven, okay, and that's capacity for that facility?

S. CROCKER: It is.

J. BROWN: Okay. Perfect.

I guess we'll go over the Recreation. So the Aquarena, can we get a timeline and schedule of the completion for that? Is that going to be ready to go for the games? Is everything on schedule for that or are there still a few issues?

S. CROCKER: Memorial is the lead on that project. We do sit on a committee that meets biweekly to make sure the project is completed.

It's a challenging project, there is no doubt about it. But right now, the structural steel is in place. That's a milestone. The masonry on that, I think from the latest update I had, is about to start. The abatement is done?

OFFICIAL: Getting done.

S. CROCKER: Yeah, I think the abatement is about 80 per cent. There was a huge amount of abatement that had to be done, lead paint right on down through, what you can imagine in a 50-year-old facility.

So, look, there are a lot of people putting a lot of blood, sweat and tears into making sure that it's ready.

J. BROWN: Okay, perfect.

The track and field facility is also on schedule?

S. CROCKER: Again, it is. Again, that one is led by the city, but my latest conversation with the city on it is the steel is up. I think their schedule is to have a layer of asphalt this year, allow settling and then put the shine on it next spring.

J. BROWN: Okay, perfect. No, that's fantastic to hear.

I know, like I said, especially coming from Labrador, we still have a lot of concerns and stuff about athletes travelling to and from for different events and stuff. I know I had some concerns about volleyball, athletes that were chosen for the games and coming from Labrador and coming down to the city to train and things like that.

I was wondering if there's any work being done on the inside to improve athlete mobility within the province, given the geographical challenges that are Newfoundland and Labrador?

S. CROCKER: Yeah, our commitment as a department to the athlete amps up the closer we get to the games. So we have funding, we have our elite athlete program. We have an elite athlete program that ramps up the closer we get to the games. That will ramp up because most teams or a lot of teams are now being selected. That is the one commitment that we have as a department to the games is TeamNL. We'll make sure that we do whatever we can to make sure our athletes are trained and ready to go.

It'll be one of the things that we will have to do this fall. Quite honestly, when you speak about the Aquarena, is we will have to work with our diving and swimming, in some cases, to actually send them out, with the Aquarena being closed, send them out for training. Because we do, as a department, have a commitment to our athletes.

J. BROWN: Yeah, perfect. Thank you so much.

I know, like I said, with travel and stuff like that, we talked about Labrador athletes do have a bit of a significant challenge, even Northern Peninsula athletes travelling.

Is there anything after the games that we can work on to make sure that they can continue their training in some cases? Because this is just one event, but there are Canada Games every couple of years, so we want to keep these people in the sport, right.

S. CROCKER: Well, I think that may be a question as well for the Department of Labrador Affairs, because obviously they have the Labrador travel subsidy in their department. But it's always a commitment to us to make sure that we train, no matter where they are in the province, our somewhat elite athletes, our Canada Games-ready athlete. It's a commitment that we always hold important to make sure that they get the training required so that we can present ourselves very strong when it comes to games.

J. BROWN: Yeah.

One last question, maybe it's for you, maybe it's for Justice, but given some of the issues with abuse in sport and stuff like that, is there any work being done in your department in Recreation for education, but also for reporting because we've all seen it, is there anything inside your department that you're doing to help talk about this, but also at the same time report it, but also put in protections for between people of authority and athletes?

S. CROCKER: The federal government has challenged all provinces to bring in a complaint system.

J. BROWN: Yes.

S. CROCKER: We are a part of that. We're doing it. It's very important. We see the Hockey Canada challenges and I think that's where we received the mandate for

the direction from Sport Canada to make sure that we're a part of it. We are in the process, as all the provinces are, of putting a complaint mechanism in place.

J. BROWN: Perfect. Thank you so much, Minister.

That's my questions for this section.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue.

J. DWYER: Thank you, Chair.

Celebrate NL is a Crown corporation and it was incorporated last year. We were told that it will work on attracting large events to the province like the Brier, the JUNOs, et cetera. There was no funding allocated in this year's budget, yet \$1.3 million was spent for what? Then, this year, over \$4 million is allocated in Grants and Subsidies. Can we have a list of these?

S. CROCKER: So, obviously, the \$4.6 million I can't give you a list of because that's what we're going to spend this year. I can give you a list of what we did last year.

We make bids all the time and we'll continue to make bids. Obviously, that's not information that we can share because we'd be tipping our hand of what we're bidding and what we're bidding for. We can give you what we invested in last year.

J. DWYER: Okay.

Marine Atlantic offers discounts for individuals who book prior to the end of April and travel prior to June of last year. Can tourists expect that discount to travel on Marine Atlantic this fiscal year?

S. CROCKER: I would certainly hope so. I do believe that they did do a 25 per cent discount in this spring season and we will certainly encourage them – we meet a couple of times a year with the CEO of Marine Atlantic. It's always something more

encouraging to do. If you talk to our tourism operators, the shoulder season is where we have capacity and that's why we encourage Marine Atlantic to do the discount in the spring and the discount in the fall.

So, yes, absolutely, it's important and our operators really see a benefit in those shoulder-season discounts.

J. DWYER: Do you think that there should be more federal investments, seeing how it's considered, let's say, the Trans-Canada Highway to get to Newfoundland? I mean, to go from Ontario to Manitoba it doesn't cost you a cent. Right?

S. CROCKER: The quick answer is absolutely, 100 per cent, yes. I met with the federal transportation minister and tourism minister just before Christmas to make that exact point. The fact is, if you call up Marine Atlantic right now and look for a passage in July or August, you're probably not going to get one.

J. DWYER: No.

S. CROCKER: And that's wrong because if we dug up the border between Nova Scotia and New Brunswick in the middle of the summer and there was no access, it's not right.

They are bringing on the new boat this summer that will add some capacity, but we will continue to not have the capacity that we need in July and August.

J. DWYER: And the Argentia run is going back as well?

S. CROCKER: Argentia will be back. Actually, Argentia will have the new vessel this year as they work the bugs out of it.

J. DWYER: Okay.

The Aquarena repairs continue to escalate and, by all reports, the facility is not likely to be completed on time or on budget. When

can we expect the facility to reopen and at what cost? But what are we also doing for our athletes that would normally use this facility for their training, particularly, like our competitive swimmers and divers?

S. CROCKER: Obviously, we are not in charge of the budget. Our commitment is about \$24 million that we've, I guess, granted to Memorial. I am not aware that it's not going to be ready. We're on a committee that meets biweekly. Challenging, absolutely. As I said earlier the structural steel is done and the abatement, I think, is 80 per cent complete.

We're doing what we can. It's a Memorial project. They seem to have a good handle on it. I'm not aware of it being over budget. I guess, it's over budget from where we started out five years ago. Our responsibility as the department is the athlete, and we will work to and make sure that our athletes that would have to use that for qualifying, for training, we'll make sure the proper provisions are in place –

J. DWYER: Are there any other 50-metre pools in the area?

S. CROCKER: There are not.

J. DWYER: No.

S. CROCKER: There are none in the province.

J. DWYER: In this budget were a number of recreational facility announcements totalling over \$14 million. Are these all part of the 2025 Canada Games required infrastructure? Are they being cost-shared? Seeing in particular the \$550,000 for Virginia Park Community Centre, the dome multiplex?

S. CROCKER: The only infrastructure that we have in the budget this year that would be games related would be the dome, and that's not games specific because that

actually would be rehabilitation and the \$900,000 for the Pippy Park.

The commitments we've made to the games on infrastructure currently have been obviously the Aquarena, the track and field facility and we're working with Tennis NL and Tennis Canada for the new dome which is also on schedule and should be in place later this year.

J. DWYER: So the \$550,000 for Virginia Park Community Centre, is that cost-shared with the city?

S. CROCKER: It's not in our department. I'm not sure if it's in TI or –

G. LITTLEJOHN: (Inaudible.)

S. CROCKER: Is it in the budget? What line?

G. LITTLEJOHN: But it came when the –

S. CROCKER: In the speech?

G. LITTLEJOHN: Yeah (inaudible) –

S. CROCKER: Yeah, maybe – yeah, but it's not in our lines.

G. LITTLEJOHN: Okay.

S. CROCKER: I'm assuming it's – well, I shouldn't assume anything, but I would think it's TI or Municipal Affairs.

J. DWYER: Why are we investing \$8 million into a new, mid-size theatre when one recently opened in the private sector here in the city? Is there that much of a demand for two facilities? Is there any pushback from that?

S. CROCKER: As I alluded to when we started out, we are out now into sort of a phase 2 of consultation on this. We will consult our private theatre operators, but I would argue that there is need in the community. The arts community will tell you,

I think, pretty clearly that there is need for public space. There is a difference, quite frankly, in private and public space, and our artists do need this space.

If we're going to continue to build on a culture of theatre, you need to build that menu. You can have one theatre, you can have two, but the more experiences you can have, that's the way to attract that tourist and keep that entertainment level up there. But I think if you were to check with the arts community, they would tell you that a new, mid-size theatre here in St. John's is long, long, long overdue.

J. DWYER: Yeah.

Come From Away has been a great success, with sell-outs each night. Why are we still subsidizing the show to the tune of \$1.1 million?

S. CROCKER: That's the in and out, right?

OFFICIAL: Ticket sales.

S. CROCKER: That's ticket sales.

So unfortunately – not unfortunately, but that's ticket sales, so what happened last year, we had to put more money into the purchased services agreement at the ACC because ticket sales exceeded what we thought they were going to be.

J. DWYER: Okay.

S. CROCKER: Because you buy your ticket, the money goes in general revenue and ACC has got to pay it out. So that's why we had to put the money in the ACC's purchased services. And that extra million this year is because we anticipate over a million dollars in *Come From Away* ticket sales.

J. DWYER: Okay.

Can you provide any further detail on the \$2 million announced for the cultural facility infrastructure fund (inaudible)?

S. CROCKER: Yeah, that's the one I alluded to a minute ago when we talked about accessibility – Arts Infrastructure and Programming. There might have been some miswording in how that one was put out, but that program is open. We opened it a couple of weeks ago, and I think that program in a lot of ways, if you go in, looks like Active NL. And that's the design of it.

I would encourage the MHAs in the room to sell that program in your constituencies because it's a great way to get some money into a sector that has not had the opportunity in the past to do those upgrades. Whereas we were doing it with recreation through Active NL, this new program can help community groups, not-for-profit community groups, groups that normally wouldn't qualify for Arts NL funding. Prebudget, they would not have had a pot of funding that they could go to for small projects.

J. DWYER: But it had to be a separate entity from the community or the LSD or anything like that?

S. CROCKER: Let me try and dig up a quick example.

J. DWYER: I'm trying to get some money for South East Bight.

S. CROCKER: We used to see overlapping applications come into Active NL. A community group, the Bay St. George Folk Arts Council, wanted to buy accordions to provide an accordion program to schools in Bay St. George. This is the gap that this program, we hope, will fill in some of that type of need.

J. DWYER: The last comment that I'm really want to make – well, of course, I want to thank the staff for your answers today and the minister, but one of the things that the

Official Opposition are really on board with is the repatriation of our soldier.

We have a veteran in the House and to have him involved with it, I think, is poignant. Whatever we can do, I guess, to support that, I think that we will. So we are looking forward to the ceremony and all that stuff. Like I said, I think that's the right avenue to take. Not that Newfoundlanders don't have a lot of pride, but they'll have a lot of pride now with this, too.

S. CROCKER: I couldn't agree more. That's a very important project and one that we will come see to fruition on July 1.

J. DWYER: Yes.

Thank you, everybody.

CHAIR: The hon. Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

P. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, first of all, I got a question – I want to go back to the parks. I think you said it was Cheeseman, outside of the Port aux Basques area, and that people from outside the province are the primary focus there. In terms of some of the parks closer to this area – I'll just use Butter Pot as an example. I know I had heard from some people a couple of years ago who had some concerns. I never heard from them last year or this year, so maybe it's all addressed, which is good if it is.

But their concern was more around the fact that it's a lot of local people using, say, Butter Pot Park, and with families, young families and so on. Their concern was around the deterioration of the park. They felt the playground was falling apart, whatever, not in the best shape, not a whole lot in it, and the fact that there used to be programs there. They'd have like scavenger hunts and different things for the kids during the summer and then for some reason it all kind of went away. I don't know, maybe it

was COVID related or whatever, but it was about providing more programming and experiences and things for kids and families to do within the park to make it a more enjoyable experience.

I'm just wondering, I haven't heard nothing, like I said, in the last year so maybe you've addressed all or some of that, but you can speak to that.

S. CROCKER: Yeah, we did. I think we probably finished the project last year. We completed all new playgrounds in all the parks with a focus on accessibility. I won't say it's perfect, but we did – I think Butter Pot actually had two new playgrounds. I think Butter Pot, being a larger park, had two or three new playgrounds.

You're absolutely right on programming. That's something that we hear. Obviously, COVID stopped programming.

One of the other things we did in all the provincial parks in that same investment as the playgrounds was a campfire space. It wasn't only a campfire space, but it provides an opportunity, a little tiny space that's not a theatre, but it gives an opportunity with some seating for programming.

Two years, I think, we were successful in having a cost-share agreement with the federal government on students and we were able to double the number of students. They played a major role in doing programming in the parks. Last year, we weren't successful in that application, but thankfully this year we were successful again, so we'll have double – we'll have an extra 15 students in the parks this summer and their focus would certainly be on programming.

P. LANE: Okay. Well that's good to hear. Like I said, it was things like scavenger hunting, you used to have movies.

S. CROCKER: One hundred per cent.

P. LANE: Movie night and campfire night and singalongs and all that good stuff. The kids enjoyed it.

S. CROCKER: Yeah, quickly to your point, though, you're absolutely right, Butter Pot wouldn't be a park that has a transient population.

P. LANE: Yeah.

S. CROCKER: Transient customer, whereas Cheeseman's would. So the parks are all somewhat different in a way.

P. LANE: Correct, yeah, and a different demographic using them. So that's good.

My final question, I guess, I'm saying it's my final question unless something else comes to mind, but I want to go to the Sports Centre, the announcement on the Sports Centre and the dome and whatever.

I had a constituent of mine who reached out to me, you probably might be familiar with what I'm going to say now, maybe you are, maybe you aren't; your staff, I think, should be. He operates a private facility, indoor turf facility, catering to like baseball and stuff like that, I think he's in Paradise. He lives in Southlands but I think his business is in Paradise, Mount Pearl boy, actually. Basically, he was very upset over the fact that this announcement was made and that in making this announcement and so on, the department was reaching out to, I'll say his customer base, reaching out to baseball, reaching out to the frisbee group, reaching out to basically all his customers, I guess. What it comes down to and the concern being that here I am, taking a risk, investing my own private money and now the government is going to subsidize and pay for a facility to take me out of business, I guess that would be sort of the concern.

Now, I know he's had a number of meetings and have been having meetings with staff since then, but I'm just wondering if you can sort of – no issue with the health. I know

part of this has to do with health and rehab and the Department of Health and all that good stuff, no issue with any of that stuff, but will this be allowed to happen or will there be some proviso to say there are certain groups that we're not going to be taking in this? We're not going to be competing with this guy or anybody else for that matter, be taking away customers in terms of sports organizations that can just as easily go to his place, like they're doing now, as opposed to going to a government subsidized facility?

S. CROCKER: Good question. We've met with the gentleman, I think, you're referring to and we've met with another private operator as well and assured them that – it wasn't the department reaching out, it was the Sports Centre that did some work early on trying to figure out what demand was out there.

P. LANE: Yeah.

S. CROCKER: A lot of that was done prior to the commitment to Health Services, and I fully understand how the business works. So the facility will be occupied by Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services or health authority from 9 to 5, Monday to Friday. Now I get it, I get that they're selling 5 p.m. to 10 p.m.

There won't be predatory pricing. Our focus at this Sports Centre will be Newfoundland and Labrador Games athletes, the PSOs, not going out searching into baseball or softball or soccer leagues. The primary focus will be training our provincial team caliber athletes.

There's such a demand for these facilities. If one of these private facilities were closed, we'd be defeating the purpose. So that's not our goal at all and we'll continue to work with them.

But to just give you a quick number, if you think about the facility we have now on Crosbie Road, so the only time left is –

there are about 40 hours left now at the new building that's not built yet; 40 per cent of those hours are already gone because 40 per cent of what happens on hardwood now at the Sports Centre should be happening on turf. So what they're going to do is they're going to move the rugby team, for example, that's training on hardwood will now go to turf. So a lot of this capacity for turf is already taken.

We don't see a large impact. It may impact, frankly, some really late nights. We know of some organizations that are having to do their particular sport at midnight. This will give an opportunity to bring it back to more realistic hours.

We have a growing sports community. I think about cricket. As our population changes and we bring in more and more new Canadians, we're finding new sports. We're confident that there is lots of capacity in the system for this.

P. LANE: Okay.

I thank you for that, Minister and I do understand his point, right?

S. CROCKER: I do as well, 100 per cent.

P. LANE: And I can understand that if we are in certain parts of the province, if I can position it that way, there are going to be certain areas of the province because of the demographics, because of the population and so on, they're not going to be able to have a facility per se unless the government steps in and provides a provincial facility or helps facilitate it or cost share with a municipality or whatever to make it happen.

S. CROCKER: Yes.

P. LANE: But certainly in the more heavily populated areas, where there are lots of private entities and opportunities for private entities, one has to wonder, is it a good use of the taxpayers' money to be subsidizing and, in theory, competing against existing

private businesses that can offer the exact same programs and are willing and able to do so; therefore, there wouldn't be no need for the provincial spend to occur.

S. CROCKER: I don't disagree, but the challenge is this is our provincial facility, right? We only have one. We operate this facility on Crosbie Road. It was envisioned to be our centre of excellence for training our Newfoundland and Labrador teams because, remember, the sports facility currently on Crosbie Road services teams that are from all over the province because it serves our provincial teams which are built from wherever – no matter where you're to, it's the provincial training facility. I think it's important that, as a province, we do have provincial training facilities and, logically, they would be in the capital.

P. LANE: Sure. No, I understand.

I guess the very last point I just want to make, because I think everyone's done now anyway, and I think you kind of touched on it and I raised it a bit earlier I guess perhaps in a different way. But in terms of provincial investment, we're just talking about investing money into facilities and tourism, for whatever the purpose might be, the whole concept of – and you did mention it – sometimes we can try to spread it all out – and I know it's all good politically for whoever is there to try to share it all out so everybody gets a little bit of something, but I think we need to be mindful as well with some of these dollars if we're going to be making investments, are we not better off making a big investment in something substantive that's actually going to draw tourism and have this product that everyone's going to want to see, as opposed to chopping it up into a hundred pieces just for the sake of doing so. I'll just throw that out there as well.

S. CROCKER: No, I couldn't agree more, and that's I think to some of the comments I made earlier. We have five, maybe six hubs of tourism in this province, and that's what

we need to focus on. If you look at other jurisdictions – if you think about Alberta, what comes to mind when it comes to tourism? The Rocky Mountains, Banff, Jasper. You don't think about Fort McMurray for tourism because they're busy doing oil. And we need that same attitude in the province.

The Member for Bonavista and I, on the break, chatted about the fact that – I'll name them: it's St. John's and the Southern Avalon; the Burin Peninsula has potential; Bonavista Peninsula has potential; Labrador has potential; Gros Morne area; the Northeast Coast up in the Twillingate region. So these are the areas that – and we talk about it all the time – we, as a department, need to focus on growing that.

The province invested I think it was \$10 million in the Fogo Island Inn. Best \$10 million we ever spent when you think about the investment in that and what that has actually done of putting Newfoundland and Labrador on the map. It is not about staying there, but it's about the coverage that facility has gotten and how you can go practically anywhere in the world and say Fogo Island Inn and someone knows what you're talking about.

P. LANE: Correct, it's about strategic investment.

S. CROCKER: A hundred per cent, yeah.

P. LANE: So I guess that's the point.

Anyway, thank you, Minister, for your time. Thank you to your staff as well and everyone else.

CHAIR: Seeing no further questions, I'll ask the Clerk to call the headings for Film, Television and Recreation.

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

CHAIR: Shall the heading 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: Now we have to do the total, so I'll ask the Clerk to call the total.

CLERK: The total.

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 as 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: So that's it for today. I just want to thank the minister and the departmental officials for coming in today and being so helpful in answering the Member's questions. We don't have a date for our next meeting at this point, I don't think, do we?

CLERK: Yes, we do. Tuesday, April 16 at 6 p.m.

CHAIR: Okay.

That's the last order of business I think, so we need a motion to adjourn.

J. DWYER: So moved.

C. PARDY: Seconded.

CHAIR: Moved by the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue and seconded by the Member for Bonavista.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

Thank you all.

On motion, the Committee adjourned.