

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE

ON

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Wednesday, April 13, 2022

LEGISLATIVE CHAMBER

Population Growth Marketing Campaign

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Public Accounts Committee

Hon. Kelly Regan (Chair)
Nolan Young (Vice-Chair)
Dave Ritcey
John A. MacDonald
Melissa Sheehy-Richard
Trevor Boudreau
Hon. Brendan Maguire
Claudia Chender
Susan Leblanc

[Nolan Young was replaced by John White.]

In Attendance:

Kim Langille
Legislative Committee Clerk

Philip Grassie
Legislative Counsel

Kim Adair,
Auditor General

WITNESSES

Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism & Heritage

Justin Huston,
Deputy Minister

Department of Labour, Skills & Immigration

Ava Czapalay,
Deputy Minister

Kimberly Jardine,
Director - Attraction & Engagement, Immigration & Population Growth Branch

Jennifer L'Esperance,
Senior Executive Director - Immigration & Population Growth Branch



HALIFAX, WEDNESDAY, APRIL 13, 2022

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

9:00 A.M.

CHAIR

Hon. Kelly Regan

VICE CHAIR

Nolan Young

THE CHAIR: I now call the Standing Committee on Public Accounts to order. My name is Kelly Regan. I'm the MLA for Bedford Basin. I will remind everyone to place your phones on silent or vibrate, and to keep your mask on, except when you're speaking.

I'm going to ask the committee members to introduce themselves, starting to my immediate left with MLA Chender.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: Welcome to the committee. This is Mr. White's first time here, so welcome. We'll be kind - maybe. (Laughter)

Over on the opposite side, we have committee members from the Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage, as well as the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration. We'll hear from them in just a moment.

I would like to note that officials from the Auditor General's Office, Legislative Counsel's Office, and Legislative Committees Office are in attendance as well. Joining us for the first time from the Legislative Counsel office is Philip Grassie. Welcome to the Public Accounts Committee this morning.

On today's agenda, we have officials with us, as I said, from the Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage, and the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration, regarding the population-growth marketing campaign. I will ask the witnesses to introduce themselves.

[The witnesses introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: I'm going to ask our witnesses to make their opening remarks, beginning with Deputy Minister Huston.

JUSTIN HUSTON: Good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to be here with Deputy Czapalay to answer your questions about the population-growth campaigns undertaken by our two departments.

I'm going to kick things off with a quick overview of the Work from Nova Scotia campaign that was launched by Tourism Nova Scotia in 2020, and then I'll turn it over to Deputy Czapalay, who will speak about the marketing campaign her team at the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration has been leading to attract newcomers from across Canada.

To provide you with some context, in the Summer 2020, the government's Office of Strategy Management approached Tourism Nova Scotia to develop a marketing campaign to encourage remote workers to come to Nova Scotia. If you recall, at the time the pandemic was in full force, and between Public Health orders and border restrictions, there were limited opportunities for tourism marketing. The timing was perfect to redeploy the team's marketing resources to capitalize on shifting workplace trends and technology advances that allowed employees to work from anywhere.

If you recall, also at that time, Nova Scotia was being recognized internationally, and certainly across Canada, for our handling of the pandemic. People were organically buying real estate sight unseen and moving to the province. With population growth as a top priority for government, and an opportunity to keep Nova Scotia's brand front and centre with Canadians, Tourism Nova Scotia - with its agency of record, m5 Marketing Communications - developed an advertising campaign and website to invite Canadians with the ability to work from anywhere to come work and live in Nova Scotia.

The first phase of the campaign ran from December 2020 to March 31, 2021. The second phase started in April, but was paused due to increased COVID cases. The campaign was once again reinstated in December 2021 at the request of the newly-elected government.

I'm very pleased with the collaboration that has happened between Tourism Nova Scotia and the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration over the past six months. The teams have shared their expertise, learnings, photos, video content, and they have evolved

the website, LiveInNovaScotia.com, to be the go-to source for information about living and working in the province.

We are pleased with the metrics and overall performance of the marketing campaign. Now that the campaign has concluded, Tourism Nova Scotia has returned to our mandated tourism development and marketing activities, with a focus on tourism recovery and future growth. We look forward to being a supporting partner for the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration in their efforts to grow Nova Scotia's population.

Thanks again for your interest in our campaign. I will now turn things over to Deputy Minister Czapalay.

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister Czapalay.

AVA CZAPALAY: Good morning. Thank you, Deputy Minister Huston. It's a pleasure to join you today to discuss the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration's Population Growth Marketing Campaign and our efforts to attract and retain people in Nova Scotia. I would also like to thank Deputy Minister Huston and his team at the Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage for their partnership over the last six months.

Promoting Nova Scotia to prospective residents is a collective effort, and I am proud to be here to talk about the work we are doing together.

Madam Chair and committee members, it is hard to believe that it has already been eight years since Nova Scotians were told we had to act - now or never. The 2014 *One Nova Scotia* report - or Ivany report, as it's been known as - outlined nineteen actions. Among these are the necessity to grow Nova Scotia's population.

I am so proud to stand before you today and say Nova Scotia is making incredible progress. For the first time ever, Nova Scotia has more than one million residents calling this beautiful province home. This is an important milestone toward our goal of two million people by 2060. I actually checked the population clock for you last night.

I want to tell you that our population, as of last night, was 1,007,802 residents. What that means is that we've grown our population by 7,802 people in four months. That's almost a Bridgewater.

Last year, in 2021, in the middle of a pandemic, we also attracted more immigrants to Nova Scotia than ever before. We have been retaining more Nova Scotians, especially youth, who see opportunities to live, work, and raise families in Nova Scotia. But we can't stop here. We must keep going and keep growing our economy and address labour shortages through population growth.

We know that population growth must be strategic and well-planned. It must benefit rural and urban communities, and it must increase diversity and inclusion throughout Nova Scotia. Our communities must be ready to welcome newcomers to both communities and workplaces. With the development of Nova Scotia's Population Growth Recruitment Campaign, we have intentionally charted a strategic path that matched population growth to labour market demand.

On December 20, 2021, the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration launched a bold new campaign to attract newcomers. We wanted people to know Nova Scotia has a lot to offer, and that we're ready to hire people working in health care and skilled trades. Based on research and with the expertise of m5 Marketing Communications, a local marketing agency, we developed a campaign that reminded job-ready Canadians that Nova Scotia is an incredible place to live and to work.

In just three months, this recruitment campaign has generated 100 million impressions. Impressions are the number of times our ads were shown or heard. Over 530,000 people have visited the website, LiveinNovaScotia.com. From the website, people can connect with our navigators. We know making the decision to move to a new place can take weeks, months, or longer, and we're here and ready to help.

So far, our navigators have responded to more than 520 inquiries from prospective Nova Scotians. Some people who contact us are at the beginning of their journey, and others are further along.

For example, we were recently contacted by a couple who had already made the decision to move here and put an offer on a home. One part of the couple is an experienced bus and large truck mechanic looking for work, and his partner was looking for remote work. Our navigators have built a great relationship with this couple and continue to support them as they settle into their new community.

This is one example of how people are responding to our campaign, and we are just getting started. In 2022-23, Labour, Skills and Immigration will continue to make sure Nova Scotia remains top-of-mind with a \$1-million investment in additional marketing in the 2022-23 budget.

While attracting and recruiting skilled labourers is a priority for our department, the job to attract new Nova Scotians belongs to all of us. We need to draw on our long history of welcoming newcomers. We have to get our communities ready, we have to get our workplaces ready, and we have to showcase the very best of who we are as Nova Scotians.

Madam Chair and members of the committee, I know we can make tremendous progress working together to welcome people home to Nova Scotia. Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

THE CHAIR: We are going to begin our first round of questioning, which involves 20 minutes for each caucus. We'll begin first with the Liberal caucus, then the NDP and the PC, and then we will divvy up the time afterward.

We will begin now with the Liberal caucus, and the honourable Brendan Maguire.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Obviously tourism is important, and so is immigration. We all know that Nova Scotia is a fantastic place to live and work. One of the things that attracts people to Nova Scotia is reputation.

Last night I took an Uber home, and the gentleman was from India. We started talking about this. His partner is coming from India in August, and they're actually packing up and moving to Ontario. I asked why. He said, did you read the *New York Times* article on COVID hotspots? I said, actually, no. I went home, read the article, and also read the article on the CBC that Nova Scotia is now considered one of the worst places in all of North America for COVID. It's considered one of the most dangerous hotspots for COVID.

That was reported by *The New York Times*, which has a daily readership in the tens of millions. That is impacting what people think of this province. People are making decisions now. We get a lot of people from the east coast in particular who come up to Nova Scotia, and they're making decisions now on where they're going to spend their tourism money. People are making decisions now on where they're going to land in this country and where they're going to stay. This is a major issue.

I'm going to keep my questions short, so I'm asking that the answers are short too - that's hard for me to do, so I appreciate it. My question for Deputy Minister Huston and Deputy Minister Czapalay is, we can't deny that this has an impact. When international media is telling people not to come to Nova Scotia, what kind of obstacles is this presenting for you in the tourism season and immigration overall?

JUSTIN HUSTON: Certainly, I think as we've navigated through the different waves of COVID - we're now in the sixth wave, I think is what they're calling it - it's required the sector to be incredibly flexible and adaptable and nimble.

Frankly, from the inquiries that are coming in on the websites and different material, we're seeing questions like we always have around it, but we're not seeing an increase at this point. That might be because there's a bit of lag in terms of public perception of things and as things go.

I would say our target markets, particularly from Ontario, Quebec, the northeast U.S., and parts of Europe, have all probably gone through more extreme waves of COVID recently. So I think they're probably seeing this here and are probably looking at it in terms of seeing what the numbers are and are going to be making their decisions based on that. I would say that they've probably already experienced this in their home jurisdictions.

A part of the work that we do is both - the sector has been hit incredibly hard, so it's looking at ways that we can rebuild and encourage people to come and visit Nova Scotia, but also helping them understand that there are Public Health measures in place, and there are steps that they can take to keep them and their families healthy.

[9:15 a.m.]

AVA CZAPALAY: I would like to add a few points from the immigration perspective and the newcomers' perspective from the rest of Canada. We do recognize that moving to Nova Scotia is a personal decision. What we have found to be very effective with the population growth campaign is the use of navigators in communities who can be there to directly answer questions for people who are considering making a move. If the navigators don't have the answer at their fingertips, they can contact others in the community who can help respond to a whole array of questions.

I would like to quickly comment on your initial statement about representation being essential. Thank you for mentioning that because the reputation is important. Therefore, our emphasis is on helping people settle well and really ensuring that we have welcoming communities and welcoming workplaces that are ready to support newcomers.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: No doubt that the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration in particular does an incredible job, and so does CCTH, obviously. Immigration - people coming to this province - is a beautiful thing, seeing more cultures and more people. I believe it makes our neighbourhoods and our province a better place to live. I have been able to live in some pretty multi-cultural cities. I lived in London for a while and different parts of Europe, and it's a beautiful thing to see. The food in particular is a lot better.

The reason I brought up the New York Times article was because it was brought up to me last night by an individual who is very concerned. We know that the deputy minister had said that during the first few waves, because of how well we handled it, we saw an influx of people coming to Nova Scotia. In fact, I think it was the New York Times that wrote an article saying that Nova Scotia was the safest place in the world to live at the time. I think someone said at one point Donald Trump was going to move here. I think that was the big joke.

All jokes aside, we saw a major influx of people moving to this province, buying properties in this province - not just from the States but from across Canada and Europe. The interest and the hits that we were receiving on the tourism and immigration websites was through the roof. Compare that to what's happening now - the New York Times, which probably has one of the largest readerships in the world of any newspaper or any media outlet. They're now saying to people, wait a second, this province went from first to worst. How do we combat that?

I understand the conversation we just had about how we have people in place to help with things like that. But the truth is that we have to convince people to spend their tourism dollars here, that it's going to be safe, that people who haven't contacted COVID-19 or who have some concerns around COVID-19 are going to be okay here in Nova Scotia to spend their tourism dollars, and move here to this province, when everybody else is saying that it's not a safe place.

The New York Times laid out some pretty startling facts on what's happening here in Nova Scotia. We can at least admit that this is going to make your jobs a little bit more difficult from a tourism standpoint and immigration standpoint because this is going to come up. Actually, there was an article in the CBC yesterday, so that made national headlines. You're not going to see the blowback from these articles right away. It's going to take some time.

Can we at least admit that the influx of COVID-19 is going to make things difficult? What are your departments doing to counter this? That was not a short question, sorry.

JUSTIN HUSTON: I'll try to keep my answer shorter than the question, but I'll see what I can do. (Laughter) Yes, my former minister here.

Like you said, I think it's important to note that there is going to be a bit of a lag. Certainly, the numbers of what we're seeing in terms of bookings are increasing, so it's a positive sign right now. Of course, there is always going to be some sort of lag in terms of people making decisions based on information. Again, it is their choice, as my colleague said, both in terms of immigration and tourism.

Our job in terms of what some of the things that we're doing are highlighting the experiences - world class tourism experiences - that we have here in the province that you can't get in some places anywhere else in the world. That, doubled with the fact of highlighting the types of activities that put people outdoors and in spaces - some of our ad campaigns have a mix of folks who have masks or are unmasked activities at play so they can see themselves there.

As well I'll just reference the fact that the folks who are coming here, our target markets, have lived through and experienced waves of COVID-19 that we're now experiencing here. I think our target markets are familiar with this and they understand how to navigate through this. They're making decisions based on that.

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister Czapalay.

AVA CZAPALAY: I'll keep it short, too. I just wanted to mention, to really emphasize that moving from one country to another or moving from one jurisdiction to another often is a longer-term decision. Although we've been surprised by some folks

responding to our navigator campaign who text us to say, “hi, here I am” kind of thing but generally it’s a long-term decision that often involves more than one member of the family.

We’re playing the long game here and really working on a strategy to continue to promote Nova Scotia’s profile both across Canada and globally.

THE CHAIR: MLA Maguire - who allegedly will keep his question short.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: One of the things that your department, deputy minister, is tasked to do is to attract skilled trades, which is fantastic. The campaign has been rolled out.

For the months of January and February, can you tell us how many nurses, long-term care workers, CCAs, and doctors were attracted to this province over that time? They are skilled workers.

AVA CZAPALAY: I might have to get you those numbers, but on the population campaign, I can tell you that we had over 500 inquiries. They were almost exactly split down the middle in terms of being half from skilled trades and half from health care workers. The campaign really did target skilled trades workers and health care workers. They did deliberately target working age population so that people would come here job ready.

I don’t have those exact numbers. I’m just looking at my team to see if they do. No, not at their fingertips.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: If you could send that into the committee at a later point, that’d be great.

There has been a bit of a transition on the marketing campaign. In 2020, we saw a lot of, especially when it comes to attracting skilled labour, “this is Nova Scotia”. This is what it brings to the table, beautiful Peggy’s Cove to Premier Houston sitting at his desk and pretending to make a phone call.

It went from “this is Nova Scotia” to “this is your Premier”. The focal point went from Nova Scotians to the Premier of Nova Scotia. That ad has been shared by the Premier and his colleagues a lot.

Whose decision was it to go from “hey everybody, come to Nova Scotia to enjoy our beaches, to enjoy all this stuff.” to that particular ad where it’s him picking up the phone, pretending to call somebody, and making the ad about him?

AVA CZAPALAY: I believe the Population Growth Marketing Campaign was always about marketing Nova Scotia. The firm that we hired, m5, did some research before

the campaign was actually launched to find out what people thought and knew about Nova Scotia, and what attributes that we enjoy here in Nova Scotia would persuade people to pick up their home and move here.

Part of that research identified our lifestyle, our proximity to the ocean was key, and just the work/life balance. Our entire campaign, which was a pretty comprehensive campaign that included a whole range of things, from the video you mentioned right through to billboards on the Don Valley Parkway, billboards outside hospitals in Toronto, radio ads, all kinds of social media that generated those 100 million impressions that I told you about in my opening remarks - all really showcased the value of the lifestyle that we have here in Nova Scotia. I just wanted to say that. That was always our focus, right from the outset.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: What information did m5 show that said that this is about lifestyle and all that stuff, but in particular, that ad? Whose decision was it to feature - it looked like a political ad, to be honest with you. We had lots of people reach out, to me in particular, and others, who said, this looks like a political ad. It's the Premier pretending to make a phone call and is a bit of self promotion.

Whose decision was it for that ad in particular? Whose decision was it to make that ad and to pivot from - because that cost money from taxpayers' dollars to make that ad - and to pivot from "look at our beaches" to that particular ad? And how effective was it?

AVA CZAPALAY: In terms of the research, I'll get my colleague Kim Jardine to talk to you about that research initiative in more detail.

The entire campaign, as I mentioned, was really selling Nova Scotia as a destination and really promoting the lifestyle that we have here in Nova Scotia. Our navigators worked hard. Once the inquiries came in, our navigators would respond to those inquiries within 24 hours, and in some instances, where warranted, we did ask the Premier and Minister Balser to make some phone calls and call people directly. I think that's an asset, in a small province like ours, to have our leadership ready and willing to reach out and say to people: You know, what they're saying about the lifestyle in Nova Scotia is true. We want you to come.

It makes a difference. We're happy to - I'll ask Kim Jardine. Do you want to follow up or ask Kim?

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: The question was about that particular ad. Whose decision was it to make that particular ad, and the theme around that ad, which was to promote the Premier to attract people to Nova Scotia. How many people called his cellphone?

AVA CZAPALAY: We do actually have a cellphone number on our website. I was joking with Kim. I said, that's unfortunate, whoever has that number there. But somebody is diligently answering texts. The vast majority of people these days tend to text their questions.

[9:30 a.m.]

The decision-making team included m5; Labour, Skills and Immigration; and Communications Nova Scotia. We were supported with Deputy Minister Huston's team, particularly, through Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: What was the cost of the total campaign?

AVA CZAPALAY: The campaign was a \$2.5 million campaign.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: What is the matrix - what are the numbers for \$2.5 million? What would make this campaign successful?

AVA CZAPALAY: With a campaign that goes from December until the end of March, it's really about raising awareness. The ultimate success will be known over the long term, of course, but my team and I already do view this campaign as successful. It's generated a lot of awareness.

For example, 100 million impressions - it's hard to wrap your head around a number like that, but a lot of people are now aware of Nova Scotia, and aware of the fact that we have jobs here for people in health care and in the skilled trades. That alone, in terms of getting that kind of visibility, I think is a success.

Also, the over 500 inquiries - these are people who have really thought it over, have talked to their families, and are really thinking about coming to Nova Scotia. Their questions are good, solid questions about, what's the next step I can take in order to look for a job, in order to look for a community to leave in?

By all standards, I'd say it's successful, but we don't see our work as being done just because March 31st has passed. This is a long-term effort.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Is the Nova Scotia ferry part of this government's strategy for tourism?

JUSTIN HUSTON: In short, yes. The commitment for this season - I know The Cat's running. I personally plan to take it. As you know, I'm from Maine originally, so I plan to go visit family and take that ferry myself. It is a part of it, and it is built into some of our marketing programs for this year.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: What's the cost?

JUSTIN HUSTON: I don't have that number, but I can certainly get that for you. Just to clarify, when you say the cost of the ferry? That would be probably from Public Works. We can follow up.

THE CHAIR: Order. Questioning for the Liberal caucus has ended. Now we move on to the NDP caucus. MLA Leblanc.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Thank you to everyone for being here. When you were making your opening statements, I decided to Google liveinnovascotia.com, and I just watched the video. I'm a lover of good videos. I didn't have the sound on, obviously, but I like the focus of it, personally.

My first question is: Who is the production company, and did they hire union actors to perform in the video?

AVA CZAPALAY: I had to defer to my colleague Ms. Jardine, and she just mentioned to me we used a lot of tourism content. I'm really happy that you had a chance to look at the video. I'll ask Deputy Minister Huston if he knows.

JUSTIN HUSTON: I'm not sure about that, but I will follow up for sure whether they're unionized actors or not and whether they're people just in the field. In some cases, that content is created by actually going and visiting local businesses, but in the case of, say, people posing for photos, those are usually through marketing agencies and they're usually professionals. But I can find out that answer.

SUSAN LEBLANC: That would be great. We might as well be putting our local actors to work and making sure that they're getting good contracts.

Also on the website - I'm just going to bring up my pictures here - the current website says that in June 2020, the average value of a home in Nova Scotia was \$286,000 compared to \$538,000 in all of Canada. Then in allnovascotia.com, the Canadian Real Estate Association has just reported in March that the average house price in the province was more than \$450,000, and the average hit was \$598,000, which is the amount that, compared to two years ago, housing prices are up 69 per cent.

Seems to me that a website should be updated. People need to know that actually, you can't get a house for \$200,000-plus anymore. I know lots of people who did get those houses and move from Toronto and bought up houses in Dartmouth North and are super happy and super grateful that they did it when they did it, because now they wouldn't be able to buy a house in Dartmouth North or anywhere. I just make that comment.

So what are we saying? I know housing prices are going up all over the country, but we do have some of the highest market rents, in the city at least. I know people who live in other cities who are paying much less rent for better accommodations. Edmonton, for instance - I have a friend who just moved there and got the pick of apartments, and it's cheaper than they would ever pay here.

I'd love to hear your thoughts on that situation, or the situation we find ourselves in two years later.

AVA CZAPALAY: Thanks for the question. On the website you'll also notice - and I went down this rabbit hole the other night - there's a link to [realtors.ca](https://www.realtors.ca). You can click on the community in Nova Scotia that you're looking at and it will bring up all the real estate that's available, along with photos and everything. I was like, why did I just spend a half-hour on [realtors.ca](https://www.realtors.ca)? We do provide real-time housing availability along with prices via that link.

The important thing about the navigators is that we're connecting people and their questions to a real person who's in a community. We're not saying, here's the cost of housing in 2020. We're saying pick up the phone, text us, email us; whatever your question is, we'll connect you to people who can give you the current information as it stands today.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Huston will not be surprised at this question - I am a big proponent of marketing our arts and culture sector. I know that the department is as well in terms of leveraging cultural assets to attract people to live in Nova Scotia and to come visit Nova Scotia. How do we square the circle of leveraging those cultural assets without actually investing in those cultural assets to make sure that they are here for folks who want to live here and folks who want to visit?

JUSTIN HUSTON: I'm not surprised by the question. It's a great point, thanks for asking that, because I would like to take a little bit of time to highlight some of the work that we are doing.

We have kept funding stable for organizations, and as you have raised before, there continue to be operating challenges, which we're aware of and we're working to address. In addition to the operating funding we provide, we also provide various project-based or initiative-based funding that can change from year to year. Particularly coming out of COVID-19, the series of programs that we have put in place to help the industry not just the large sector rebound, but also community projects rebound.

In different communities able to hold outdoor festivals, music or otherwise, that they're able to come from the grassroots community level that funding is available so they can respond to both their citizens as well as attract visitors. That's an example of something we're doing, and that will continue over this year as well.

I welcome the question or the comment because one of the things we like to say in CCTH on why tourism is such a good fit for our department is that the same things that make communities livable and vibrant places to live and make people want to move there are the same reasons that people will come to visit. For a lot of these communities, the arts and culture for both tourists and people to live there is what attracts folks. It's a very good point, and it's very important why we continue to support this sector, particularly coming out of COVID-19.

SUSAN LEBLANC: How much time do I have?

THE CHAIR: About 12 minutes.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I'm going to leave that. We can have another conversation about it.

Deputy Czapalay said we have to make sure we have to make sure we have welcoming communities and workplaces for people; I'm wondering what that looks like. The reason I'm asking that is because we know in Nova Scotia, we do have a legacy of structural racism. We know that we are working on it, and there's plenty of work at a community level and government level. Nonetheless, we still have structural racism in many workplaces.

When we market the province to newcomers who may not be white, for instance, what are we saying to them - come and be exposed to structural racism in the workplace? Obviously, we're not saying that, and I'm not trying to make light of it. It's a very serious situation. What does it look like when we're making sure that we have welcoming communities and workplaces for people who are not of European descent?

AVA CZAPALAY: A number of us want to answer your question. That's an important question to ask. As a newcomer to a rural community in Nova Scotia, Barrington Passage, we were the most exotic family to land there, with the last name Czapalay. I think one way of overcoming structural racism is by diversifying our population. That's what we're focused on doing.

Deputy Huston whispered to me that he would like to respond as well if that's okay with you.

JUSTIN HUSTON: Thanks for the question. This is an important issue, and it's very real. There is work that is under way across different departments in terms of the various sectors that those departments work with around equity, diversity, and inclusion and building it in and baking it into whether their funding agreements or training that can be made available to help support transformation within workplaces.

As well as at the community level, something that we have been doing at CCTH is around EDI training for boards and. We've been piloting a project and looking at ways, because in addition to workplaces, there're the families that go and visit libraries and museums and public spaces. We're wanting to ensure that they feel as welcome as any Nova Scotian in that space.

I think similar to these government bodies or structural or businesses, I would say, it's also the work that we're doing whether it's Treaty Education or it's work in African Nova Scotian Affairs, or the Office of Equity and Anti-Racism Initiatives. It's all Nova Scotians that really need to look at themselves and look at ways that we can be the most welcoming we can.

I think part of working with folks that are coming into the province, it is the reality of understanding the history of the province and the makeup of the province, and that's part of why the work that we do in Treaty Education is infusing it in all classrooms, so that that starts as early as possible.

One of the things that I think is really interesting - and if I can just take a couple seconds around the Treaty Education work - where we see a lot of resonance is in folks who are coming in from formerly colonized countries, that have that experience of colonization. That's a way we're seeing new immigrants connecting into the Treaty Education work which is something we didn't quite expect but it's kind of interesting.

SUSAN LEBLANC: The new government was in part elected on a promise to improve conditions in long-term care and continuing care, and our immigration framework has been linked to the recruitment strategy in long-term care in order to deliver the reform promised by the PC government.

We've heard during Budget Estimates and Health Committee and PAC a couple of weeks ago - we've heard from Doctor Orrell who's in charge of the Office of Healthcare Professionals Recruitment that he's been focusing on - I believe they said - the Philippines and another country in Southeast Asia which I can't remember. Immigration to bring people in from other countries to work in our health care system.

There's a recent CCPA report examining the connection between continuing care and the immigration system.

“Renewed efforts to attract foreign workers through provincial nomination programs (PNPs)” or nominee programs, “over the last 20 years have increased Nova Scotia’s immigration rates. However, Nova Scotia’s most recently calculated 5-year retention rate (65%) for immigrants remains lower than every other jurisdiction outside of Atlantic Canada, and below the national average (70%). Economic immigrants have the lowest retention

rate (63%), whereas the rate is slightly higher for refugees (72%). Compounding the matter are known factors in Nova Scotia, such as healthcare labour casualization, lack of mandated long-term care staffing levels” although we’re looking at that now, “high cost of living, low pay, and benefits, and minimal settlement infrastructure. Taken together, these issues point to the likelihood that immigrant CCAs in Nova Scotia will struggle to build long-term viable careers and may not stay here.”

I’m very pleased to see the increase in pay for CCAs and the standards for work - the 4.1 hours in long-term care - but as the report points out, there are other factors at play that will affect people staying in Nova Scotia, including racialized immigrant workers. The fact is that they’re more likely to be overrepresented in private and casual continuing care positions that won’t benefit from those recent changes.

I’m wondering, with that long preamble: how is the department working on this issue, and what does the department do to improve working conditions in the health care professions that immigrants to Nova Scotia are entering? I can table that report for the benefit of the committee.

AVA CZAPALAY: A lot of our recruitment efforts are in, of course, focused on attracting health care workers to Nova Scotia. My colleagues to my right have actually just returned from Singapore, Dubai, and London. I think you were maybe thinking of Singapore, possibly? They have the first-hand experience of being there, speaking with people in person who are interested in coming here to work.

Maybe, if it’s okay with you, I’d like to invite Jen L’Esperance, the Senior Executive Director, to respond to your question.

JENNIFER L’ESPERANCE: As you mentioned, the Philippines is also a strategic market. We did meet many Filipino people in Singapore and Dubai; it’s a secondary migration for them. They’re looking to come to Canada with their families which they were unable to do from the places that they were. When we talked to them about the job opportunities here, they were very much engaged and very much wanting to stay, to come to Nova Scotia.

I’m interested in the report that you mentioned. We look at six-year rolling retention rates, so essentially anyone who’s migrated over the past six years. Are they still here on that sixth year? We’ve been at 71 per cent every year for the past five to six years. That’s the highest rate in Atlantic Canada. We recently surpassed Saskatchewan as well.

We’re not done yet. We do want to increase that rate from 71 per cent to higher than 71 per cent. We’re looking at working on our settlement, working with partners like

the Health Association and our health care partners to make sure that workplaces are welcoming and providing the conditions that make people want to stay.

[9:45 a.m.]

One of the things that we've put in place is with the permanent Atlantic Immigration Program, there is now mandatory training for employers to take inter-cultural competency training. All employers will have that training, which will help to keep people here and ensure that they and their families are happy in the communities in which they settle.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Thanks very much. Yes, it sounds like similar numbers when you roll in the refugees versus people coming in on the work programs. Anyhow, take a look.

I appreciate that it's the best in Atlantic Canada, but the fact is that immigrants are coming here and then they'll move to Montréal or Toronto where - depending on the culture they come from - they will find a bigger cultural community in those cities, which totally makes sense.

I wanted to ask a question that we've asked in Estimates and was asked in Question Period and we haven't quite gotten to the crux of the matter here. I hope the Deputy Minister can address this.

Our understanding is that only certain applicants arriving from Ukraine will be eligible for MSI. If they go through the federal program, which is what the minister said yesterday in Question Period, if they go through the federal program, they apply for a work permit through the federal Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel stream. If they do that, then they can get MSI right away. But in Newfoundland and Labrador, Ontario, and British Columbia, they have announced that they will provide coverage for all Ukrainians fleeing war.

There's lots of other ways that folks might enter the country besides that particular stream. I'm wondering if Nova Scotia is going to do the same. That is: Any person fleeing the war from Ukraine who comes here, will they have access to MSI upon arrival? That's my first question.

AVA CZAPALAY: Thank you for the question. First, what an awful situation and very heartbreaking. We are working hard as a team to ensure that arrivals from the Ukraine are settled well here in Nova Scotia, whether it's for the short-term, or whether they decide to stay for the longer term.

When they arrive under the Canada Ukraine program - it's an open work program for three years - if they tick off the box saying that they're able to work, then they're

covered by MSI. I asked IRCC Deputy Minister Tapley what the age range was: As long as they're 14 and older, they can check that box.

The federal government is not actually expecting them to work, they just check that box, and they have coverage here in Nova Scotia. If they're under 14, hopefully they are children accompanied by a parent who has checked the box and they're covered too.

If they are an unaccompanied minor, I hope that we find out about them before they arrive here. We've spoken with the Red Cross to see how we can catch those children if they're coming here. I'm not aware of any, but if there is a situation, I hope the MLAs reach out to our department to let us know how we can help.

I'm just going to double-check with my colleague, Jen, because she's been on the file with eyes more focused than I am. I'll just see if Jen has anything to add to that. No. All good. Did that answer your question?

SUSAN LEBLANC: Yes, but maybe I don't understand. Does every person who enters the country have to have the form from the federal government, or could there be people who come in in other ways where they might not encounter that form where they check the box? Are we making sure that they understand that they should check the box?

For instance, if there's a woman who's nine months pregnant and knows that she's not going to be able to work, she may not check the box, but then she doesn't have any health care. Can you just talk a bit more about that?

AVA CZAPALAY: For sure, people are coming through the regular immigration program channels anyway, and in Nova Scotia we have economic immigration programs where people have an offer for work, and if they have an offer for work they're also covered through MSI.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Leblanc, your time has elapsed. We will now move on to the PC caucus. Mr. Ritcey.

DAVE RITCEY: I'd like to ask a few questions around rural population growth. That's the focus here. My first question is directed to Deputy Minister Czapalay.

While immigration efforts have grown our province's population, many rural areas in our province have continued to experience population declines. As a result, this government has made rural population growth a priority. How would this marketing strategy serve to achieve this goal?

AVA CZAPALAY: It's really important to us that all regions of Nova Scotia benefit from population growth. We're really working hard in two ways. One is to have settlement providers throughout the province who will not only help to welcome

newcomers into communities throughout Nova Scotia, but also work hard to keep them here and work with our local community organizations, chambers, business associations, employer groups, what have you, to make sure that people settle well and feel welcomed.

The idea behind the navigators is really to help people spread out the population. If someone contacts us through the population growth campaign and says, I'm a skilled trades worker, I want to work in Nova Scotia, I want to work by the ocean and I don't care where, then these navigators can help them, say, have you ever thought of working in this location or that location, really helping people consider the options and the benefits of living in rural Nova Scotia.

DAVE RITCEY: Again, that now leads me into the navigators and the importance again for the emphasis on rural communities. How do the navigators from the population growth marketing campaign engage with those potentially interested in living in Nova Scotia and the possibility of living in rural areas and help them determine what rural community might be best fit?

AVA CZAPALAY: Our navigators are based in communities, and they're dedicated to promoting all regions of Nova Scotia, but they've been hired for the regions of Halifax, Cape Breton, South Shore, Annapolis Valley, Digby, Yarmouth, Shelburne. Another area is Cumberland-Colchester-Hants, and then another area is Pictou-Antigonish-Guysborough.

You can see that we have people in communities who can link in directly with community organizations to help people get the information they need to make a well-informed decision about where they want to live and work when they come to Nova Scotia.

DAVE RITCEY: My last question: How is this campaign using new government policies like offering the \$125,000 over five years to family physicians and specialists who move to rural Nova Scotia - as you can tell, I'm a rural MLA - in its marketing to attract skilled workers that are in demand?

AVA CZAPALAY: We work in very close partnership with two groups. One, if a skilled tradesperson makes an inquiry through our population growth campaign, the navigator can then refer that inquiry on to the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency. If the person making the inquiry is a health care worker, then the inquiry is forwarded on to the Office of Healthcare Professionals Recruitment and they respond with the various incentives that they have at their disposal.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Ritcey, who is up after you?

DAVE RITCEY: I'm going to pass this on to my colleague for Hants East.

THE CHAIR: Mr. MacDonald.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: I'll allow the deputy ministers to decide who is going to answer this question. Upon taking the office, the government moved immigration into a department with labour. How did that change better align and help with getting more immigration to help with the labour shortage?

AVA CZAPALAY: I was the deputy minister for the Office of Immigration, and before that, I was the ADM of the former Department of Labour and Advanced Education. I like to think that bringing me back with Immigration and putting me in the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration was part of that alignment. I have to say that it is a fantastic fit.

There's alignment in every aspect of our department with immigration. Our department is really focused on helping connect people to the skills, the training and the work that they need to thrive here in Nova Scotia. Every aspect of our department is connected with making sure that people - whether they're Nova Scotians or newcomers - have that ability to thrive.

Working with the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency, for example - the skilled trades workers are coming in, but my team here works with the apprenticeship agency, which then works with the employers to connect people to work. We also have apprentices coming in from elsewhere in Canada. We work with the apprenticeship agency to attract those apprentices to opportunities here so that they can continue their training here.

We have our Skills and Learning Branch. That branch offers the Nova Scotia Works centres throughout Nova Scotia in 53 different communities. Those centres offer career counselling and resumé writing opportunities. They can even bring employers in and have a little session on what it's like to work in a particular field. Their goal is to connect people to work and help people get job ready.

Some of those services are available to newcomers, but also to Nova Scotians who want to connect with the workforce. The list goes on, but we do have a very strong connection to Immigration and the rest of the department.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: I was going to ask you how specifically it did that, but you already answered the question, so I'll ask a different question. What is the department doing to make it easier for people to move here and transfer licences and certificates to fill the key labour shortages?

AVA CZAPALAY: In terms of filling key labour shortages, we work very closely with employers. I'll ask my colleague Jen in a moment to speak to some of the services that we offer in immigration to connect employers to immigration programs.

In terms of just helping people connect to work, we have a whole variety of services and supports available. We work really hard to make sure that employers know what those

services are. The Immigration branch, for example, had a webinar the other day and put it out to employers that we're going to hold a webinar on some of our immigration programs. They had 1,500 employers sign up for that. We're working very hard with communities to get the information out.

[10:00 a.m.]

We have these programs and we're happy to help you understand the programs so that you can use them to the best of your ability when you're looking for workers. If it's okay with you, I'll ask Jen L'Esperance to respond as well.

JENNIFER L'ESPERANCE: I'll keep it fairly brief. I'll just say that our work is because of employers. We're a tool that employers can use to fill their labour needs. We take that quite seriously in our consultation with employers and sector groups.

Just in the past two days, I have spoken with a working group of the Halifax Chamber of Commerce, with the Halifax Partnership, particularly about the programs and the tools that we have. We input the feedback that we get into our programming, and make real policy changes so that more employers can use more of our programs, and fill those labour needs that they have.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: Just so Mr. Huston doesn't think he's being ignored, this would be to him. What role do films and TV programs produced in Nova Scotia play to attract individuals to Nova Scotia?

JUSTIN HUSTON: Thanks for keeping me in the loop here and not making me feel left out. Thanks for the question. I think it speaks in terms of attracting both tourists and longer-term potential immigrants. It's a way for Nova Scotia to be showcased to an audience who wouldn't otherwise be thinking about Nova Scotia, or who may know about it but don't really know what it looks like.

Particularly in today's day and age with social media and the way that things are linked and people viewing things on online platforms, if somebody sees a series or a film and they realize it's filmed in Nova Scotia - say, *The Lighthouse* down Yarmouth way - they Google Nova Scotia and what it looks like. Then that helps connect to potential ads and social media ads that then start popping up in their feed to drive people to the website. It just creates a level of awareness and interest.

That's always been the case. For example, *Titanic* still is one of those movies that creates a tourist market relative to people who come here off the cruise ships, et cetera, just for a *Titanic* tour. What I think is different now is, like I mentioned, that linkage into social media and advertising. It's a much tighter connection.

Whether it's *The Book of Negroes* and what that's done to Birchtown and the Black Loyalist Heritage Centre - we're going to see something similar with *Washington Black*, which is going to be a Disney series - any time that we have a high-profile series or movie that's filmed here in Nova Scotia, we almost immediately see folks coming in who want to visit.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: This will be my last question and then I'll defer to Ms. Sheehy-Richard. I'll let either one of the deputy ministers decide who's going to answer this one.

The goal of both of these campaigns was to grow our province's population. Did the marketing campaign also indirectly serve to increase provincial tourism numbers?

JUSTIN HUSTON: I'll answer. The short answer to that is, it's a little too early to tell, just given where we've been with Public Health measures and greatly reduced tourism over the past two years. Really, if you came and asked me in a year or two years from now, we'd have a better sense of that.

This year, we'll be seeing rebounding numbers, and I think we'll have a clearer sense, through exit surveys, et cetera, about why people chose to come to Nova Scotia and what their experience was. We'll have a better sense of that then.

AVA CZAPALAY: I'd like to ask my colleague Kim Jardine to respond as well.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Jardine.

KIMBERLY JARDINE: Thank you, deputy minister. We do know from inquiries that our navigators have received that folks who have previously visited here as tourists fell in love with the province and are interested in coming and looking and staying here permanently and exploring what that opportunity looks like for them.

We've also heard from some who are saying, I'm really interested in Nova Scotia, but I'm not quite sure what community I want to live in yet, so I'm going to come and do a site visit this Summer. There has been a connection between visitation and staying here permanently.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Now we'll move on to Ms. Sheehy-Richard. You have eight minutes.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm going to just change topic a little bit here.

Being a mom of three young boys, and hoping that they're going to get into skilled trades - one of them is a power engineer, so he's working and demand is high for him - I

was pleased, obviously, to see our budget announcement for more opportunities for a skilled workers program that reduces the personal tax burden on those aged under-30 in the trades.

I think it will be critical for more young workers to enter the labour force in Nova Scotian with our aging demographic to keep our economy growing. How is the marketing campaign targeted to grow that younger age demographic in our labour force?

AVA CZAPALAY: I'm really pleased that at least one of your children is considering a skilled trade. Perhaps the others will follow suit.

A skilled trade is definitely a pathway to financial stability. We really hope that Nova Scotians, and people living here in Nova Scotia, consider a skilled trade as an option when they're thinking of post-secondary opportunities for their children.

I want you to know that even though we have a marketing campaign that's focused on the rest of Canada and focused on bringing skilled trades workers here who are job-ready and can help us tackle the trades that have openings, we also have a campaign here in Nova Scotia that's aimed at encouraging people who are living here to consider skilled trades as an option. Everything from power engineers to carpenters, we need people to consider skilled trades.

We're working hard also to diversify the trades so that more people who are Mi'kmaw or of African descent or women in non-traditional fields, for example, or people with disabilities look at skilled trades as a wonderful career option. Those campaigns are out there now.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: I'm going to keep it going a little bit on my journey because obviously the Annapolis Valley - I took a minute and looked at the video, and I was pretty happy with it. I saw some clips from home that I recognized or down the Annapolis Valley - the beautiful orchards, the vineyards, the highest tides in the world.

How specifically has the marketing campaign leveraged these assets to promote our province as a great place to live? How has the campaign that regions all the way from Annapolis Valley - and I heard you even say Hants in your earlier comments - to the Cape Breton Highlands? Can you just elaborate a little bit more on the outskirts of rural again?

AVA CZAPALAY: The wonderful thing about promoting Nova Scotia is that it's easy to promote. There's beauty throughout the province and as you mentioned literally every area of the province has gorgeous vistas and beautiful things to showcase. My colleague Kim Jardine was very involved in the creative, and I'll just ask Kim to respond in more detail on how we leveraged those assets.

KIMBERLY JARDINE: We definitely tried with the campaign to highlight as many features of Nova Scotia as possible in terms of promoting our urban and rural settings, the experiences, and the lifestyle, regardless of what people were looking for and getting them to contact us and visit the website and search more.

Certainly, in the conversations that our navigators are having with inquiries, they're asking those kinds of questions. Part of the decision to move is based on the job opportunity, but it's also based on lifestyle, and it's a whole-family decision. It's not only maybe the skilled trades worker, but it's their spouse - what do they do? What activities are the children interested in? It's really trying to understand from the family's perspective what their interests are and what kind of lifestyle they are looking for and helping them to connect to that information, services, and resources.

One inquiry, for example, contacted us and said, we're unsure about Digby, Annapolis, or Antigonish - tell us a little bit about those communities and what we need to know. Ultimately the decision is theirs, but we're definitely trying to make sure that they have the best information to make those decisions.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: Let's do a few specific questions - we'll start with one, and maybe I can finish up in round two. Could you tell us how remote workers support Nova Scotia's population growth and that Work from Nova Scotia campaign?

JUSTIN HUSTON: In terms of remote workers and how they contribute to the economy, it's essentially bringing in dollars from outside of Nova Scotia, in many cases. They're able to work and locate anywhere within the province so long as they have the ability to connect to their employer. That means typically that they're in places where normally people wouldn't be working. They can travel anywhere around the province. They can be mobile. They're spending dollars in local economies.

As well, they're bringing in a set of skills that helps contribute - they might be here working remotely for a year or two, and then they might start working for a local business - they fall in love with the town that they have moved to, or they visited the Valley and really like that area and they decide to move there. I think the key, in particular when they're coming in, is that they already have secure employment, and it's typically from dollars outside, so it's a way to bring new dollars into the province.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: You guys took the lead on the campaign - Tourism Nova Scotia was the lead on population growth. Who were you trying to attract and why?

JUSTIN HUSTON: In the initial days of the campaign, which then was built on with Labour, Skills and Immigration, it was mobile workers who essentially could work anywhere who were attracted to moving to Nova Scotia because where they currently were,

frankly, was under lockdown and the quality of life wasn't seen as favourable as in Nova Scotia.

If you recall, particularly in that first Summer, we didn't have hardly any cases compared to the rest of North America and other parts of the world. People were seeing if they could work from anywhere, work out of a van or work from their own home or apartment, why wouldn't they choose to be in Nova Scotia versus others? The idea was to attract folks who may want to relocate permanently or even just for a period of time, with the idea that once they're here and they see the value and the quality of life that's here in Nova Scotia, they would want to stay.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Sheehy-Richard, you have 10 seconds.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: That's okay.

THE CHAIR: We'll move on to the next round of questioning. The honourable Brendan Maguire.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: How long?

THE CHAIR: Ten minutes.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Just a comment and then I'll ask a different question, but there are a lot of contradictions in what is being said here today. We hear the Deputy Minister for Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage saying people were attracted here because of the low COVID cases early on - if that's the case, people are keeping an eye on this stuff. It's almost like we're saying, it's not going to be an issue anymore, even though our cases are extremely high. We're now a hot spot.

We can't have it both ways. We can't have people coming here making the decision because of how safe it is, and now because we're one of the worst places in all of North America that it's not going to impact, when in fact it really is going to impact. You're hearing it from people who are coming here and people who are temporarily living here.

The question I have is actually for the Deputy Minister of Labour, Skills and Immigration. When it comes to Ukrainians coming over to Nova Scotia, we've had individuals reach out to us. They're required to do a medical within 99 days of being here in Nova Scotia, and the cost is \$280 per person. A family of four, that's well over \$1,000. The majority of people who are coming from Ukraine have already spent their life savings to get here or have had their life savings destroyed or taken from them.

Will the deputy work with the government to find a way to have that fee waived? That, quite frankly, is a huge burden on people who don't need it.

[10:15 a.m.]

AVA CZAPALAY: We're working very closely with the Atlantic chapter of the Ukrainian Congress to respond to all the individual situations that are arising. I have a deputies' meeting with IRCC next week, on April 22nd, and I'll make sure I raise it as a pan-Canadian issue, because it's not just this jurisdiction. It seems like it would be something that every jurisdiction would encounter. We'll also raise it with our Department of Health and Wellness as well.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Was the government aware of this fee, the \$280 per person?

AVA CZAPALAY: We were aware that the health check had to be done, but we were also aware that people had health coverage if they tick that box that we were talking about on their paperwork. I'll have to clarify with the federal government what the intention is in terms of helping out with that piece.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Just to clarify that. Even if they tick the box, that's not covered. That fee's not covered. They have to pay for that fee in order to get health care. Just to let you know. Like I said, a lot of people are coming over with large families, and obviously we want to do whatever we can to make sure that their transition is easier.

When it comes to immigration, obviously we're big fans of immigration, we want to make sure that more people come and enjoy Nova Scotia. One of the criticisms that have gone on about government since the beginning of time is that government works in silos, departments work in silos.

When it comes to immigration, to be honest with you, we tried to bring in more speakers here today, because immigration is an extremely important topic, but it also impacts our education system, it impacts our health care system, and it impacts our housing system, which we're in the middle of a housing crisis right now. We know that public housing, for example, is up to a five-year wait-list to get in - if you are lucky to get in. I mean, most people can't wait five years to get into housing.

As you are working to bring people to this province - I'll give you an example: The schools in Bedford are already at or over 100 per cent capacity. Are you working with other departments to ensure that when people land here, that they have the proper housing, they have the schools, but also that not only do they have it, but the Nova Scotia population also has - everybody has it? There is a massive impact. We're talking about doubling the population, so that's another million people. We just don't have the infrastructure capacity. Are you working with those other departments?

AVA CZAPALAY: Thank you for the question. We are working with virtually all departments. As you mentioned, immigration is an important topic. It is of interest to

everyone, and it literally covers every department. My colleague Jen L'Esperance actually co-chairs two committees - one looking at settlement and one looking at infrastructure, including the types of infrastructure you mentioned - that have representation from all government departments.

I mentioned in my remarks that our intention is not just to grow the population to two million by 2060, but to grow it carefully and thoughtfully. We can't not grow it and wait for services to catch up. We can't wait for services to catch up and so on, so the two go forward together.

We do feel as though focusing on bringing people here to Nova Scotia who are job-ready - and by the way, the vast majority of people who come here through immigration or through in-migration from the rest of Canada are between the ages of 24 and 54. We're bringing in people who are job-ready, probably going to live here and raise a family, and will be concerned about the services.

So it's eyes wide open, making sure people understand there are communities throughout Nova Scotia that have supports and are ready to welcome newcomers and make sure they are settled.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I've been on this committee for eight years and I have to say that was one of the best answers I've ever received on a question, so I thank you. It shows that you have a lot of depth and understanding of this topic. It's not just about welcoming people here but it's supporting them. I do appreciate that answer.

I'm hoping that if there is a plan in place, that if there's something that you could table to the committee, at a future date, that would be greatly appreciated. I think a lot of people were worried about that.

It's important that our schools and our health care and our infrastructure - housing and things like that, our housing market - have what people need when they come here. If they don't, they are just going to go somewhere else.

I'm hoping that you'll table that and just to clarify it to Deputy Minister Huston, what actually was tabled was the fiscal impact, so how much in the upcoming year the government will be spending on the Nova Scotia ferry. That would be great if you could do that. I understand, we all understand that that is an important part of tourism moving forward and it always has been, so I appreciate that.

I guess I probably have about a minute left? Two minutes! I could ask half a question.

THE CHAIR: Or you could just ask the question. (Interruption)

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I'll give this to Deputy Minister Huston: What does success look like this coming tourism season? Considering the madness of the last few years and everything we've been through - and not just tourism coming into the province, but as importantly, local tourism from Nova Scotians - what does success look like to you?

JUSTIN HUSTON: The short answer is that success is a lot higher numbers coming back into the province. We're seeing that rebound starting already. We've been in-market with ad campaigns already in our key markets, the earliest we've been in the season and we're already starting to see bookings, talking to our sector partners. I think the last couple of years really built up, as you mentioned, that internal tourism, Nova Scotians visiting other parts of Nova Scotia and Atlantic Canadians coming here.

We're very optimistic that both, in terms of people visiting around the province that live here as well as people coming back in, that the numbers are going to be great.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I'm just going to do a local shout-out - you probably know which group I'm going to talk about. When it comes to outdoor adventure, what kind of impact has a group like A for Adventure had on local tourism and just shining a light on the beauty that is Nova Scotia?

JUSTIN HUSTON: Thanks for that question. They've done some work directly with Tourism Nova Scotia in the past, as you may be aware. What it does is showcasing parts of the province that a lot of people don't even know exist, both within Nova Scotia and outside of the province. Mainly rural Nova Scotia and activities . . .

THE CHAIR: Order. Order. The time for Liberal questioning has elapsed. Now we'll move on to the NDP. Ms. Leblanc, you have 10 minutes.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I want to ask a couple of sort of randoms. My first one I guess is for Deputy Minister Huston - keep that mask off.

In lots of countries and lots of jurisdictions culinary art is connected very closely with tourism. When I think of culinary tourism, I think of Todd Perrin in Newfoundland and Labrador - I forget the name of his restaurant - it's a destination in Quidi Vidi Village. I think of the Wild Caraway in Advocate Harbour - an amazing restaurant. I think people do actually go to Advocate Harbour to eat at the Wild Caraway.

I don't know if this is still in vogue, but the Michelin star system, I believe if you have a third star as a Michelin chef, it's because people make a point of going to the place specifically because you are there cooking or you're there making food.

I'm wondering if there's any thought in the department about a targeted investment in culinary art and in chefs?

JUSTIN HUSTON: That's a great question. That's something I'll take back to my team in terms of a specific investment into that sector from our department.

I will take the opportunity to say that that is well a recognized in terms of aspect that we use to target key demographics that we are attracting here for tourism, both in the province as MLA Maguire mentioned, as well as external. The Devour! The Food Film Fest is a great example of that synergy between great food, great art, and great film.

To your point, as well, there are a number of what I would call anchor establishments that because of their reputations for fine and innovative dining, they've actually become destinations that people go to an area, then travel too. It's a great issue that you raise and it's something that I'll take back to my team specifically.

I can tell you right now that it is highlighted extensively in our current marketing campaigns. Things like Dining on the Ocean Floor up in Five Islands way where people have the unique experience of dining on the floor of the Bay of Fundy while the tide is low, then quickly eating and getting out before the tide rises.

There are other examples, as well, in terms of that synergy between not only just food but other arts and culture and the natural environment. Performances in historic sites or provincial parks and things that we're looking to do which make Nova Scotia unique compared to a lot of other places.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Thank you. I'm wondering if the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration have any metrics or statistics on people who are coming to move to the province - this is not tourism but people moving to the province - whether they are coming home versus newcomers?

AVA CZAPALAY: With our Population Growth Marketing Campaign, looking at the rest of Canada and attracting newcomers from the rest of Canada, we were thinking how we can get a good handle on the results of that campaign in terms of people physically arriving here and settling here without subtracting immigration numbers and numbers that we know.

One of the ideas that we had and that we're looking into right now is seeing if we can attach a questionnaire to individual Nova Scotia Health Card applications. We're in the process of looking at that and seeing if that's a practical way of finding out why newcomers from the rest of Canada came here. Did they come as a result of the campaign, or did they come for another reason?

SUSAN LEBLANC: Is there any strategy? I come from a family of five kids, and three of my siblings moved away for work or whatever. Two of them have come back, and then two of us never left. The two that came back did so for specific reasons at specific times - and that's just one family. Is there any target to folks who grew up in Nova Scotia

but then left for work or whatever, and we want to get them to come back because things are different now or whatever?

AVA CZAPALAY: We would love to have them come back. Actually, last night my daughter had word that she was accepted into a residency program at Queens School of Medicine, and I said, "But don't forget to come home to your mom in Nova Scotia."

We don't want our youth to leave. In fact, last year we had the highest youth net immigration in 50 years. We had something like 4,500 youth to the plus side of the ledger stay here in Nova Scotia.

Through the navigators and through our in-community partners, we're working hard to make sure that people know about the opportunities. There's a lot of work there. I'm sure that as MLAs you know the opportunities for work in communities throughout Nova Scotia is there, and getting word back to people, saying come home, we need you, we need your talent, we need your skills, you're very welcome. It's not just looking for newcomers from all over the world. Looking for Nova Scotians to come back home is certainly something that we want to have happen.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I just wanted to ask a quick question about the tax break for workers under 30 - the skilled trades tax break. In principle, it's a great idea, but we have to face the fact that skilled trades right now are mostly male dominated. Women under 30, or whatever it is, are not going to benefit from that nearly as much as men. I'm wondering, was there any gender analysis done of that program, and is there a recognition that some of our trades or skilled trades are gendered?

For instance, I would say that early childhood education is a skilled trade. It's not welding and it's not plumbing, but my goodness, you have to be pretty skilled to do that work, and it's dominated by women - and young women. I'm wondering if there is a consideration of extending that program to other types of skilled work - CCAs, for instance. I'd love the deputy minister's comments on that.

AVA CZAPALAY: It's early days yet on the tax incentive for those under 30, and the first 50,000, so we're waiting for more details on that program. Like you, I would be keeping a very sharp and vigilant eye on the gender balance. It's a priority for our apprenticeship agency. We're working hard to really encourage more women to see skilled trades as a fantastic career opportunity and to take advantage of the pathway to a lifetime of a career that's solid - that there'll always be work here in Nova Scotia for people with skilled trades. We'll keep an eye on that

I want to just completely assure you that diversifying skilled trades is a priority for us. It really does actually involve families and helping families understand that skilled trades don't need be gender biased. It's for everybody, and we're working hard to attract all kinds of people to consider skilled trades as a career opportunity.

[10:30 a.m.]

SUSAN LEBLANC: I don't know if there's a definition of what a trade is, but would the deputy minister agree that something like early childhood education, where there is a two-year education program involved and, like I said, it's pretty tough work. It's not typically what we think of as a skilled trade, but would the deputy agree that ECEs are skilled tradespeople?

AVA CZAPALAY: I'm not sure if they would fit in under the apprenticeship agency, but I do agree that there are many careers that have a gender bias for whatever reason. It's 2022 - I think it's time that we broke those barriers and really help our young people understand what their strengths are, what their skill sets are, what their aptitudes are. Really, there's a whole wide array of job opportunities here in Nova Scotia, and let's not . . .

THE CHAIR: Order, the time for the NDP questioning has elapsed. Ms. Sheehy-Richard.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: I'm just going to finish up a couple more questions with regard to the Work from Nova Scotia campaign. How does the investment compare to the amount that you spend on tourism marketing, that campaign?

JUSTIN HUSTON: This is in regard to Work from Nova Scotia, the remote work. Yes, I'll share a little bit of numbers. Just to emphasize or caution, it's a little bit comparing apples to oranges because they're not quite the same.

In Phase 1 of the campaign, it was about \$1.3 million, and Phase 2, \$1 million, so about \$2.5 million for that campaign. In comparison, we spent, across all of Canada for all tourism, \$6.8 million in tourism marketing for media buys. They're different in the sense that the campaign had unique objectives and targets, and it was across Canada while our tourism marketing tends to be very focused in our target markets - Ontario, Quebec, northeastern U.S., and Europe.

When I say the \$6.8 million, that's generally for all tourism, generally focused in the Quebec and Ontario markets, versus the \$2.3 million which was across all of Canada. But that's how it compares, the numbers breakdown.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: What do the metrics tell us about the success that we're having so far? Are there any metrics to see how they have been . . .

JUSTIN HUSTON: In terms of the metrics of that actual campaign, I'll speak a little bit to the results that we have seen in terms of driving folks to websites, et cetera.

In Phase 1, the digital ads were viewed 371 million times, resulting in 1.5 million clicks on ads. That drove about 800,000 people to visit the website at the time. In Phase 2, the digital ads were viewed about 30 million times, resulting in 860,000 clicks and about 300 people visiting the website.

The difference between Phase 1 and Phase 2, I would emphasize, is that Phase 1 was much more around social media content. It had easy links to drive people to click on the ad and go to the website. In Phase 2, in addition to that online presence, there was also a greater presence of television ads, timed to coincide with the holiday season.

Again, it's a little bit of apples and oranges, but that's how the numbers break down for those two campaigns.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: I just want to throw a quick last one in so that my colleague, MLA Ritcey, can have some time. Do you have plans to continue with the campaign and to continue the tourism - still work with Labour, Skills and Immigration?

JUSTIN HUSTON: The short answer to that is no. The longer answer is that we were able to pivot in a time when tourism really wasn't happening in the province at the time because of COVID-19 and COVID-19 measures. Now we need to focus on getting people back to visit the province and focusing on tourism, which our team does best.

That said, my team continues to work closely as along with the agency record M5 to work closely with LSI on the current campaign. That will continue, and I can give you a really concrete example of one of the reasons why that synergy is so important. When we were running our campaign for remote workers, one of our learnings that came out of Phase 1 was that we really need to have a robust website, and the navigators were key. We were creating a lot of interest, people were going to the website and then they were searching for more information, more answers.

We knew that if we wanted to capture people that we needed to be more responsive. How many times are you annoyed when you go online to do your bill and you get some chat bot that isn't answering your questions, and all you want to do is talk to a real person.

People can talk to real people in communities and more often than not, yes, I know that person, they just live down the road, so it's connecting with people and that is what has proven to be so successful in this campaign.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Ritcey, five minutes.

DAVE RITCEY: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just wanted to touch on and go back to the rural areas. My next question really leads into - our rural areas are experiencing some major shortages, including mine - skilled trades, health care, I want to say the service industry, but more so the quick service industry workers. How do we expect this marketing

campaign will work to entice workers to move to these rural areas and work in those employment areas?

JUSTIN HUSTON: I'll start by just saying that it's something that we've heard from the tourism sector, as well as the service industry that serves that, as well as music, arts, is around access to a workforce and not just people - bums in chairs or doing the work - but quality that can ensure that we have a quality product for people who are coming to visit the province. That's something that I've met with in a variety of sector organizations that they've seen as one of their number one priorities is attracting workforce.

Now some of the things we're doing to look at that is, for example, one of the areas is looking at extending the seasons, looking at shoulder seasons, and looking at ways that we can - whether it's supporting events that are coming to Nova Scotia. Frankly, it's great that we have a lot of Summer events already, so it's looking at ways that we can attract events in the Spring or in the Fall. What does is that creates a longer season for folks, which then creates viable employment so that folks aren't looking at just three months. They're looking at potentially a six-month gig before they might do something else or move on to other work.

There are conversations that are happening with our colleagues at the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration but also with colleagues, for example, at the NSCC and with the industry sectors. and looking at ways that we can attract more folks to the service industry and the tourism sector.

DAVE RITCEY: How did the collaboration between the departments and Labour, Skills and Immigration, and the Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage contribute to the success of this marketing campaign?

AVA CZAPALAY: The campaign has been successful, in great measure because of the collaboration. To pick up on a comment that Deputy Minister Huston just made in terms of the navigators, I believe the recommendation for navigators came from your analysis of the first remote worker campaign. That personal connection in communities, I would say, has been a success and we're very anxious to continue with the work of the navigators beyond their 18-month contract, because we do see that people really respond well to having an individual they can connect with.

DAVE RITCEY: So having said that, obviously in the rural areas again, it's that same challenge and I'm hearing it day in and day out, especially in the quick service industry but also in health care and the skilled trades. I want to thank you both for your answers and your time.

I can say, Deputy Minister Czapalay and Deputy Minister Huston, I've had great conversations with your department, and I appreciate the feedback, so thank you so much.

[10:30 a.m.]

THE CHAIR: If the deputy ministers would like to make any closing comments, brief closing comments, this is the time.

JUSTIN HUSTON: I'll limit my comments just to say thank you for the opportunity to come and talk about this work. We think it's incredibly important. To MLA Maguire's comment, we're working very closely across departments on this. It can be a complex issue, whether it takes in things like health care and housing, but to my colleague's comment earlier, we can't wait on this.

It's a chicken-and-egg in some cases, but we need to keep moving forward, and the only way we're going to do that successfully is if we're all communicating and talking and working together. Appreciate the opportunity to be here and talk to you about the work that we're doing.

AVA CZAPALAY: I also appreciate the opportunity to speak about the work that we're doing, and I can feel the interest that you have in this topic. I will say that it sends a strong signal to Nova Scotians that this is important work and it's work that we need all communities to lean in on and to support, because it's welcoming communities and welcoming workplaces that will keep people here. We can bring them in, but it's a collective effort to keep people here.

I just wanted to quickly thank my talented team at Immigration and Population Growth. You see them here today, but I see how tirelessly they work around the clock to make sure that we have the population growth that we need to address the rural concerns that Mr. Ritcey mentioned, as well as others.

THE CHAIR: Thank you to all of our witnesses. You are now free to go and attract immigration while we deal with committee business. (Laughter)

We will now move on to committee business. We do have correspondence from the Department of Community Services, the information that was requested from the February 23rd meeting. Just checking to see if there is any discussion on that particular issue?

Hearing none, we'll move on to funding to community-based health organizations. In addition to the Deputy Minister of Health and Wellness and the provincial coordinator for Sexual Health Nova Scotia, the committee approved the president of the Nova Scotia Association of Community Health Centres as well as the executive director of the North End Community Health Centre. Marie-France LeBlanc is the executive director of the North End Community Health Centre and has recently taken over as the president of the Nova Scotia Association of Community Health Centres.

The former president of the Nova Scotia Association of Community Health Centres was Lorraine Burch. Ms. Burch is executive director of Our Health Centre in Chester and indicated she'd be happy to appear to speak on behalf of community health centres - specifically rural CHCs - if the committee wished. How does the committee wish to proceed? Mr. Maguire.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: We'd just like to put forward a motion on this topic, to allow Dr. Charlebois - am I pronouncing that wrong?

THE CHAIR: You're on the wrong one.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Sorry. All I heard is food.

THE CHAIR: Any thoughts on whether - Ms. Leblanc.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I think it's a good idea to have representation from the rural perspective and the urban perspective, so I'm good with both of them coming.

THE CHAIR: I do see Mr. Boudreau with his hand up.

TREVOR BOUDREAU: I think that's a reasonable request as well.

THE CHAIR: Would anyone like to put a motion forward? Ms. Leblanc.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I move that for the meeting around funding to community-based health organizations, that we invite Marie-France LeBlanc as the Executive Director of the North End Community Health Centre and the Chair of the Nova Scotia Association of Community Health Centres, as well as Lorraine Burch to be witnesses.

THE CHAIR: All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

Now we will move on to rising food cost and food inflation in Nova Scotia. Approved witnesses are the Deputy Minister of Community Services, the Deputy Minister of Agriculture, Dr. Sylvain Charlebois, project lead and author of Canada's Food Price Report 2022, representatives of Feed Nova Scotia, representatives of the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture, and a representative of Nourish.

All are available on June 1st and can attend in person except for Dr. Charlebois. He's out of province but is happy to appear virtually. The committee will need to agree to him appearing virtually. How does the committee wish to proceed? Mr. Maguire, I see your hand up.

[10:45 a.m.]

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I know. I jumped the gun. I apologize. I'd like to put a motion to allow Dr. Charlebois to appear virtually for the Public Accounts Committee.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Boudreau.

TREVOR BOUDREAU: Madam Chair, we're in agreement with that motion as well.

THE CHAIR: All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

Now we move on to the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedures and the Record of Decision. The subcommittee met on April 6th to discuss witnesses with respect to upcoming Auditor General Reports. Members have been provided with the Record of Decision. I would ask that we approve the motions as submitted.

The honourable member for Richmond.

TREVOR BOUDREAU: Madam Chair, I would make the motion to approve the Record of Decision of the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedures.

THE CHAIR: All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

There we go. Just for the benefit of Mr. Grassie, that's a first. Our next meeting date is April 20, 2022. It's Virtual Care Nova Scotia. We have Doctors Nova Scotia, the Nova Scotia Health Authority, and the Department of Health and Wellness just so members know.

Is there any further business? I will now adjourn the meeting.

[The committee adjourned at 10:46 a.m.]