



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Standing Committee
on
Community Services

Department of Tourism, Parks and Recreation
Consideration of Main Estimates

Tuesday, April 21, 2009
6:30 p.m.

Transcript No. 27-2-2

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[Mr. Doerksen in the chair]

Department of Tourism, Parks and Recreation
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The Chair: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. I am pleased to welcome you to the Standing Committee on Community Services this evening. I welcome you all here. Also, to the people who may be listening to the audio broadcast, it's a pleasure to have you join us this evening.

At this point I'd ask that we go around the table and members introduce themselves. My name is Arno Doerksen. I'm the chair of the committee and the MLA for Strathmore-Brooks. I'd also ask that the minister introduce her staff at the table as we move around. Thank you. Go ahead.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Good afternoon. Thomas Lukaszuk, Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Rodney: Hello, and welcome. Dave Rodney, MLA, Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Benito: Hello. Carl Benito, Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mr. Devlin: Barry Devlin, Tourism, Parks and Recreation SFO.

Mrs. Ady: My name is Cindy Ady. I'm the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

Mr. Werry: My name is Bill Werry, and I'm the Deputy Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

Mr. Nagendran: Jay Nagendran, assistant deputy minister, parks division, Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

Mr. Chase: Harry Chase, Calgary-Varsity, responsible for pointing out all the wonderful aspects of Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

Mrs. Sarich: Good evening. Janice Sarich, MLA for Edmonton-Decore and parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Education.

Mr. Johnston: Good evening. Art Johnston, Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnson: Jeff Johnson, Athabasca-Redwater.

Mr. Hehr: Kent Hehr, Calgary-Buffalo.

The Chair: Thank you, members. Just a few process items to review before we begin. Vote on the estimates, as the committee will know, will be deferred until the Committee of Supply on May 7, as will any amendments that may be brought forward this evening also be deferred to the Committee of Supply on May 7. Amendments, as you know, must be reviewed by Parliamentary Counsel no later than 6 p.m. on the day that they are to be moved, so if anyone has amendments to be brought forward, I assume that housekeeping has been taken care of.

Standing Order 59.01 governs who may speak. Committee members, ministers, and other members may participate in the discussion around the table. Department officials and staff members may be present but may not address the committee. Speaking time will be limited to 10 minutes, or a minister and a member may

combine their time for a total of 20 minutes. I would ask that members advise the chair with regard to their intention to exchange time with the minister that way.

We have three hours allocated for this meeting this evening to consider the estimates of Tourism, Parks and Recreation. If debate is exhausted prior to three hours, the department's estimates are deemed to have been considered for the time allotted in the schedule, and we will adjourn. Otherwise, we will adjourn at 9:30 this evening.

Further to that, I would suggest that we take a five-minute break at approximately 8 p.m. or following the third party's 20-minute allocation.

Points of order will be dealt with as they come up, and the clock will remain running.

Do we have additional members that have come since the introductions? Go ahead.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Naresh Bhardwaj, Edmonton-Ellerslie.

The Chair: Thank you.

With that, I invite the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation to begin her remarks. I'd invite you to make any further introductions that you may want to with regard to staff. The first hour will be allocated to the Official Opposition.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Chair. Obviously, three hours is not long enough to cover all the wonderful things that are happening in the province of Alberta, but we'll all attempt to get our work done in that time period.

I'm pleased to be able to present the Tourism, Parks and Recreation estimates for the 2009-2010 year. Joining me today, as we've already introduced, I have my senior financial officer, Barry Devlin; Bill Werry, my deputy minister; and Jay Nagendran, my assistant deputy minister. As well, we are joined by Bob Scott, ADM of tourism, who is managing the tourism portion for us. I see one other and Lloyd Bentz, who are kind of in what we'll call the cheaper seats, but they're definitely here, so thank you very much.

This team along with the rest of our ministry sees Alberta as a world-class tourism destination with active, healthy citizens who value their natural heritage, and we have a plan to make that vision a reality. With your support and approval we can help make Alberta an even better place to live and visit despite the economic challenges that we face.

Our total voted expense for 2009-2010 is \$191 million, a \$52 million decrease from our 2008-2009 forecast. The decrease is due mainly to the \$50 million provided to the first phase of the capital region river valley park last year. The good news is that we expect to maintain the same level of service to Albertans and our guests. We are not planning on reducing staff. While we'll review all of our programs to ensure that we provide the best value, we do not anticipate a reduction in service. This is especially important in our parks division. Not only are we maintaining our force of conservation officers, but we will continue to modernize facilities to keep pace with the demands and to improve services.

Next month we will launch the first phase of our new online campground reservation system. It will give campers the chance to browse sites and amenities in 25 campgrounds and to make their reservations online. We plan to expand the system in the coming years. Creating this system is one of the priorities set out in the plan for parks that I announced in Calgary yesterday.

Creating a plan for parks was my mandate priority from Premier Stelmach. I want you to know that we consulted extensively with park visitors, aboriginal groups, and stakeholder organizations to

ensure that we struck the right balance between conservation and recreation objectives. The plan gives us a road map for the next 10 years and ensures that parks and planning and management are aligned with the land-use framework. The plan recognizes just how popular our provincial parks are and how passionate Albertans are about making sure that these special landscapes can be enjoyed for years to come.

In addition to the more than \$67 million allocated to operate our parks in 2009-10, we plan to make an \$18 million capital investment to continue maintaining and replacing facilities and infrastructure in our parks. Provincial parks are a significant asset. The replacement value of park infrastructure is estimated at more than \$1 billion, so we're working hard to protect these assets. Since 2004-2005 approximately \$225 million has been invested in upgrading and replacing park facilities and infrastructure.

This past year alone we completed upgrades at a number of parks such as Miquelon Lake. We've opened two new visitors centres. Right now we estimate that about 72 per cent of our park infrastructure is in good or fair condition. That is a significant improvement over the past five years, and we're continuing this work. This year we plan to upgrade campground facilities and water and sewer systems in areas like Cypress Hills, Vermilion, Jarvis Bay, and others.

Another important capital investment this year will be the expansion of the Travel Alberta visitor information centre in Canmore. This is the busiest of our Travel Alberta centres, and it is the only one that is open year-round. Our visitor information centres are popular with travellers, achieving a 99 per cent satisfaction rate in the surveys, so this is a sound investment in a resource with proven results. This is especially important as competition in the global tourism industry is tougher than ever.

There is no doubt that the tourism industry is hit hard during economic downturns, but we have an innovative model that can help us keep and increase our share of the market. Tourism marketing and development funding is based on collection under the 4 per cent tourism levy. This year's \$71 million budget is based on the tourism levy funds collected in 2007-2008. It's resulting in a \$4.75 million increase over last year's budget.

6:40

This year the levy dollars have been split 80-20, with 80 per cent for marketing and 20 per cent for development: tourism development activities like investment attraction, product development, research, and visitors' services like our 1-800 call centre, all of which fall within the department. The tourism division works with municipalities and others to expand this \$5 billion industry, especially in rural areas. A tremendous amount of work has already been done in, for example, the Canadian badlands region, and emerging opportunities like aboriginal tourism experiences offer great potential for growth.

With financial markets like they are, the business services we offer are valuable resources. We will continue to assist those with market-ready projects to reach investors and take major projects abroad to entice international investors to consider Alberta. All of this work is important in creating experiences that will attract visitors and to encourage them to return time and again.

Marketing Alberta as a must-see destination is Travel Alberta's job. Travel Alberta is now a legislated corporation with a board of directors. Recently I tabled their first business plan in the Assembly, and it shows how they plan to get the most from their \$57 million budget. Travel Alberta has always worked closely with the industry, and through the Strategic Tourism Marketing Council they've received valuable insights and advice on their marketing approach. This year's plan underlines the need to stay the course. Now is not

the time to abandon emerging markets or to lose valuable ground in establishing markets like the United States, and we definitely can't afford to take our biggest market, Albertans, for granted.

Travel Alberta is also supporting our plan to take advantage of opportunities around the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games in Vancouver. Our proximity to the games gives us a unique opportunity to showcase our province, athletes, and the culture of this province to the world. We've allocated \$6.6 million for the Olympic and Paralympic Secretariat to co-ordinate efforts across government that will ensure that Alberta has a major profile at Canada's games. So far we've secured a prime venue for Alberta House directly across from BC Place, and we've partnered with Rocky Mountaineer Vacations for the train travelling between Vancouver and Whistler. These high-profile venues will put Alberta front and centre with international visitors.

Alberta businesses hope to use the games as an opportunity to build relationships that will last long after the flame has been extinguished. We're working with them to maximize the advantage for Alberta. Although most Albertans won't get to the games, we want to help them embrace the extraordinary Olympic spirit many of us experienced in '88. Alberta will host seven World Cup events leading up to the games. We will once again experience the excitement of a torch relay. The torch will travel to 73 communities, with celebrations being held across this province. We will see this relay as a chance to celebrate our Olympic legacy and Alberta's athletes, artists, and performers.

Of course, sports and recreation in Alberta is much broader than the Olympics, and Budget 2009 provides \$28 million to support programs in organizations through the soon to be changed in name Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation. I'm very pleased that this budget allows us to maintain the existing levels of funding for the foundation this year.

We want all Albertans to lead healthy, active lives. Physical inactivity, especially among the young, is a growing problem across Canada. This year we've added a new performance measure to help us better gauge how active our young people are. We're working with municipalities and associations to encourage Albertans of all ages to be more active.

We want people to get out and enjoy our province, and one way is to build a more sustainable trail system across Alberta. The Alberta recreation corridor committee, led by the MLA for Athabasca-Redwater, will provide recommendations regarding risk management, trail mapping, enforcement, and education as well as trail designation programs to make the most of the resources that we have and to strike a balance between the wide range of users.

This is only a quick look at how we will build on the Alberta economic strengths and create a better quality of life for Albertans. I'd be happy to share more and answer any questions you may have.

The Chair: Perfect timing, Minister. Thank you very much.

At this point we'll give the floor to Mr. Chase.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Just to let the chair know, my plan is to use my 10-minute segments solidly and then have the minister reply in her 10-minute response times.

I would like to begin by moving two amendments. How would you like that done? Bring it up to you for your perusal and then distribution?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Chase: Okay. Great. Thanks very much. I'm pleased to see that we have page patrol helping out tonight. I'll wait till the first amendment is distributed, and then I'll briefly read it into the record.

It appears, Mr. Chair, that everyone has their amendment, so to put it on the record, I move that

the estimates for the 2010 Olympics and Paralympic Games under reference 4.0.6 at page 395 of the 2009-2010 main estimates of the Department of Tourism, Parks and Recreation be reduced by \$2 million so that the amount to be voted at page 391 for expense and equipment/inventory purchases is \$188,761,000.

I have a second amendment. If I may pass that along to the pages for distribution. I will move that on the record once everyone has had a chance to review it. My second amendment. I'm moving that the estimates for strategic corporate services under reference 1.0.3 at page 394 of the 2009-2010 main estimates of the Department of Tourism, Parks and Recreation be reduced by \$53,000 so that the amount to be voted at page 391 for expense and equipment/inventory purchases is \$190,708,000.

I realize, as per the instructions, that these will be debated on the 7th of May.

Moving into the question portion, page 393 of the estimates shows that the voted capital investment for parks has decreased from the \$37.5 million forecast for 2008-09 to \$16.8 million for 2009-10. I'm getting a little bit ahead of myself, but I did mention to the minister prior to the meeting that I'm not expecting her or her department officials within their 10-minute slots to be able to answer all the questions. I am looking forward to written responses, as has been previously the case.

With that little bit of preamble on the reduction, I would ask: can the minister explain what accounts for the decrease, more than halving? Was the decreased amount going to the capital region river valley park in 2008-09? Are there any other parks throughout the province which will be seeing a decrease in funding going towards capital investment?

The decrease is also quite significant in comparison to the 2007-2008 amount of \$47 million. Does the minister expect capital investment to increase in the next budgetary year, and if so, an approximation of how much? Are there any plans currently in place for the short term which would require an increase in investment?

Referencing page 393 of the estimates, I note that the nonbudgetary disbursement for parks will be decreasing \$125,000 to \$375,000 for the 2009-2010 year in comparison to the 2008-2009 year. Can the minister explain what accounts for this decrease? What exactly are the nonbudgetary disbursements which will be going out this fiscal year? Are they distributed throughout the province or only in specific parks?

6:50

On page 394, line 3.0.1, it's noted that the program support for parks is decreasing by \$25,000, to \$440,000. I would ask the minister at some point if she could account for this decrease. Will certain programs be ending, or will funding for various programs be decreasing? Are there programs which have received their planned end, or will some be cancelled? Will this decrease in support for programs result in a decrease in patrol of parks? The minister knows what a fan I am of conservation officers. Will this decrease impact the protection of parks from destruction by excessive ATV use?

On page 394, line 3.0.4, it notes that funding for parks infrastructure management will be decreasing by about \$4 million in the 2009-2010 year to \$6.564 million from the \$10.2 million in 2008-2009. How will this decrease affect park infrastructure in the province? Also, as a little sidebar here, the minister knows how concerned I am, having spent three summers working in Cataract Creek park continually attempting to repair park infrastructure, how important maintenance is to me and, obviously, to the Albertans who enjoy the usage of the parks.

With many parks in need of infrastructure upgrades, how will

decreasing funding help keep infrastructure up to date and in good shape, particularly after 15 years of deterioration? Will this decrease be throughout the province or only in specific parks? Are there certain projects which have now finished that account for a significant portion of this decrease? I know, for example, that Nakiska has received some wonderful funding for sewage and water projects there. What sorts of infrastructure projects will be targeted with the funding allocated for the 2009-10 fiscal year? Again, I know that in past years information centres have received a fair amount of funding, but the backwoods parks have not really seen the degree of infrastructure upkeep that they need.

Referencing page 394 of the estimates, line 3.0.5, it shows that there is no support for the capital river valley park because the funding in the amount of \$50 million was provided in last year's budget. Can the minister update us on the status of the capital river valley park? How many components of the park have had to be stalled? Have there been any requests for additional dollars for this project?

Strategy 3.2 on page 290 of the business plan notes the implementation of the Alberta recreation corridor and trails designation program. What are the timelines for this? How much money will be spent on the implementation?

I'll now move into recreation and sport as a main heading. As noted on page 395 of the estimates, the total for recreation and sport for the 2009-10 budget is \$4.75 million less than that forecast for 2008-2009. Under line 4.0.3 the recreation and sport facilities grants have decreased by over half, from \$20 million to \$9 million. This decrease has been of concern to many recreation and sports groups. What will the \$9 million be used for? Where will the funds be targeted? What will the distribution throughout the province be? Will more be going to one area? What is the process for the distribution of the grants? Who has the final sign-off? Have any grants been postponed or cancelled as a result of the \$11 million decrease from last year?

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chase. Just to remind you, with regard to the amendments it is the vote on the estimates and amendments that is deferred to May 7. In fact, debate on the estimates will happen this evening with the clock running. Just for your awareness and contemplation that, in fact, that happens this evening.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I appreciate that clarification.

The Chair: Go ahead, please, Minister Ady.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you. Well, you've asked some very, very detailed questions, and some of that we will do in writing, obviously, because it's pretty pointed, but I would like to speak to a few of the things that you have raised.

One of the things I can tell you about this budget is that the \$50 million decrease that you see is money that flowed through to the river valley park, and I'll start with that one. They have that money now. No, there haven't been any setbacks that I'm aware of. Obviously, they are at this point in time looking to see which lands they will purchase and how they will acquire this park. It's not our department that will be doing this; it's them. I think they're very satisfied. They have the resources to do what they need, so I don't anticipate that that is stalled or having a problem at all. I just want to reassure the member of that first and foremost.

As far as the infrastructure in parks goes, though, on a higher level we're actually pretty proud of the work that we've done. You're right: there was a time period where there was a deterioration of the

park infrastructure. We're about 73 per cent of the way back now. Now, a lot of that is in things that you don't see. It's that wastewater stuff, the things that are underground. They're not necessarily big, new buildings or, you know, a lot of the visual things but definitely needed infrastructure. We're about 73 per cent of the way back to having our campgrounds in fair to good condition.

This year alone we're going to be putting in \$18 million. Now, that does seem like a reduction from \$225 million, but it's very robust if you were to look back a few years ago when we look at infrastructure spending. We think it's a really good number for continuing the program that we have. Obviously, we'd like to be at 100 per cent. There's always some ongoing. But I think that if you went into our parks today versus five years ago, there are some major improvements. We've really been able to bring that up because of the work that government has done since 2004, and we're feeling actually pretty good about that. So, first and foremost, I want you to understand that I do not see this as a decrease. I see this as a continued improvement and an ongoing program at a pretty robust rate and that we are going to continue those.

I do have a list for your information on some of the park infrastructures in 2009-2010. I know the hon. member has been in a lot of these parks, so he'll recognize some of them. We are completing the upgrade and the expansion of the Fish Creek Environmental Learning Centre. I'm actually pretty proud of that. I just met a gal yesterday that is running that program, and it's a great one for teaching kids not only in Calgary but southern Alberta. So that is being completed.

We're completing or starting a number of water and sewage system upgrade projects in the following parks: Cypress Hills, Jarvis Bay, Kananaskis Country, Little Bow, Park Lake, Vermilion, William A. Switzer, and Winagami Lake.

We're upgrading campgrounds and other park facilities in parks throughout the province. We're actually redoing those washrooms in Sylvan Lake. I went through them this summer. I think they need a little bit of a facelift. Various park revitalization projects are at Chain Lakes, Cold Lake, Park Lake, William A. Switzer, and the Sandy McNabb area of Kananaskis Country.

We've got a fairly aggressive capital thing that's going to go on this summer. Like I said, I think we really have a handle on this issue, different than we would have had a few years back. I'm feeling actually pretty satisfied about this area and what we're doing, and I'm really glad that we have not held back this year, that we're not stopping the work. We're continuing it.

Relative to the sports and recreation piece, you did reference a \$9 million decrease. That's money that actually is flowing through to WinSport. They used to be called CODA, for those of you that haven't heard of the name change. They're now called WinSport. As you know, there was a \$69 million commitment for that Centre of Sport Excellence. This is the last \$9 million of that \$69 million. It completes the provincial contribution to that centre. That's why it's showing up as a \$9 million decrease, just so you understand what that is. Sometimes money flows through us, and then it looks like a decrease in the next year's budget when, in fact, it's not going to do anything to our programs in sports and recreation at this point in time.

7:00

I had already mentioned this, the \$50 million that we flowed through to the capital region. That is there, it's in place, and we don't need to worry about that. In fact, they have not come back to us for additional monies – I know you asked that question at this time – because they're still very much in their planning phases and how they're going to and where they're going to acquire. There's a

lot of work to be done down there, but it's one of those projects that you just know some day someone is going to look back and say: "Wow. Aren't we glad we did the capital river region park?" I'll be very interested to get their updates as the time goes and it unfolds and we see what they're able to put together with the monies that they do have.

Other than that, I really didn't see anything else. Oh, you did ask about the trails and how we're going to be funding the trails piece as far as the budget is concerned. We actually have received \$300,000. I'm going to go to a different sheet here. I'm sorry; because your questions are so detailed, you have me hopping all over the place.

Let me just, first of all, speak to the concept. We have a trails recreation committee at work right now. As part of the plan for parks we recognize that this is an issue that we need some good policy around. You know, funding is one thing. We need the plan first and foremost. We need to better understand how we're going to engage the different groups. I've learned since I've been minister that everybody wants a trail, everybody wants to use a trail, but everybody wants to use the trail that they want to use the way they want to use it, and they don't want anybody else there with them. So sometimes you've got the horse guys saying: well, you know, the quaders are the problem. Then you have the bikers saying: the horse guys are the problem.

We've got to come out with – and that's why I'm glad to see the hon. member here today – a good policy on this. We have all the groups sitting down together and coming up with a way to manage the trail system in this province. Some say: well, you're going to let quads all through the parks. That's not our intention. Our intention is actually to find a way to manage the issue so that all can recreate in this province. It doesn't mean that everything will be everywhere all the time anywhere. It means that there needs to be a good, cohesive plan for the development of parks and to allow them to happen.

We do have a few sections. I do know that we've got 110 kilometres of the historical Peace River trail, connecting Fort Edmonton to the Peace River region and ultimately the gold rush in the Klondike, and that's damaged right now. There are some funds put in place for that because the trail is impassable right now in some large sections. The project that we're working on will reroute and regrade the trails to a more sustainable route. Some additional clearing will be done to accommodate increased usage of the trails and improve sightlines. The parking lots and other amenities such as signage and toilets, well water, camping areas will also be constructed as part of this project. I didn't see the number on this. It's in the composite.

As well, the Crownsnest Pass in the Rocky Mountain area has approximately 1,200 kilometres of recreation trail used by a lot of recreation groups. It's estimated that there are some 50,000 people that will access the trail in this region this year. This project will rebuild the trails damaged by a recent flood and forest fire.

One of the things that we're finding, in all honesty, is that we can build a trail, and Mother Nature can take it apart pretty fast, and trails are not cheap to build, necessarily. I go: you know, as much as you want to keep those trails open, just one slide can wipe out huge sections of trails. So part of what we're looking at in the policy is how we're going to fund trails and manage trails maybe a bit differently than we have in the past. That's a policy that we're not quite ready with but that we are going to be working at developing this year, so hopefully you will see some outcomes of that.

This project will rebuild trails damaged by the recent flood, and construction will include rebuilding trail grades, rerouting the trail for more sustainable alignments where necessary, and – I think this is important – installing drainage and repairing or replacing bridges

and other trail infrastructure. The project will create job opportunities and generate economic benefits for the region.

So we do have some within this budget this year, and we'll get you the specific numbers in writing on some trail repairs that we are doing. The longer I've looked at the trail piece – and I was just looking at a new recreation study that has come out, and the number one activity in this province, believe it or not, right now is actually walking. It is the number one activity in the province.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We'll go back to Mr. Chase for 10 minutes.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Thank you very much for those answers. They're much appreciated. With regard to Mother Nature, Mother Nature unfortunately has been assisted by man in the destruction of trails in McLean Creek and Wilkinson Creek, Cataract Creek, some areas of Bragg Creek. The style of clear-cutting on the slopes of mountains has led to a terrific amount of erosion, and of course the runoff after the spring thaw has an effect on taking out those trails. For the record I want it to be known that I'm not opposed to all-terrain vehicle usage, and I do agree with the minister that the majority of ATVs are responsible. However, until we get a handle on that, we'll be I guess working with the Solicitor General's department on those who flagrantly abuse the law. Long weekends, in particular, become hostage-taking circumstances for regular campers. Until we get a handle on both the alcohol consumption and the off-roading, that appear to go together, the quality of recreation for Albertans will be severely reduced.

Policing has helped to move things around. The Ghost-Waiparous was destroyed to a large extent by mud boggers, all-terrain vehicles of a variety of styles: the heavier ones, obviously, doing the greatest amount of damage; the ATVs, the small quads doing very little by comparison. When the police crackdown took place in the Ghost-Waiparous, it reappeared just west of the Cataract Creek area, at Indian Graves. Then, working in conjunction with Sustainable Resource Development, what happened the following year was that the problems were moved to McLean Creek.

The problems have yet to be resolved. They simply get moved from place to place to place. I really believe that part of the solution is the control, at least in designated areas, of the alcohol consumption. I know, having managed parks, that it's when the alcohol fuels the activities, the parks become extremely hard to manage. Park hosts have been beaten up by rowdy individuals.

Also, you mentioned you're 75 per cent, sort of, caught up on the infrastructure. I would appreciate, as you provide further answers, if you can tell me whether part of that 75 per cent is providing fencing around the designated provincial parks. Again using my Cataract Creek example, or Etherington, which was down the road, campers had to compete with cattle because the free-ranging cattle were dropped off, and they frequently infiltrated into the parks because the fencing was down. The Texas gates, the cattle guards were down. So, again, I spent a fair amount of time being a herdsman as opposed to a camp operator.

I'll go back to the questioning. Again, in terms of sports and recreation have any grants been postponed or cancelled as a result of the \$11 million decrease from last year? You mentioned the change in name from CODA to WinSport, and you mentioned that money had flowed through. I know that WinSport, like so many other organizations, took a tremendous hit in their investments, and I'm just wondering: to what extent are they going to be backed up or subsidized? I do appreciate the money that has been invested in Canada Olympic Park. There has been some talk about cutting down the usage of the speed skating oval at the University of

Calgary and cutting back on the operation there. That, to me, would be a very sad circumstance. That's why I would rather see the money spent in terms of Olympic promotion here for our Alberta athletes as opposed to advertising in B.C. However, I'll move on.

7:10

Line 4.0.5 shows that assistance to the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation will stay the same for 2009-2010 at \$25.12 million. What will these funds be used for? Which grants, projects have already been approved? Where are the projects throughout the province? What is the process for determining the distribution?

Referencing page 284 of the business plan, it discusses physical inactivity among children and youth and notes opportunities "to work with other ministries, governments and stakeholders to inform Albertans about the value of active, healthy lifestyles." How does the ministry plan on going about doing this? I'm sure, hopefully, the Ministry of Education will be a partner in the process. Which ministries have collaborated already to get this healthy lifestyle information out there? I would think that Minister Liepert with Health would also have to be involved. What resources will be dedicated to this initiative? The Alberta active living strategy, for which the task force was struck in 1997, would have already covered many of the issues in this point in the current business plan. Will there be any overlap or duplication with new initiatives?

Talking specifically under the heading of Olympics, line 4.0.6 on page 395 of the estimates shows \$6.6 million being spent on the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games. This is up from \$624,000 last year. What will these increased funds be spent on? With the Olympics now less than a year away, what plans are already in place to promote Alberta alongside the Vancouver 2010 Olympics? I appreciate the fact that you've begun that discussion, with the train, for example, and the location of the Alberta area for tourist promotion.

Page 284 of the business plan discusses the aging infrastructure of sport and recreation facilities and that 75 per cent of them are more than 25 years old. It also notes the opportunities the Olympic Games have for use of sporting events in Alberta. With the Olympics less than a year away, how will these infrastructure upgrading projects be done in time to actually benefit from the 2010 Olympics? Again, I'm all for spending the money here in Alberta, where it'll do Alberta athletes the greatest service. How much money will be directed toward these initiatives? Will other infrastructure upgrading projects be delayed or cancelled to prioritize one for the Olympics? If so, which ones?

Page 285 of the business plan notes the implementation of the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games accord as well as the creation of the Calgary Olympic Development Association's Canadian Centre of Sport Excellence. How much will be spent on each of these initiatives? What are the timelines for the implementation of the accord? When is the Centre of Sport Excellence expected to be up and running?

While we're sort of on the subject of Olympics, will there be any other funding directed to WinSport for gymnastics? I had a chance to view the gymnastic facilities, and while I was there prior to the Summer Olympics, it was mentioned that they were in desperate need of expanded spaces. Gymnastics had grown in tremendous popularity. I'm sure that Kyle Shewfelt was a large, single-handed reason for that increase.

Page 393 of the estimates shows that the tourism budget for 2009-2010 will be increasing \$4.7 million to \$70.9 million from the 2008-09 amounts. What accounts for this increase? Are there new projects which will be coming onboard as a result of this funding?

I've previously mentioned to the minister a concern about local tourism-promoting groups potentially getting lost in the new tourism Alberta. I would appreciate reassurances that that isn't happening, that local-level tourism is well and being supported by the government.

On page 394 of the estimates line 2.0.1 shows that program support funding will be increasing by \$230,000 dollars. [Mr. Chase's speaking time expired]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chase.
We'll return to the minister.

Mrs. Ady: A very ambitious list of questions that he's given me. I'll start with where you were in the parks. I just want the hon. member to know that we're singing from the same song sheet when it comes to the May long weekend. We recognize that that seems to be the weekend of greatest concern. We always brace ourselves for it every year.

I think we've done some important things lately. We have created a liquor ban in eight parks. You know, what that has done in those parks is that we now see families returning to them. There was a time when families were saying to us: I can't go out on the May long weekend because of the crowds that are coming into the parks. With the liquor ban on we're seeing families return to those parks now and enjoying them on the May long weekend, which I'm very happy about.

But I take the member's point seriously. When you squeeze a hose, it bulges somewhere else. We do know that, particularly around our large urban centres – and McLean Creek and Ghost-Waiparous are two good examples because they're close to a major urban centre – there seems to be, I don't know, a rite of passage or something that's going on there where we're having a lot of alcohol and a lot of things happen that we think are very unfortunate in the parks. Last year we combined our efforts with Sustainable Resource Development officers and the parks department and the Solicitor General. We went out, and I thought we attacked it pretty hard. We had the liquor bans on, we closed roads down, we had a very major enforcement presence out there, and I think we're making a difference.

Now, does that mean that some groups will be able to go and find some back-bush area that we can't necessarily find them in? There's always going to be that happening. For us to say that we're ever going to eradicate this practice on the May long weekend I think would be naive. But as I've said in the press and I will continue to say: if you go and you tear up our environment and we find you, watch out.

We are going to be out in a major presence on the May long weekend. We're going to do our utmost to try and prevent as much of this behaviour as we can. We do know that alcohol is a big determinant in what goes on. We know we've got a lot of high schools out there with grads and those things that also go on. We continue to be very, very concerned about them. I think we are attacking with everything we've kind of got in the tool box, and we're going to continue to do that. We agree with you that it's not a practice that we want to encourage. We just don't want to see the destruction, and we don't want to spend the money trying to fix the destruction. So we will continue to do that.

I would agree with you that it's the weight of the vehicle that is causing the damage. You know, one of the things we're going to have to look at when we look at where things can go on in this province is the weight of a vehicle. We've often said: could we get these heavy trucks down into gravel pits or areas where they could play but not necessarily create the destruction? What has always

bothered me about them is that they find a wet place where they want to go into, and then two weekends later they don't want that anymore because it's all wrecked. They want to go somewhere else. Two to three years later we go back, and it has still not recovered. We know the damage it can cause, and we're going to be looking at that. When it comes to this piece on the parks, we'll continue this work. It's never going to be over, but we're going to stay as vigilant as possible in this area.

As far as the sports grants go, I still think that you have your finger on the money that's flowing through to WinSport this year when it comes to a drop. We have not dropped any of our programs or reduced in the sports and rec area this year, so no programs have taken a decrease, but their money is flowing through. When it comes to WinSport, I also am a very big fan of what they're about and what they're doing there. Yes, they had money that they lost in their trust for the very first time. I mean, they've operated for 25 years since the Olympics and have done an excellent job. But this year, obviously, with the decrease they had issues. As well, of course, the U of C, one of their partners at the Olympic Oval, also had a decrease in their trusts. So in combination they had some issues.

7:20

When it comes to operational dollars, though, on the Olympic Oval and WinSport, we don't give operational dollars. The Olympic Oval is two-thirds WinSport and one-third the U of C, and they have a bit of a federal partnership as well. We're not planning on changing that position at this point in time. We do give capital dollars. We have given a lot of capital dollars to upgrade Olympic facilities, some hundred million dollars we're in for right now. That's where we are.

But we are very supportive of assisting these organizations in any way that we can. You know, I'm in constant conversation with them as they proceed forward with their Centre of Sport Excellence and making sure that they can move it forward. As you know, they went to court this year and were able to get into their trust for some operation because this year is considered to be very exceptional. The judge said: how can we let you not operate when you're sitting on a hundred million dollars in trust? So there were some court arrangements made. We as a government do not participate there, but we are very, very supportive of what they're doing.

As far as the activity, health, lifestyle piece you have your finger on the thing that I am going to be putting a lot of focus on this year. We've worked really hard on the tourism portfolio and the park plan, but when it comes to activity levels in kids, we are gravely concerned. We now have a bit of a target in boys from nine to 12 that we can kind of use as a way of measuring. As sports ministers we got together this year, and we agreed that we were going to increase the number of steps kids took. But I keep saying: you've got to stop the decrease before you can increase.

We're particularly worried about boys. I mean, the most active group would usually be young boys. But with the advent of computer games and computers and parents' fear about safety we have a major problem on our hands and a direction we don't like right now. I have been talking both to the ministries of Education and Health because I agree with you that it cannot be one. But I really feel like somebody should take the lead hand on this a bit, and I think sports and recreation is a really appropriate place to take some of that lead hand on it.

I've also been very impressed with some of the literature that I've been reading lately about the deficit of kids being in the environment. I mean, if you've read *Last Child in the Woods* – I think that's the name of the book; there have been a few of those – the preface of the book was where the kid said: you know, I like being inside

best because that's where all the electrical outlets are. I was really concerned when I read that because it's so true. One of the indications is that it would be better for our health if we were outside. Also, who will be the stewards of the land in the next generation if kids aren't in nature and they're not enjoying it and they don't come to love it passionately like Albertans do today?

So we're looking at that, and we're really hoping that we can come forward with a new policy in this recreation area in the next year. We are not looking at any cutbacks in programming for them at this point in time. I want to reassure the member of that.

Finally, on the tourism side, the local level, I don't know if you've been able to watch our Stay campaign this year. I just think it's been unwinding beautifully in the province in the sense that we've got these value cards that will send you to all parts of the province right now. We're running ads, you know, in newsprint, television, on the computer, out in that Internet world in order to help drive people around into the other parts of the province. I'll cover that later maybe in more detail.

This online camping reservation system we also see as a real tool to help drive into other portions of the province that are maybe underutilized at this point in time. We all kind of head to the same campground year after year. We have our favourite. Sometimes we get there, we can't get in, and there are lots of campgrounds if we just knew they were there and that they were available. We think that we are serving those outer areas and that the Travel Alberta board is very aware of its responsibilities to market all of the province, not just some of the province. I don't anticipate that to change at all. I just wanted to reassure the member that we are, I think, on top of that particular issue.

I think that I covered all the questions. Oh, wait. The other thing that you talked about is the Olympics and what we're doing with the Olympics. First of all, some of those monies that you see there are helping with our sponsorship and our lift on the World Cups that we're having in the province this year. One of the big advantages for us is to showcase Alberta. Whenever there's a World Cup, that gets fed all over Europe. I mean, you have no idea the viewership that we get out of a World Cup, and the backdrop is always Alberta. Those are some of our best customers when it comes to the tourism industry.

So first and foremost, we're doing work here in the province this year. Some of those monies that you see being spent there would also be, you know, in relationship to our engagement with the torch relay as it moves through the province. [Mrs. Ady's speaking time expired] Oh, sorry. Maybe I can cover it later.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We'll go back to Mr. Chase for the final 10 minutes of the first hour.

Mr. Chase: Thanks. Just with regard to international attention, one of the things that unfortunately was cancelled in the Kananaskis was the TransRockies road race. This was a bicycle race. I'm not sure the reasoning behind this, but this was broadcast world-wide because we had competitors from all over the globe. I know that in 2003 and 2004 I assisted in terms of providing water and hosing down the bikes and providing amenities and so on. This was a very inexpensive circumstance, inexpensive in terms of its effect on the environment because we're talking mountain bikes on pretty much designated trails. Unfortunately, for some reason it was abandoned, yet we have seen motorized vehicle usage in inappropriate manners expanded.

[Mr. Hehr in the chair]

With regard to the liquor ban, we have in the neighbourhood of 500 parks and designated protected areas; therefore, eight is such a very small fraction. I don't want to come across as a teetotaler, but my experience is that it's not the kids and grads. My experience is the 30-somethings, who can afford multiple cases of beer, especially on that May long weekend. That's when conservation officers and I have experienced the greatest difficulty, and it had to do with the consumption of liquor.

Secondly, the best campground experience I ever had was in 2002 during the G-8 because the G-8 was held in Kananaskis, and we had what I would call literally hot and cold running conservation officer attention. We had conservation officers coming through the parks providing information on fishing, providing information on hiking trails, there to protect individuals who might have got lost when they wandered off.

I think that one of the best things we can do to improve the utilization of parks and an enjoyable experience is make sure that beyond the Bow Valley parks and beyond some of the larger parks we have individuals at least coming through the parks and providing interpretive information. They may not be the fancy shows that the children like to go to at night and so on, but again I can't stress enough the importance of conservation officers. Conservation officers currently have such a large area to patrol. The RCMP is so distant from the wilderness campgrounds; therefore, it's left up to the conservation officers to do the policing and patrolling.

[Mr. Doerksen in the chair]

You mentioned targeting boys, the nine to 12 ages. That was the age that I started with in 1971, when I began teaching grade 4 and then worked through grade 6. There's no doubt that that is an appropriate target to aim at. In the good old days I would be able on a Friday afternoon to offer an opportunity to boys and girls to go for runs or cross-country skis on weather-permitting days. We're in a different world. There are more dangers lurking out there for students, but in supervised recreational activities there are terrific opportunities.

7:30

I would be interested to know in terms of recreational camping programs what type of subsidies the Alberta government offers in terms of helping kids in lower socioeconomic positions in attending summer camps. I'm wondering if there is any organized system within our parks program for providing reduced camping rates for, say, Boys and Girls Clubs, activities for Scouts, this kind of thing. I know that when I worked at Cataract Creek, I had a very understanding individual who worked for High Country Camping – Ian Nicholson was the gentleman's name – and he mentioned any time the kids came through: give them the best discount you can because, obviously, they're going to grow up and they're going to potentially come back. He was very thoughtful in terms of providing children reduced rates and opportunities.

Going back to where I left off, I was referencing page 394 of the estimates, and the program support funding will be increasing by \$230,000, just as a reference. I'll continue from there. Are there specific programs which will receive this increase, or will it be across the board? Will this increase be for programs province-wide, or will they be specific regional projects? Will any programs see a decrease in their funding and those funds allocated elsewhere? Are there any tourism programs which will be ending this year?

I just want to commend the minister and the department for this stay home initiative. It's wonderful, and the minister and the department are extremely aware that for every dollar we invest, we

get a \$9 to \$10 return. Increasing the enjoyment not only for Albertans but expanding our possibilities world-wide is extremely important.

I'm now referring to page 394 of the estimates, line 2.0.2, which shows that tourism information services funding will be increasing by \$1.25 million. What will that increase be directed towards? Will services be receiving increased support throughout the province, or will certain tourism centres be receiving more than others? I indicated earlier that it's great, for example, in the upper Kananaskis to have the information centres, but the farther you are removed from, say, the Peter Lougheed and as you go farther south down the forestry roads that I've experienced, the support, particularly information, is significantly reduced. I would hope that as well as having these glorious centres, there would be funding spread throughout the whole park system.

What will the increase be directed towards? Will the services be receiving increased support throughout the province, or, as I indicated, will it be specific information-centred areas as opposed to spread out? Will any new information centres be developed? If so, how many and where? Has the ministry done any studies as to the effectiveness of these services?

One of the things that I really would advocate for is a service whereby hikers or any backwoods enthusiasts are able to register. In talking to conservation officers, they basically suggested that if somebody went in on their own, their chances of survival were entirely dependent on their relatives or their family or whoever they left the information with. I've been involved in backwoods rescues, just trying to find the person and how long it takes with the current systems of radio towers. I'm hoping that part of that 75 per cent increase was involved in the radio towers. The RCMP had the advantage. They had satellite telephones whereas the conservation officers and myself had radios, and they frequently didn't do the job. So, hopefully, communications systems have been developed.

What is the actual value for money on investing in tourist dollars? As I say, I threw out that figure of 1 in 10, and if you could confirm that, that would be appreciated. Page 394 of the estimates, line 2.0.3, shows that tourism development funding will be increasing by \$1.67 million. What will these funds be directed towards? What accounts for the increase in funding this year? Will any of the \$5.65 million in funding for this year be spent on foreign advertising projects? If so, how much? You know how I feel. Yes, we want people to come here, but if we do our best here in Alberta to show what a wonderful product we have, we don't have to go as far and wide because people come here and tell their families and friends back home.

Page 394 of the estimates, line 2.0.4, shows that tourism research funding will be increasing by \$514,000 to \$1.7 million. What types of research will be done with this money? With funding increasing for other tourism initiatives, is this additional funding needed? What is the return on this research funding? Have we done previous research so that we can track its value? Are any of these . . . [Mr. Chase's speaking time expired] I'll stop at that point.

Mr. Chair, could you qualify at which point I'll be able to get back into the flow or the rotation?

The Chair: We've actually done the first hour. This will complete your first hour. We'll have 10 minutes for the minister to respond at this point. In the absence of the third party, we will then begin alternating back and forth from the government members to your side.

At this point, Mr. Hehr, are you on the speakers list?

Mr. Hehr: No, I'm not.

The Chair: Okay. So you'll be back in after the next exchange.

Mr. Chase: Thank you for the clarification.

The Chair: Go ahead, Minister, please.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you very much. You know, I can't answer that question, in all honesty, on the Kananaskis bicycle race. It predates me and also predates my deputy, so we'll have to look into that one. I don't know what happened to that. It seems to me like a great idea. It might have been that the sponsors decided not to. I'm not certain. We'll track that one down for you because it does seem like a terribly good project.

Back to the liquor ban. I know that some would call me a teetotaler, too, and they'd be right. When it comes to where we decide to implement liquor bans and where we don't on the May long weekend, we generally don't just kind of arbitrarily do that. We look at those parks where we have had difficulty. We consult with the area MLA, we consult with the staff, we consult with the volunteers, all those that have had a stake or have been trying to control it over the May long weekend. Those are done in very specific ways where there are difficulties.

You know, if you had a park – and you're right: we have 500 – where there really weren't any difficulties, why would you have a liquor ban? We've been trying to respond to what I'll call the hot spots in that. It's not done kind of randomly; it's done with all of that kind of information brought to bear. I still think that's a good way to do it because I don't want to become too heavy handed in this attempt. I mean, I think some people, even though I don't drink myself, do responsibly drink and do think of it as part of enjoying a long weekend. So that's kind of the criteria that we use and probably will continue to use.

I don't even anticipate an increase in the parks this year from last year. We increased last year, but we felt like we had a pretty good handle on the parks last year. When you talk about volunteers, you know, being beat up and those types of things, that just makes me – I mean, they're kind of part of that life force that really gives us that added coverage out there, that we could never hire. No matter how many conservation officers you have, there's no way we could get the coverage that we have or the information that we have in parks without the volunteer system. I could wax on lyrically. I think we have 187,000 volunteers. That tells me how many people love the parks, too.

When I was out this summer on the park tour, I got to go and sit with some of the camp hosts and talk to them about why they chose to be hosts and what their experiences were. Mostly they were pretty happy. They had really had a pretty peaceful summer, and they said that people mostly are really co-operative in the parks and quite helpful to them.

You're right: I think alcohol can make people do things they shouldn't. I think we are going to have to continue to be very vigilant on the May long weekend and that if we have incidents that start to emerge in parks in specific areas, we look at those even during the rest of the season.

When it comes to conservation officers, we felt really fortunate last year that we could increase the number of officers by 13. I think we have a total of 82 conservation officers now. When I say 500 parks, you think, "Wow," but remember that a lot of these are very small parks and not necessarily of the same degree. We are pleased that in this budget, even though economically things are tougher, we have not had to take a single conservation officer away. We feel that's the worst place we could create cuts in a budget, so we have not done that. We have all conservation officers there. As well, we

hire a fair bit of summer staff – I don't know why none of my boys ever hire out and work in parks, but they haven't yet; my boys cut grass; I'm thinking about that – and, of course, all the volunteers. But we've been able to increase them since last year, and we're holding that this year. I just want to let the hon. member know that.

7:40

As far as targeting boys, you know, it's an interesting phenomenon. Parents feel like it's less safe out there, yet everything I read or look at says that actually it's no more dangerous than it ever was. It's our perception of safety, like with this child in Ontario. The minute something like that happens, the whole world goes into lockdown, and as parents you pull them in tighter and harder.

I was thinking about schools, how schools were having so much difficulty because parents felt like they not only had to drive their kids to school and that the kids couldn't walk, which adds to the fact that they're not getting physical activity, but that they had to see them actually go in the door. So we have all these traffic jams, snarls, you know, terrible for the environmental situation, going on all because people feel more at risk with their children.

I've often referenced in the speaking that I do in this subject area Gary Mar's comment that we should, you know, bus all children to school but drop them all a mile from the building so they could all walk the last mile. I've been very impressed as I've been out there and looked at some of our programs that do this walking, school bus piece in the province. Some schools are coming up with some very innovative ways to help kids naturally get activity in their lives.

Again, until we can kind of crack this a bit and really get everybody working on it, I don't know if we're going to see, as I said before, getting that decline stopped and actually getting it arrested. We've got to be able to find ways to give parents a surety that their kids are safe yet get activity at the same time. I know even as a mother – my mother never even thought about how we got to school. She just said, "Go," and we did. You know, I often drove my kids to school just because I felt safer. I did. I felt safer.

Tourism programs. You talked a lot about tourism programs that might be ending this year and whether we're going to do any more tourism centres. We have no plans to do any more centres. But you're right: there are some areas that are way more active than other areas. I think that over the years we've all tried to solve that problem in a variety of ways, but I really believe that part of the future of being able to drive and help areas is going to happen online.

I was reading in the paper last week where someone said: well, the last place there are no computers is campgrounds, and now she's going to put computers in campgrounds. I didn't understand the comment. More and more people are getting their information online, and the opportunities and the hand-held devices and the wireless opportunities that we have are actually, I think, the future. I think that in the future these centres will not necessarily always be staffed with individuals. You're going to be able to find ways, as we look forward in our tourism development, as to how we give information, that there are going to be more and more opportunities for people to look online to find the things that they want and that they need in this area. That's also going to give us the opportunity to advertise and promote things differently than we have in the past, and if we're smart, we won't be saying that that's a decrease in tourism but that it's a redirection.

One of the things I'll be looking to the tourism corporation, who has a real business edge, getting their advice from the tourism sector, to do is to move in those directions. I might say: "You know what? The Peace Country looks pretty good to me. Why would I go there? How would I get there?" I might be a hiker that wants to go up into,

as you said, the backcountry. Would I have to go online and book that I'm going in and where I'm going in? You know, how can we better gather that kind of information?

One of the things I can tell you as I've looked at the future of our reservation system in camping is that it's not just about getting a campsite. There is a whole raft of opportunities that we are going to have as we move fully into this technology that I think are very exciting. Some of the things that we've done in the past, frankly, as much as you're trying to do the good work, have not necessarily produced what you wanted when it came to results. We have a far higher opportunity with technology, and I really do see it as the future.

But if I was to look at this year's budgets, I would not see decreases to programs there. I don't think that we're backing away from any of it. I would say that when it comes to the development of tourism, we have a few things that we focus on. Let me just pull a sheet for you. I talked before about the Stay campaign. One of the things that we do is that we look at helping areas create new destinations and new products so that we keep the product fresh and give people something to do that's different.

One really great example this year – I even brought some of the brochures – is the Badlands, where we got a whole bunch of the province to put themselves together as a tourism destination. We gave them not a lot of money but some money, and we matched what the communities were doing. They've been able to come up with what they call the ultimate road trip. Some of the pictorial stuff that they're putting together and the development stuff that they're doing on the Badlands area is really making this area start to live.

That's part of what we're doing with the tourism development dollars. We're using it to help communities actually lift and find ways to create their new product. We're also trying to help them . . . [Ms Ady's speaking time expired] Oh, jeez. Maybe later.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

At this point we will go back and forth to the government members' side. Mr. Rodney, you have 10 minutes or a 20-minute exchange, whichever your preference is.

Mr. Rodney: If it's the pleasure of the chair and agreeable to the minister, we'll do 20 minutes back and forth.

Mrs. Ady: Sure.

The Chair: We'll do that. Following that, we'll take a five-minute break, and then come back to Mr. Chase, please.

Mr. Rodney: Agreed, and maybe back to me or other members.

I do have eight questions, Minister. I'm going to give you the categories, and then we'll come back to them just one at a time. I find it maybe a bit easier for both sides on that. The first question will have to do with the amount of money granted for tourism promotion. The second one is on the 80-20 split. The third one is on the Travel Alberta organization and changes there. Number four will be on the results for the Stay program. Number 5 is collaboration with other departments, not only provincially but at other levels of government. Minister, I see you feverishly writing. Don't worry. I will repeat these questions. But just in case you're getting some thoughts in your head, feel free. The sixth one is regarding infrastructure maintenance. Number seven is online campground reservation system details. The eighth question has to do with the plan for parks. We'll just see how far we can get.

I do want to read into the record, though, the vision and mission for the department, mostly for the people who, hopefully, are

listening online. The first one is the vision. [interjection] Yeah, it may include my mother. Thank you, hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs. She knows that the vision for the department is for Alberta to be a “world-class tourism destination with active, healthy citizens who value their natural heritage.” The reason that I’m bringing this up is it has everything to do with the questions to come. The mission:

To create the conditions for a vibrant and successful tourism industry throughout the province; manage the provincial parks system for the benefit of all Albertans and future generations; and promote active, healthy lifestyles through participation in sport and recreation.

With that, Minister, being the vision and mission, my first question is this. Despite what I call current economic realities – some have referred to them more negatively, but they just are realities – I consistently see Alberta tourism numbers being amongst the brightest lights in North America. They are better numbers than the rest of the continent, by and large. I’d be honest in admitting that we haven’t been experiencing the growth that we have seen in the past. For my first question I wonder if you can just comment on the amount of money being granted to tourism promotion through your ministry. Is it the right amount?

Mrs. Ady: Well, if I was to ask my marketing guys, they would always want more. No question about that. But that being said, when it comes to our marketing dollar, we’re spending in these estimates some \$56 million in marketing.

7:50

I’m starting to really see reflected out there in our tourism industry, first and foremost, that with the governance changes that we’ve made and with the surety of the tourism levy, Alberta is starting to become the example that the rest of the country – even if you were to look at the Canadian Tourism Commission and different cities that have, you know, tourism organizations of their own, we’re becoming the standard to look to because they’re looking at what they think is a very solid governance model but also really good, sure funding and predictable funding. If we were to look around us sometimes, they don’t always have predictable funding. They’re waiting to see what governments will or won’t give them each year. This way we always know in advance what will be there, what won’t be there, so they can plan for it.

We also are able to follow up on what I consider millions of dollars that we have invested in some markets. So you spend a lot of money getting a presence and getting an industry built up. You have to continue to go and work on that. You can’t desert it.

One of the things that I found when I was down in New York visiting – I was with *Architectural Digest* and *Bon Appétit* and travel editors and travel magazines – was that they were finding that a lot of people, because of the economic condition, were deserting the market. They were pulling back in their promotion. When I got there, they said, “Why are you here?” and I said, “Because we’re from Alberta, and we just want you to know that we’re not going away, that we’re staying in the game and that we’re going to continue to stay the course on our marketing because we know we’re going to come out of this recession and we don’t want to have pulled back and lost all the momentum and all the good work that we had done in the past.” They said: “You know what? There are two advantages to that. First of all, you don’t lose your momentum, and the other thing is that others are pulling back, so there’s less noise in the market, so your dollar pops even bigger.”

We think that our strategy has been the right strategy. We think that the number is right. That being said, we also recognize that although we collect the tourism levy, we don’t actually spend it till

some two years later. Although the tourism levy has been increasing every year, we see the softening of the market right now. So one of the things the tourism board has decided to do, which I think is very wise, is that they are creating a 10 per cent contingency fund right now with the extra monies that they have to prepare for what comes in the future so that we don’t see an interruption in their ability to market. Maybe, you know, this year we’ll come on like gangbusters and there won’t be that dip, but I think that it’s always wise to plan for these things and to be prepared. So, first and foremost, I applaud them for that corporate stance, and I would say that they are right on with that.

As far as the realities in our tourism industry go, at this point in time we’re doing better than the rest of the country. It’s important to note that even though the U.S. is our biggest customer, we are not a rubber tire market. Unlike British Columbia and Ontario, where they’re popping back and forth across the border, we have a lot of pretty big, empty states below us to drive through. We’re an air access market. So one way we can measure tourism is direct entries. We’ve done considerably better than the rest of the country. We’re only down about 3 per cent. I think they’re down in some markets as much as 12 per cent.

So we really feel like we’re holding our own in spite of the economy at this point in time, and we’re going to continue to be aggressive in those markets, not only in our Stay campaign because 50 per cent of tourism is Albertans. I know that the hon. member before referred to it, but sometimes as Albertans we’re not the big spenders. We have the discount card that’s available right now. We pack a lunch. We do a lot of things that our out-of-town, out-of-province visitors don’t do. So when you really look at the industry, those out-of-province visitors are very important to a \$5.4 billion industry in keeping it healthy.

Thank you.

Mr. Rodney: I know we have time left on the clock. Will the first beep be our first 10 minutes?

The Chair: You have, Mr. Rodney, about 12 minutes left, so you’ve used less than half of it.

Mr. Rodney: Great. I’m actually going to merge questions 2 and 3 with the minister if that’s okay. I did hear the minister say that other provinces are looking to Alberta for answers, and I suppose a less-than-informed person might surmise that we should therefore keep things exactly as they are, but there have been a number of changes. One is the 80-20 split on marketing and development. We’ve had changes on the tourism levy that I know you know I’m very familiar with, and I’m so glad to see it working the way that it has. I’ve heard nothing but positive things as a result of that. Not me, but the changes in the levy. The Travel Alberta organization has undergone, of course, as you know and have directed, some really huge changes. With other provinces looking to us, why would we change an 80-20 split, a tourism levy, and the Travel Alberta organization? Are the expected outcomes going to be worth the price of these changes?

Mrs. Ady: Well, obviously, because it was a major piece of legislation that I carried, I’d say of course. First of all, the 80-20 split was one of the ideas that we talked about. You know, some people out there would put all the money into marketing, but we know fundamentally that you always have to be developing new product and that you also have to help lift and assist communities out there that are trying to advertise themselves. We think that that particular type of funding is important. So 20 per cent of it stays, some would call it, in-house, within the department because

particularly in rural Alberta, where maybe they don't have some of the advantages of a major international airport and some of the things that larger urban centres would have, they also still have the ability to attract tourism. We do a lot of work out there through our shop. As well, we're out there trying to find market-ready product that we can take out and help investors and link investors to. We've actually been pretty successful in this area, so we continue to think the 80-20 split is the right split.

As far as the changes go, I can only tell you that we're very early into the Travel Alberta corporation. Those members have just been named. I've been able to attend two different board meetings just to kind of see them begin their work. They are bringing an expertise and an energy to this industry. Although not all of them are from the tourism industry, they have very much a governance, business understanding. They looked at the Strategic Tourism Marketing Council, who are the people in the industry, and said: "What are the trends? What are you seeing? What are you thinking?" They take that advice and they overlay it with a business model. We think that that is going to create a continued vibrant tourism industry in this province, that it will do nothing but lift and build, particularly as we come out of the recession, and that we are going to only see really great things from this group.

A lot of it's dependent, of course, on personnel. We're also out now looking for the first CEO of this corporation and, of course, a VP of marketing. All of those are really critical positions. But I'm happy to say that in our executive search, because of the corporation and the level that they're working at, the interest in the CEO position in the province of Alberta is, like, second to none. I think we have – I don't know – the last I heard, over 200 applicants of a high quality now looking at this province, wanting to bring their talent and skill set here, and some in the province.

I'm very excited to see the way that it has worked out and also how supportive industry is of this model. They recognize its strengths and feel like they are being very well served by what they see happening right now. I think those changes were critical for really making it so that we could take a good industry and lift it higher and give it sure funding, a really civil split so that we don't forget that we need to develop but remember that we need to market.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Minister. Question 4. I know that ever since I moved to Alberta during the year of the Calgary Olympics, I've been a really big fan of new Albertans not leaving the province for long weekends and holidays at every possible opportunity so that they can discover some of the amazing opportunities here in the province. You know, I think everyone agrees that the Stay program has been absolutely well received, but I'm wondering about results, tangible or otherwise. I know so many times it's hard to put firm numbers on things. Is this one of those examples where we're not sure how much money has been kept in the province, or do we have any indicators of the amount of money that has been, you know, utilized across the province with the Stay program?

Mrs. Ady: Well, I have to say to the hon. member that mostly it's anecdotal right now. I don't know about you, but I really like the commercials. I like the song. I enjoy whenever they come on television. I stop to watch them. But operators are telling us of the increase in Albertans that they're seeing move around the province. I can't give it a hard, definitive number yet, but what we are hearing back from people is that we are seeing Albertans in record number move around this province again. I think part of it, too, is that as we look at an economy, you start to say, you know, maybe I'll spend fewer dollars, and I'll look around Alberta.

8:00

The value cards, I think, are a great example. I think we've seen an increase of 5,000 new people that have come online to get a value card. We had a certain number – I think it was 180,000 – and we've just increased it in this new marketing campaign by 5,000 people that are going on, getting their value card, and saying: "You know what? Where could I go in this province? Look, I can get 50 per cent off here and 25 per cent off there."

We would like to say that, you know, we did this because we foresaw an economic time coming in this world-wide meltdown. We didn't really actually see it, but it makes us look brilliant, like we co-ordinated it. There's no question that it's a very popular program with Albertans. They're very proud of their province. We think that the effects for operators out there at a time when it might be getting a bit slim with outside visitors will help backfill some of that for them and make their seasons more successful.

We have other programs in the province, too. One that I wanted to mention is a park program that we do for new Albertans because sometimes they come to Alberta, and they don't know what those programs could look like. So we've had a pilot program in Kananaskis called nature as a second language that kind of works into that stay in Alberta type of idea. That's where we helped 700 new Albertans last year get comfortable with being in our parks. We worked with the Calgary Catholic Immigration Society and the city of Calgary cultural diversity program to host day trips for groups of new Albertans into the parks so that they could see what we had. They learned how to book a campsite and how keep it clean and safe. We've actually seen the Calgary Chinese cultural association book an event in Kananaskis Country where they brought 220 people in. They had such a great time in the program, and they learned how to participate through one of these programs.

So those also work really well for us when it comes to keeping Albertans home. Again, it's all anecdotal, but we are seeing an increase, yes.

Mr. Rodney: I know I have just a little bit of time, Mr. Chair. Minister, you know your vision and mission inside out, and I know everyone doesn't. That's why I read it to begin with. Based on that, though, you mentioned collaboration, and you and I both know it's with other departments within the provincial government but also other levels of government. Can you elaborate on any of the projects that do occur between your department and other departments in the province, other levels of government, and any associated costs that you might care to comment on with those programs and projects?

Mrs. Ady: Well, there's no question that when it comes to the tourism industry, we work very closely with partners, whether that be Tourism Calgary, Edmonton Tourism, you know, the different organizations across the province. And, yes, there are costs for us in those things, and it's often borne on the development side.

One of the things that we are doing when we work with other partners is that we gather them together once a year, and we bring them into conferences where we teach them to be better at what they do. We offer that kind of support. It's a nice networking opportunity for them as they see other operators. They see what's successful and what isn't successful. That's one area where we do work closely with other levels of government: municipalities, cities, and of course regions.

As far as the other departments I can only really reference back to the project that we are really putting on the runway this year, and that is, of course, our recreation policy. We're only going to be successful in this area if we have education and health at the table because they have roles in this area. So we have an agreement from both of those departments that we will sit down together this year,

in this budget, in this look at a recreation policy to make sure that we're co-ordinating our efforts but also that we're doing real things. The one thing I hesitate to see us do is to create artificial programs in this area that really don't have the outcomes that we want.

The other night we had the recreation world together in Kananaskis, actually, and we were giving awards out to coaches and to referees – it was nice to see referees get awards because they usually just get abuse – and athletes and different individuals. One of the things I did is that I challenged the room to come to us with their best thinking and the ideas and the things that they see working out in the world and in the programs that they're involved in. I literally, probably for an hour after we ended the evening, was pulled aside by different organizations within this province that had great ideas in this area. What I've learned is that there's a lot of really good thinking and research going on out there with the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary and some of the physical activity centres and various other organizations that we have in the province.

So you're right: it takes all of us to make some of these programs really lift and do the jobs that they need to. We're very much open to those kinds of conversations.

The Chair: We'll hear a buzzer in about one minute.

Mr. Rodney: Okay. Well, maybe there's enough time for a quick answer on this one. It has to do with the fact that in the mission and vision we do refer to world-class. I know that you've alluded to this, Minister. Do we have enough money in this budget to repair the infrastructure or just to maintain it at its current level?

Mrs. Ady: Could the hon. member tell me which infrastructure he's referring to?

Mr. Rodney: Oh, you know, having to do with our provincial parks that we run.

Mrs. Ady: Oh, right. Okay. Yes, I do believe we do. As I said before with the past member, you know, \$18 million this year – if we were to look back five or six years ago, before we started the real repair on parks, that would have been considered a very robust budget. I think we used to spend about \$5 million a year. So to spend \$18 million a year tells me we're not only keeping up, but we're making progress. That's what I'm interested in. I'm interested in us taking that 73 number – I don't know if you ever hit 100 per cent. But, definitely, when I think of how much our parks say about us as Albertans, we want them to be in top-notch condition. We want guests to come here and say that this is a great place to come.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

I'm going to suggest that we now take a five-minute break. Let's keep ourselves pretty strictly to that time frame and try to be back here at about 12 minutes after 8, when the buzzer sounds. Thank you.

[The committee adjourned from 8:07 p.m. to 8:14 p.m.]

The Chair: Okay. We'll call the committee back to order. Thank you.

There was a question posed with regard to written responses. Those will be circulated to the entire committee for your information.

At this point we'll go to Mr. Chase for 10 minutes, if you choose to use that time on your own, followed by Mrs. Sarich.

Mr. Chase: Thank you for the opportunity to continue. I want to add a little bit of advice as well as questions. The topic I would put it under would be eliminating camper stress and frustration. The electronic prereservation will help. There's no doubt about that. There are positives and negatives associated, but my experience in Cataract Creek with 102 sites was that in the three years that I ran the facility with my wife, we only once ever had an overflow circumstance, and there was sufficient space that we were able to accommodate it. There's nothing more frustrating for a camper, especially when they've gone, say, 35 kilometres down a forestry road, than to find the campgrounds full. So anything within the ministry that you could do to encourage campground operators, whether they're the big Bow Valleys where you've only wasted, say, seven kilometres when you drive in to find out that it's full, to post that information in a variety of ways.

Put it out on the highway, on the main artery, so that people don't find themselves bouncing along, especially if they've got a fifth wheel or a trailer, on forestry roads only to find out and be very frustrated and quite often, maybe justifiably so, willing to share that frustration with the campground operator, who should have posted the information. Radio updates, 24-hour hotlines, actually requiring people, if they do not have an actual operator available to provide you that information, to have it available on a recording – you know, "It's 3 o'clock on Saturday, July 2; we're down to two spaces" – so that people don't have their holidays ruined.

The other experience that I had was that because we were so far down the forestry road, the Peter Lougheed parks and so on would fill up first. The closer the proximity to the cities and towns, obviously they fill up. Then what happens is that you get desperate people – you know, crying children, frustrated individuals – coming into your campground. It's getting dark, and they've been turned away. They're desperate. So here you are: you're standing in the middle of the road doing an imitation of the *Walking Tall* movie, trying to provide assurance to individuals that you still have camp spaces and that they don't have to road at 50 kilometres an hour through your 20-kilometre zone, so that forewarned, forearmed situation.

I think that in terms of the advertising it would be very beneficial to advertise some of the more remote campgrounds because that provides people with alternatives. For example, Etherington and Cataract Creek are very rarely filled, yet any of the campgrounds, as I say, Willow Rock – I'm trying to think of some of the other names of campgrounds closer into Okotoks and Black Diamond, Turner Valley kinds of things; Bluerock was one of them – would fill quickly. So just let people know that there are alternatives early on in the process.

The other point I would like to make besides posting the information and eliminating frustration is the importance of working in concert with other ministries, Sustainable Resources for example, regarding buffer zones around parks. My experience, that you've heard so many times, with regard to Cataract Creek was the clear-cutting. If you decimate the entire area around a park, the park may come off as an oasis, but where are the people going to hike? Parks are small in terms of their circumference, and you need to preserve the beauty surrounding them.

Yes, we've got to work on fire suppression. You can't just simply stop fires. You have to, as the national parks do, have controlled burns, selective logging as opposed to clear-cutting. Again, with regard to the buffer zones, highway 40 must be if not the most scenic highway in southern Alberta among the most scenic mountain

highways, and Spray Lakes has a historical agreement which allows them to cut a considerable amount of the area along highway 40. It's extremely important when contracts are given that the value of the scenery is taken into account with the value of the wood. So I'm saying: please co-ordinate your ministry with Sustainable Resources.

8:20

Another ministry I'd like to see co-ordinated with is Transportation. One of the mistakes that was made repeatedly along the forestry road leading to Etherington and Cataract Creek was grading, basically, on the Thursday or Friday before a long weekend. What that did was instead of creating a level road, it raised the sharp gravel. A number of people with their, you know, beautiful buses and fifth wheels and exotic trailers were flattened alongside the road. Of course, Longview is a long way away if you need to be rescued. So do that grading well ahead of the long weekends.

Also, you cannot safely have a holiday trailer operating on the same road at the same time as a logging truck. This is where the Solicitor General comes into mind and also the Transportation minister in terms of enforcing the fact that logging trucks are supposed to be off the roads, I think, no later than 3 o'clock on a Friday. It gets scary when you have a big logging truck roaring down getting paid by the hour on the delivery competing with campers. So I would just encourage you to work with that ministry.

Going back to page 394 of the estimates, line 2.0.4, we were talking about tourism research funding. I'll just continue along that line for the remainder of my minutes. Are any of these research projects in conjunction with other provinces? For example, we've got TILMA now. Are we selling the Alberta-B.C. package? Are we encouraging people that the Cypress Hills, for example, are on both sides of our border – you know, "If you had fun in Saskatchewan, how about coming and seeing what we've got to offer in Alberta?" – that kind of interprovincial selling of our resources and sharing of the marketing costs?

Are any of these projects in conjunction with municipalities? I mean, we're talking about selling destinations. One of the best things that Alberta Tourism has done has been the coupon books, where, you know, you get one night free, that kind of thing. It encouraged people to go to campgrounds they might not ordinarily travel to. Again, selling the whole idea, as you noted with the brochure on Dinosaur park and Writing-on-Stone, of these combinations but then including the municipalities and what they have to offer in their special, unique, historical backgrounds and so on as part of the marketing.

I'm now talking about page 394 of the estimates. Line 2.0.5 shows that tourism photo and video library funding will be increasing by \$288,000. Can the minister provide a breakdown of what these additional dollars will be doing? How is the access set up for this library? Will it be changing at all?

Going back to my camping days as a kid with my parents, we really enjoyed not only the active nature explanations and the plays, but we enjoyed seeing, you know, National Film Board films, that kind of thing. The video update of other destinations in Alberta to see: I mean, we've got a captive audience camping. Let's use that audience and provide them with a top-notch audiovisual show that would encourage them to view other parts of Alberta.

On page 394 of the estimates line 2.0.6 shows that tourism business investment funding will be increasing by \$302,000. What investments will this increased funding go towards?

Thank you for that time.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chase.

We'll now go to the minister for a response, followed by Mrs. Sarich, please.

Mrs. Ady: Well, thank you very much. Once again a very long list of questions. As far as the advice that the hon. member was mentioning on the campground reservation system, one of the reasons that I pushed really hard and am so thankful to the department for stepping up and meeting this demand on the reservation system this year was partially what you're talking about.

It's so interesting when we track where people camp and why they camp. You know, I've learned a few things since I've been in this ministry, and that is that 40 per cent of Albertans camp. Almost half of us camp, which is an enormous number when you think about it, and 70 per cent of that 40 per cent of the people are in RV units today. They've got the big units. Some of our campgrounds are undersized. Some of our more popular campgrounds – you're right – near the urban centres book up so far in advance.

As I was on the park tour this summer, I was so amazed at some of the coping strategies people were using to book a campground. I learned about the phantom tent – I didn't even know the phantom tent existed; I wish I'd thought of it – where people would go out and buy a little pup tent. They'd drive into a campground, and they'd put it up on a site with nothing in it, just a pup tent, and then they would rent that site all week long so they could get it for the weekend. We used to use, you know, the lawn chair to try to hold a site, but they're actually sophisticated enough that they're using tents, which tells me that they're under pressure.

I remember that same day we were in the Lakeland district last summer, and a woman was just distraught because she had kids screaming and, you know, all her kids in the van with her, and she'd just driven for three hours to find out there wasn't a site for her. She came up to us, because obviously we had one of the park conservation officers with us, thinking we could help her. She was determined to be in that campground and was just hysterical. I kept thinking: why would she have to drive three hours when she probably passed several other sites or there are a few more sites just up the road that would do just as well? She doesn't know about them. She knows about this campground.

I pushed the department really hard this year to get here. I'm proud to say we're about to announce a camp reservation system, and we think that it will give people opportunities to see where else there is. You talk about Cataract Creek. One of my favourite features – and I don't want to give away all the campground reservation system secrets yet – is that you can say that this is the radius I want to go in, and this is the type of camping I want to experience, whether it's mountain or lake or whatever your desire is, and then you can see all of those campgrounds. You'll actually know that if I can't get in campground A, I could get in campground B, and you'll be able to book that site and know that you have it 90 days before. So there are a lot of really good things that I think are going to come out of this reservation system, and as you see the fuller presentation on what it's going to offer, I think you're going to actually be quite bedazzled. Is that a word? I don't know.

But I take your point on the frustration that's out there in this area. People have told me that they have called and called and called and called campgrounds, and nobody picks up the phone; you know, just the frustrations of trying to get there. So we think this is going to be a really important way of helping distress but also show and teach Albertans where the other opportunities are, because they're out there.

I just wanted to let this hon. member know that we have 500 radiophones in the province of Alberta today. I know that you asked that question in the past, about areas where you couldn't get help when you were a volunteer, but there are 500 radiophones in the province of Alberta. That's from last year, but I'd just add that to the discussion.

As far as forewarned and advertised and being able to kind of help people maybe in some kind of a way as they move through the province to know where there are and aren't opportunities so that they don't go down roads – my husband won't drive down a gravel road with any of his vehicles – I know that for some people, yeah, that's an irritation, so I think it's great advice, and we will certainly look to do that.

When you talk about buffer zones and about working with other departments, one of the things that I think is a good outcome of the park plan right now is the way that we are working in lockstep with the land-use framework. With Sustainable Resource Development we have opportunities now to go into the different regions. We're going to look at the parks that are within them. We're going to let the people who live in the region have some voice. In the past the criticism has been that they could come in and they thought the land would be under certain conditions, and the next thing they knew, we were tacking up signs saying: no this; no that. For the first time they're going to have some voice in the nomination of parks and what's going to happen in their regions in those areas.

8:30

I think we could work better with other departments, and I think this land-use framework is going to be one of those opportunities, if we work closely with them, to really make a difference in the park system as well as what's happening on the land, whether that could be buffer zones around really critical park infrastructure. Those are good tips and good advice, that I think we should be looking at.

As far as grading, well, the Transportation department, you know those guys. They run their own schedule sometimes. When the grader can be there is when they're going to send a grader in. It's something that I will maybe have the department take a longer look at when it comes to the May long weekend and others.

Just moving on, as far as the photo and video costs we have some new digital photos that we're doing now. I guess we're entering the digital age, so that's one of the reasons. We're removing those old photos. I know that even on the park plan I had picked certain pictures out, and I was informed I couldn't use those because those were old photos and they weren't of a high enough resolution anymore. I said, "But I like those photos," but I got, you know, knocked out on that one because we're redoing and making them a digital library today, mostly for obvious reasons. We're going to add more high-definition video and new software for users to be able to use parts of our library.

I always love those who use our library and our products kindly. I do not like those who take our products and distort them as we had happen this year with Greenpeace. I was not happy to see them distort what I consider to be some of the most beautiful vistas in the world. So I would say to all of you that want to use our libraries: please use them responsibly because we're very proud of them in this province.

As far as tourism research goes and working with other provinces, the hon. member is right. I learned when I was in China that they barely know there is Canada, let alone Alberta. They don't recognize provinces. Many people in the States, our biggest customer, don't even recognize provinces. So one of the things that we have been doing is that my deputy minister actually sits on a committee with the Canadian Tourism Commission now, and in their leadership role they are helping us as provinces come together as partners so that we can do some things in conjunction. You're right; if we can get them to land in British Columbia, why can't we get them on a Rocky Mountaineer train to come up over the mountains or to spend the first few days there and then come on and see Lake Louise or

whatever it is that we're going to bring them into the province to do? We have, you know, some great opportunities there, and so we need to do a better job of this.

The CTC is showing some really good leadership. I think if you were to ask the CTC, they would tell you that Alberta is one of their strongest partners when it comes to trying to do things in conjunction with other provinces. We often are putting dollars in this game when other provinces aren't because we actually do believe in it. We think that when we promote the whole country, we all win and that if we think we can go out and promote just Alberta, sometimes that's difficult.

We're fortunate because we have a few iconic things that make sense to people. Anywhere I go in the world, if I say "Calgary," people say "Stampede"; if I say "Rocky Mountains," they'll say "Banff." So there are some what I call iconic hooks that we do have that give us world-wide recognition. But let's be really clear: the majority of this world doesn't define the provinces. They don't see those borders or those boundaries – we see them very clearly – so it's important that we work together.

I don't know if I've hit all of your questions. The coupon books. I think that the value card is a good example of that. It's the new version of the coupon book. It's just kind of that you go online with your card, and then you can get to those opportunities. I love the coupon book. I think it is a really good, valuable tool.

Am I out of time? Is that what you're indicating?

The Chair: Very close.

Mrs. Ady: Okay.

The Chair: Forty seconds.

Mrs. Ady: Well, if I have 40 seconds, what else can I share with you? We're only looking at bringing on 25 campgrounds this year for a reason. They're some of our busiest, and this is a new thing, and we need to get it up and operational. But we're certainly not going to rest on that laurel – I just want to assure you – so maybe someday Cataract campground will be one of the ones that is actually on the campground booking. Yeah.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We'll now call on Mrs. Sarich, followed by Mr. Hehr, please, after the minister's exchange. Do you prefer to have an exchange or to use the full 10 minutes?

Mrs. Sarich: It's whatever the preference of the minister would be on the time allotment.

Mrs. Ady: I'm happy to answer any questions from any hon. member.

The Chair: We'll accept you going back and forth for up to 20 minutes, please.

Mrs. Sarich: Sure. Up to 20 minutes. Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd just like to open by saying thank you very much for the insight and information, hon. minister, thus far and the great questions that have been asked and your attempt to try your very best to answer them.

I'd like to start with the government estimates on page 392. Please forgive me if this question has been asked before; I know that there have been numerous questions previous to this question. I'm

looking at the consolidated adjustments intraminsty. Although there is a note on page 392 to explain what that's all about, I'm just wondering if you could provide a little bit more insight. Moving from the number \$25,120,000 to \$81,709,000, are there any examples that you could provide for us this evening that would help clarify what those intraminsty examples would be?

Mrs. Ady: What they're indicating to me is it's the transactions that we have interdepartmental, between other ministries. For example, if we have work that we're doing with Service Alberta – and we are doing more and more with them at this point in time. When you see the campground reservation system come online, you're going to see some really important work that we've done with them. Sometimes we have budgetary dollars that are floating between the two departments. That's what he's indicating that this would be an example of.

Mrs. Sarich: Okay. Very good. Am I correct in reading this that because it is in brackets, it is running at a deficit? Or is that a different interpretation on this statement?

Mrs. Ady: It's no deficit. It's just in or out. That's why it's in brackets. It's not running in a deficit. No.

Mrs. Sarich: Okay. Thank you very much. Moving on to the business plan, in particular on page 284, under the category called Physical Inactivity among Children and Youth, you make a comment there: "to work with other ministries, governments and stakeholders to inform Albertans about the value of active, healthy lifestyles and to collaborate on strategies that will help reduce childhood obesity," followed by, on page 285, item 5, where you identify exactly to "develop a recreation policy to help address the high levels of obesity among children and youth, encourage active, healthy lifestyles and increase participation in sport and recreation" and that as a ministry you "also support and enhance the efforts of stakeholders that are developing healthy community initiatives." On page 289 you also identify strategy 3.1, that supports that particular direction.

When you say "develop a recreation policy" and that you are interested also in working with other ministries, governments, and stakeholders, are you aware or have you had from the department any work – let's start with Health and Wellness, the Department of Education as well – on the policies that they already have in place or work on their policy frameworks that would address this particular issue? Are you co-collaborating with those – let's start with the government ministries – to help develop this policy so that you wouldn't have to do extraneous work in the view that a lot of research has already been done? You're probably aware, hon. minister, that Alberta has the highest obesity rate for children in this province. I just was wondering if you could shed a little bit of light on the policy development piece.

Mrs. Ady: Yeah. I mean, I've spoken to it a little bit before, and I'll just reiterate that the hon. member is right; Education has had some activity programs, the ever active school program, that they've had running. Unfortunately, when we look at that and some of the research that's coming out right now, they're saying that even with this ever active program we're not necessarily seeing any of the right trends happening yet because it's a combination piece. I know that Health has got their smart choices in what we eat program that's going on. They're saying, you know, that we have to a better job of melding these programs. Let's talk about that: recreation, what we're eating.

8:40

I always say this. Often we think that we have a problem and that the schools can solve it for us. If it was just a matter of getting kids active for an hour a day and that would solve the obesity problem, okay, but what we're finding is that that's not working. The idea that everything can be solved during a school day I think is also a misnomer. When we're looking at a recreation policy, at least for myself, in all honesty, I'm saying that we have to look at the whole, entire issue.

I'm disturbed by trends that say that kids only feel like they can be active when they're in organized sport. If we were to go back to our own childhood, well, frankly, I was never in organized sport. My brothers got to be in baseball, but that was back before we had that just let them play from Nike for girls. There weren't a lot of organized sports for girls. You were either a cheerleader, and if you couldn't do the splits, you were out. So I'm disturbed by trends that say that kids are only active when they're in an organized sport. First and foremost, I like the recreation sense that we have those sports organizations, and they do keep kids more active. I've always said that I put my four boys in a lot of sports programs and a lot of scouting programs. I didn't do it because I thought they needed to be active for their health; I did it to keep the drywall on the walls of my house, more than anything, with four boys. You know, I had great outcomes because I did those things.

First and foremost, I think we need to take a look at the problem of, "When are kids active?" and we need to start to look at why they're not active. A lot of it has to do with what I've mentioned before on the safety issue. A lot of it has to do, I believe, with computers and the screen time. We're seeing kids with up to 40 hours a week now of screen time, and it's no longer television; it is computers. With that world changing, I think it's going to have to be a multifaceted strategy including all three departments. I think the education of parents in this is going to be critical. Schools alone cannot handle this problem, and parents are going to have to start to recognize and understand better how they can teach kids to be active again because I think they're losing. The idea that kids wouldn't play or be active is so foreign in some ways, yet that's truly what's happening.

I'm going to be looking very much to my department and the different organizations that we have, working with these other two departments to come with some good strategies this year that begin to help attack this issue. Do I think we'll solve it in a year? No, I do not believe that. But I think we can't wait, and I think it's something that we should be putting some really strong governmental attention to making sure that the programs that we do have are.

When it comes to some of these recreations, in a former member's question on the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation I was asked how we determine what organizations receive funding. We have 20 different grant programs that we use right now, and eligibility ranges from individual to registered, not-for-profit organizations. Depending on their grant program, they receive monies from this organization, and they can apply to the foundation for funding. How we handle it is that we tend to handle the umbrella organizations over the different sports.

We also provide a lot of games in this province. One of the privileges of being the minister is that I've been to the 55 Plus Winter Games. We're now going to have 55 Plus Summer Games. I was down in Medicine Hat watching all the kids show up in Medicine Hat, and they billet them all out in the schools. I just said to the kids: please don't tear Medicine Hat apart. They responded beautifully. They came in and participated.

We do a lot as a province to try and organize and gather and give all age groups the opportunity to be active and to live and breathe

and compete in their sport. We'll continue those good programs. We're not cutting back.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you very much for that. I'd like to move on to another policy consideration for you. When you said that there would be working with ministries, is there any consideration from the funding perspective, you know, when you look at your budget, to pool resources together to strengthen the policy development for the obesity challenge that we have in the province? Could you comment on that?

Mrs. Ady: Yes. Obviously, whenever I work with departments, if they have funding in those particular areas that they would like to share with my department, I'm all ears. You know, when I say that we'll work collaboratively, together, I think that that has to mean budget as well as resource and ideas, so we'll be looking to see how we can manage that issue.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you very much. There are tools that measure satisfaction, having gone through your business plan, and those tools are only as good as the rigour of the questions that are asked to measure the outcomes within the department or people's experiences and things like that. I've noticed that there is no longer a performance measure on the satisfaction with the Travel Alberta website piece. I was just wondering if you could comment as to that particular decision?

Mrs. Ady: First of all, I think we were doing a really great job on the website, so nobody was commenting, because they were so pleased. I'll say that first of all.

The other issue was that we were not receiving a particularly large amount of a response on the website. People weren't participating on the satisfaction thing. It ceased to be all that relevant as a tool because they just weren't commenting on it. I think the last time we only had 237 responses, and they were unrelated to the actual context of the website. We haven't found it to be particularly useful anymore, and that's why we discontinued it.

Mrs. Sarich: Okay. Thank you for that. Moving on to the business plan, page 284, the importance of volunteers, you make the statement: "The Ministry's role in supporting these organizations has never been more important." There seems to be a lot of nervousness because the government has changed not only approaches, for example, that may or may not apply in your particular area but, certainly, for Culture and Community Spirit on the traditional not-for-profits. There are different ways of approaching how the funding would be in place to support the volunteerism that we have in Alberta.

Certainly, from a government perspective I hope that you would agree that we value and appreciate all those across Alberta that volunteer. I'm just wondering if there is an interrelationship between the support that you mean in the business plan between your department and the Department of Culture and Community Spirit, that support, so that there may be a little bit of clarity. And, I guess, supplemental to that, is there any support that people may expect will also translate into support through financial or other means for those types of activities? So support for volunteers and maybe on the financial piece as well.

Mrs. Ady: There's no question that my department and Culture and Community Spirit are still very, very closely aligned. I mean, you can't divide a department – it's not as easy as, you know, surgically cutting them. We're still very much overlapped in many areas, and

perhaps the volunteer and the not-for-profit sector would be a good example. The minister of culture and I actually have to work quite closely at times on different programs because I'll have the policy side, and he'll have the chequebook side. Often I'm over in his office, and we're sitting down to look at things.

When it comes to our volunteer program, though, you have your finger on a very important thing. When we look at all the sports organizations that we run in this province, all those sports organizations are run by volunteers. The reality is that without them, we would not have that program in this province because if you had to hire it, you wouldn't be able to afford the program.

I want to say, first and foremost, that we value them. As I said before, we have 187,000 volunteers across this sector, not just campground hosts but coaching and reffing and all the different things that they do. Just to run the games that we run: 2,400 volunteers supported the 2008 Alberta Summer Games in Medicine Hat. I talked about billeting those kids and setting those programs up; 2,400 volunteers set that in motion.

Even if you went to a more professional level in sport, like the Brier that we just had in Calgary: hugely supported by a volunteer segment. When we go to do the qualifiers for the Olympics, it's another huge event that we would not lift without volunteers. The not-for-profit sector and the volunteer piece is critical in this ministry and in culture to be able to support the programs, and we have to work so closely together. Sometimes he supports them. Sometimes we do put dollars into things like helping support coaching, you know, how much training we can do. Today there's a higher degree of scrutiny towards and for coaches for different safety reasons and all other kinds of reasons. We do offer support in those areas through these programs.

8:50

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you very much. My last question touches on the area of recreation and sports facilities. For example, in the city of Edmonton there's what's called a joint-use agreement. It might be a little bit different in Calgary. That's the agreement with the school boards and the city of Edmonton on the usage of the physical spaces not necessarily falling into the appropriate category as a recreation facility. I'm really referring to the schools for gymnasiums and some of the sports offerings that they would have, like track and field and pitches for other types of athletic endeavours. I'm wondering if there's any dialogue or any policy consideration of showing that interrelationship between the recreation spaces that could be available, linking up to policy dialogue with the Ministry of Education that would look at those spaces from a school board perspective on joint-use agreements.

Mrs. Ady: Wow. I have to say that I would agree with you. I know exactly where you're coming from right now on the joint use of things. At this point in time I would say that we're not as a department in discussion in this area. These are things that are managed between the city of Calgary and the school boards. I know in Calgary it's between the school board and the city. We have been doing a fair bit of work as government on the rehab of recreation facilities themselves. I think we've done a lot of work in recent years on that, but as far as the schools themselves and those gymnasiums, that does continue to be an issue and a problem. I would agree with the hon. member that if we're going to look at a rec facility and we don't look at utilizing every asset that we have there in this province, then we're probably not getting our work done. I'd say that that's something I'd like to take note of. It may be something that we should be looking at a bit differently than we have in the past.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you very much. Those are all the questions I have, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Sarich. We've had a minor change in our speakers list, so at this point we'll go to Mr. Chase and then back to the minister and then on to Mr. Bhardwaj, please. You have up to 10 minutes.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I'm aware that this may be the last shot, so I'll try and be quick. Unintended consequences of the reservation system, safeguards, monitoring, and checks and balances. A concern that I have is that while a person can only stay in a specific campsite for, I believe, 16 days, using the electronic reservation system, an individual could tie up a series of sites along a lake or in a particular scenic circumstance. They could theoretically, unless there's some safeguard, monopolize an entire summer. They could pre-book 90 days in advance every single weekend for site 43, for example, you know, close to Sylvan Lake, or whatever other designated area you like. At that point because they have the money to potentially do the \$10-a-shot reservation, they could turn a provincial public campground into a private space. So that's the unintended consequence. I'm hoping that there's some type of check or balance, safeguard or monitoring so that an individual doesn't simply, because they can afford to, move their trailer every 16 days just back and forth, back and forth. That would just take out the whole point of the public system.

Something else that I would really like to see the ministry undertake are commercials on preparedness: before you go, what do you need to know? And coolers. One conservation officer would very graphically tell people what happens when they leave their coolers out, and that is that bears get shot. So providing people with information. Also, just before you go, what do you need to know? You need to have backup clothes because the weather changes in Alberta. On June 14, 2003, over a metre of snow fell in Cataract Creek. It surprised the heck out of everybody. So clothing. And why is it a good idea to have extra rope? If you don't tie down your tarp or your canopy, you'll find it floating somewhere, you know, miles down the road, possibly smacking somebody in the process. So what do you need to know before you go?

Safety monitoring. There is a very limited number of conservation officers. There is a limited number of RCMP. I would really want to emphasize boating safety. Sea-Doos are the ATV equivalent on the water. For people that enjoy kayaking and rowing, as I do, without policing on the riverways and on the waterways, there's danger. Now, recently the government took away the cap on the number of commercial rafting outfits that can go on the Bow, and that's potentially a recipe for danger because the more people you put in a proximity on currents and undertows, fallen trees, and so on, you create dangers. Unless you have some kind of a safety or rescue system, a surveillance system, an enforcement system, people are being put in danger. The last thing you want to have is negative aspects about your stay in Alberta. So those are sort of the commercials that I would like to see addressed.

Going back to page 394 of the estimates, I talked about the funding increasing by \$302,000. Is any of this money spent on investments outside of Alberta? If so, how much? Yes, we need to attract tourism from around the world. Yes, the States are our nearest neighbour. But how can we sort of co-ordinate interstate and interprovincial in terms of advertising? You know, "We'll advertise Montana if you'll advertise Alberta" as opposed to setting up expensive advertising TV spots in the States.

Page 284 of the business plan notes that there are opportunities to increase "tourism experiences for a growing immigrant population."

Can the minister outline any specific plans or action items the department has to do in order to promote this? How will the advertising be targeted? Will there be any consultation with various groups to determine the most effective way to expand tourism? If so, which groups, and how will that consultation process occur? Has any money been dedicated to consultation? If so, how much? Of course, I'm talking about newly arrived Albertans who are seeking citizenship.

Page 286 of the business plan notes that the province will be "working collaboratively with all levels of government and industry stakeholders to increase awareness of the economic significance of tourism." Can the minister offer further information on this? I guess it would be almost like a mandate. How much money will be spent on this initiative? Have any consultations already been done? Will certain spending on tourism be held off until studies are done as to how best to go about this and whether or not the investment, in quotes, in raising the awareness of investment in tourism will be useful?

I very much appreciate the consultation that is going to happen with municipalities and recreational groups in terms of the areas around the province. As I pointed out, we have the 500 bits and pieces of parks and protected areas, and to date we've only had 45 management plans, so anything we do to involve people in ownership and enjoyment and sort of direction of their local park areas is very important.

The Travel Alberta corporation will be receiving \$56.6 million in funding for 2009-10. Because it's a new organization, we obviously don't have any comparison to previous years. Page 406 of the estimates provides a breakdown for the costs of the corporation: \$11.3 million, as noted on page 406 of the estimates, will be spent on in-Alberta regional marketing. Where will this funding be spent? Which locations? Are there any specific regions which have been noted as needing additional dollars or advertisement? Being a southern Albertan, I've been up to Lesser Slave Lake and, you know, enjoyed that experience, but I'm not sure how many people in southern Alberta are aware of those northern experiences that you had with your family last summer. What will be the return for these investments? Have any studies been done to determine where best to target the money and the areas that we should be targeting in our advertisements?

9:00

Will any of these funds be going to the Stay, travel in Alberta campaign? If so, can you give me an idea? Further, what studies, if any, have been done on the effectiveness of the Stay campaign? I personally think it's a great idea, but if we had some research background providing justification, that would be even better. What were the results of any studies? If there are any which have been done, can they be provided by the minister? In other words, share that good news, what I'm assuming is a good-news story, with us.

As noted on page 406 of the estimates, \$7.6 million will be spent on tourism destination regions. Which regions will this money be spent on? Will any specific tourist attractions be targeted with this funding? One of the things that we could be doing is all the novelties that we have: giant Easter eggs, large gophers, see the hoodoos, the dinosaurs. I mean, in some cases we overdo the Disney part of it, but in other cases that's what appeals to tourists. What specific initiatives will the funding be used for? Who will be in control of sign-off for the use of these funds? Will it be the Travel Alberta corporation or those in charge of local tourist destinations? You know my concern of local autonomy potentially lost in a provincial, supposedly arm's-length tourist organization.

On page 406 of the estimates \$28.2 million will be spent on

international marketing by the corporation. This is a significant amount of money. Where will the money be spent? Which countries are we trying to attract? Is there a breakdown available which can be provided by the minister? Have studies been done as to where we're going to get the best return? Obviously, you know, we get a terrific number of tourists from Japan because Alberta and Hokkaido are very similar in terms of their geography. We are getting more tourism . . . [Mr. Chase's speaking time expired]

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chase.

I'll go to the minister for a 10-minute response to those queries.

Mrs. Ady: Well, thank you very much. I think there are really three main points that I heard in the last line of questioning that I'd like to answer.

Relative to the unintended consequences on the camp reservation system, there's no question that people will try to, you know, find some unique ways to use this reservation system. I just want to assure you that we're going to be continuing to review this campground reservation system to look for those trends and ways that we can manage that issue. First and foremost, we're aware that people could do some interesting things, and we will be looking very seriously at that.

What do you need before you go? Great idea. Something that you can do with this site is that before they can ever get to their campground, you can give them a whole lot of information. Before they can even pay for it and actually get out the door, you can give them a whole lot of information, so I think we should do that in really fun, clever ways. It's a great idea and something that we could easily incorporate into our online reservation system that I think would be very valuable in helping them prepare. I know that when I camp in Alberta, I bring everything from swimsuits to my parka because every day can be different. That's the one thing that is the challenge to camping in Alberta: you've got it all. You've got it all weather-wise.

Safety monitoring. I know that you mentioned the riverways and the boating safety thing and even the commercial rafting. I can only tell you that that is under the Department of Sustainable Resource Development. That is not something that we have done in parks, but we are happy to mention it to our colleague. I know that we sold our WaveRunner just because our boys were getting a little wild with it, so I understand that comment completely. But that is SRD's role and department, so I'm loath to answer their questions as well.

As far as Travel Alberta, you asked a whole series of questions. I just want to remind you that I did table in the House this year the Travel Alberta business plan. They are a corporation now, so they give us a large amount of detail about what they are specifically doing and where they're targeting and where they're targeting funds, so I would refer the hon. member to this particular document. I would like to reassure him one more time that we are not forgetting about different destinations. I think that we do a really good job both in-house and out of house working with partners.

The one thing I've noticed in tourism since I've been in it is that a lot of people really do believe that they're an expert in tourism and really do believe that they know what the marketing angle should be for the province and that if we would just support with a certain amount of dollars this project, then all sorts of people are going to come to the province. I have learned in my time as the tourism minister that there is some pretty complex and sophisticated science around some of this stuff that we'll never understand just because we were once tourists ourselves. The marketing experts that we hire in Travel Alberta actually have a really great sense of what works and

what doesn't work. They know that some things are just like spreading fairy dust across the world, and they have no meaning. So they're very targeted in where they go.

We're looking now at new, emerging markets. I know the corporation is looking at those right now. Like, I would look at Japan and say: what a great customer. They've been a good customer for so long, but in some ways Japan is waning as a customer right now. They're starting to travel to other places, sometimes closer to home. Really, our truly great market opportunities are Korea and China, so we're putting some focus in those areas. Direct flights would help us, and approved traveller destination status in China would be a helpful thing. We think that those are the emerging markets, so we're spending some time and some energy on those. We still promote this province in Japan; we'll never give up. They're great customers, and they have a long memory of us. But they're not growing, and those other markets are growing.

Another one that we're looking at very anxiously right now is Mexico. It's just amazing to me that we flee to Mexico in the winter, and they flee here for the opposite experience.

I'd just like to conclude. I don't know how much more time I have left today to just say this and share with this group. There are two things that I love about my ministry. I love promoting a province that I think is one of the most beautiful places in the world, and that's not just the mountains. That's the prairies. That's the lakeland areas. That's the high desert. We have some of the most diverse and beautiful landscape you can find anywhere in the world. I love Athabasca. I was supposed to mention Drumheller and the Rosebud Theatre. Everybody has a favourite place in the province. It's a no-sweat thing for me to promote this province.

The other thing is that spending a lot of your working life in beautiful parks just really does – I always feel guilty that I'm working because I get to be in the parks a lot. I enjoyed being in the lakeland district last summer and going up to Slave Lake and seeing a beach that was as beautiful as any that I'd seen in Hawaii in some ways. This summer I will be going south – I just want to announce that now – down into the badlands. I'm going to go all the way down to Cypress, and I'm going to be spending some time in the hon. chair's riding this summer looking around at the different experiences. I think you're right: we have to make sure that we are really promoting all angles of this province because there's more than just the mountains to offer in this province. It's wide, it's diverse, it's beautiful, and this is a great ministry to be able to shepherd at this time.

I think we're doing the right things. I think we're heading in the right directions. I think that the work that we're doing and where we're placing money will have good effect, and I'm really actually very proud of these estimates. I think that we're going to see a good year in spite of the times that we live in, at least the best that we can possibly expect, because of the good work that's being done in the province.

That's all I have to say. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

At this point we'll move to Mr. Bhardwaj. You have up to 10 minutes on your own or 20 minutes in exchange with the minister.

9:10

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the minister and her staff. If it's okay with you, I would like to go back and forth with the minister.

Three key areas I would like to talk about. One of them is the fitness level of Alberta youth, the second one I would like to talk

about is sports and recreation performance measures, and, time permitting, I would like to ask you some questions regarding tourism and what some of the things are that we are doing to facilitate some of the tourists, encourage them and help them with visas and so on, to visit us here in Alberta. Those are the three areas I would like to talk about.

To start off with, my background being, you know, math and physical education, mind you always at high school – I can't date myself back to '71 but started around 1989 – I've noticed a considerable difference in the fitness levels of youth even from '91 to '08, when I got elected and didn't teach much of physical education. Now, looking at your business plan, Minister, on page 284 it talks about and compares our youth and their fitness level to the national levels and their averages. We're falling far below the national averages. So I'm going to ask you, basically, three questions in that area.

Question one would be: how do fitness levels of Alberta youth compare to the rest of the country? That would be my first question because I do know we are way below. At the grade 10 level, when you get some students coming out of grade 9, they can't even do 10 minutes of fitness, let alone, you know, when we have them for half a day, particularly in summer school. It's just impossible. By the time they're done, they either get in shape or they're dead.

The second question I'm going to ask you is: what is your ministry doing specifically to encourage some of these youth to be more active? I know you talked about the organized sports and that they don't have to be involved in the organized sports to be active. What are the things as a ministry and some of the initiatives you are taking to encourage some of these youth to be active and actively participate not just in organized sports but in some of the other recreational activities?

Lastly on that topic, I'm going to ask you: how do Albertans fare compared to the national averages?

With that, I'm going to turn it over to you, and you can answer those questions.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, hon. member. As far as fitness levels in Alberta youth go, 1 in 4 children in Alberta is considered overweight now, 1 in 4. Studies have shown that a large majority of overweight children and adolescents become, of course, overweight adults. Although most of Alberta's children fall short of the Canadian recommended physical activity guidelines, which is an average of 12,135 steps per day versus the recommended 16,500 steps – yeah, we measure steps, believe it or not – on average the Alberta children remain slightly more active than other Canadian children. So we're doing a bit better, but I wouldn't say significantly better. Regular physical activity is still considered good for good health, but that's about where we're falling right now.

Again, I'll repeat that: 1 in 4 is considered overweight, and we're averaging 12,135 steps versus the recommended 16,500 roughly, what they're using as the comparator. So do we have some work to do here? Absolutely. I think I've indicated that several times today.

If you were to look at the performance measures, we are using the age group of 12 to 19, moderately active, at this point in time. We'll be looking to try and improve this level from 69.7 per cent in 2007 to 71 per cent. I again want to indicate that before you can increase, you have to stop a decrease. I do not think that we've been successful across this province in doing that yet.

What are we doing out there right now that I think is helping? One is that we're acknowledging that we have the problem. I think that if you can't start there, you're never going to get there. I still remember being in the Bronx a few years ago for the first time with

my son in medical school and being so shocked to see no child ever that wasn't overweight. I don't mean to make a generalization, but that's just the way it was. When I move around the province of Alberta, I don't see what I saw there, but there's no question that when I go to visit schools, I don't remember those levels of obesity even, you know, when I was raising my sons through the school system.

I think that we're seeing it head in wrong directions right now, but as I said before, we are trying to co-ordinate several ministries and their organizations and the volunteer groups to encourage all to come to the table with their ideas on what we can add to this recreation policy. I'm working with the federal, provincial, and territorial governments and colleagues to find a way to reverse the trend. We'll be meeting again this summer interprovincially at the Canada Summer Games as ministers across the country to talk about things that we think we can collaborate on across the country to see if we can help to change this trend. Mostly I think we have to work on aligning our provincial policies with a provincial recreation strategy. I think that's got to be our fundamental thing.

I think we can build on existing programs. I had the opportunity this year to drop in on several of the organizations that are going out there and training children in schools on how they can help their individual schools be more active. They're done in very exciting, fun ways, too, the different activity programs that are out there. Is it enough? I think not quite, but it's a good start.

You have to begin with a performance measure, too, so that has been developed for the 2009-2010 business plan, related, again, to the percentage of 12- to 19-year-old Albertans who are active during their leisure time as measured by Stats Canada. We will use that as a performance measure to see where we get. Then I'm hoping this year to bring forward the beginning of a recreation policy with all ideas in. Like I said, I challenged the group just Saturday night to bring me their ideas. I think I've got almost six appointments in my office with different research organizations from the University of Alberta, University of Calgary, and different sports and recreation groups coming in to see me to participate as we develop the recreation policy.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much.

Mrs. Ady: Oh, and you asked me about visas and tourism.

Mr. Bhardwaj: No. That'll come later.

That's good information, you know, when we're talking about the performance measures. Looking at the performance measures, when you were looking at the 12- to 19-year-old young adults, I guess, I think it's quite easy to get them engaged and get them involved at the younger age, but I think once they get to be about 13 or 14 years old, that's when it really becomes a challenge. I think you can motivate them. You can take them out yourself. But I think at 14 and onwards you start to get a bit of push back. You talked about your four boys and that you always kept them in various sports. The same with me, having two boys and a girl. I always kept them involved.

I think if you're looking at it from a child point of view and from the adult point of view, if you look at your business plan on page 290, you'll notice that just above where it's talking about the percentage of 12- to 19-year-olds, where your starting target is 71 per cent, participation in sports and recreational activities for adults is higher, at 81 per cent. Why are those the targets as they're being indicated? Do you think the adults are pushing themselves harder than the kids are? Maybe we just need to tie them along with us.

9:20

Mrs. Ady: Well, I'm a real big believer in a family that plays together, stays together. I think that that could be part of our education program with parents, to teach them to be active with their children because they are role models for their kids. I think it also goes back to things that we've said earlier. I didn't grow up playing computer games. They just weren't available when I was growing up, so I became active in other ways. Fortunately for me most of my boys didn't grow up during the computer era. They kind of, you know, were just ahead of it. But my youngest is very much trapped in that particular dilemma. I watch him, and he's not as active as his older brothers. He's much more content playing a game than he is actually out being physically active.

I think we're going to have to manage and help parents understand the need to manage screen time in kids' lives. I think one of the ways that we can do that is that we can use the beautiful resources we have in this province to get more kids outside. I put my boys in Scouting programs. There were some of them that really did not want to do winter camping and did not want to go on those hikes, but I packed those packs and shoved them out the door, and in there somewhere they learned to love nature, love to be out in it, learned to be resilient, learned to know they could do hard things. They just learned, I think, a sense of activeness that's very different than some kids may be learning today.

I was asked earlier about opportunities for kids in the parks and whether we have some not-for-profit groups that allow kids to get discounted rates to get into the parks and those types of things. I would say that probably there's a limited amount of that opportunity in this province today. Part of our recreation policy, I think, needs to be tied with outdoor opportunities. We don't always need to be in a gym in an organized activity. There are lots of ways to be active. I'll remind you that the number one activities in this province are, first, walking; two, golf; and three, camping. So if we kind of focus – not everyone can afford golf, but walking and camping to me are obvious fits for helping fitness levels and recreation and should be looked at in our recreation policies.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Well, thank you very much, Minister. I do agree. One of the trends which is also relatively inexpensive is that if you look around Edmonton, you see yoga studios popping up all over the place.

Mr. Rodney: Do you go?

Mr. Bhardwaj: Absolutely I do. First thing in the morning. You could actually do it, you know, out in the open field. You don't really need to be spending any kind of money.

Anyway, I'm just going to shift gears here to tourism. As a province, you know, you're doing a good marketing campaign in terms of promotion of tourism, and when you're looking at some of the other markets outside of Europe, particularly Asian markets – India, Pakistan – they're sort of emerging superpowers and emerging economies, yet lots of disposable income. But in order for somebody to travel to Canada, you know, it's a huge challenge. They want to come here, they want to spend the money, but the challenge is getting the immigration.

This question here, we've been going back and forth with Canadian immigration and various other ministers. I'm just kind of wondering, in terms of your promotion in that part of the world, if we're doing anything about it. Secondly, are we doing anything to facilitate the visa process? I know that one of the biggest fears Canadian immigration have is that they're not going to go back, but

I sort of argue that if somebody is spending hundreds and thousands of dollars, obviously they have enough business back in their homeland which they will go back to. Is there anything as a government that your ministry is doing to encourage that kind of thing, working with other ministries?

Mrs. Ady: Yeah. Whenever we look at overseas markets in tourism, obviously one of the things that we look at is, first of all: is there air access? Any time we can get direct air access back to this province, it's huge for us in tourism. So first and foremost, if we can get those kinds of things happening, those work very well for us.

Another thing that we do look at is the visa, or the ability to come, because to make that too onerous becomes a barrier to tourism. I would agree with the hon. member that there are areas in the world that have a much more difficult time getting those visas to come. Part of that is a federal responsibility. Let's be clear: it is a federal responsibility. One of the things that I've been doing is working with the Canadian Tourism Commission and with Minister Diane Ablonczy because she does have direct access to this issue. We are working together as provinces with the federal government right now because all provinces have this issue.

You're right. India is another really emerging tourism market for us right now. You cannot look at that body of population – I know in China 5 per cent of 1.4 billion people today have the money to travel. I don't know what that number would be in India, but those are huge, huge tourism dollars. So we'll continue to work with the federal government because if we don't get these problems solved, if we continue to make this onerous, then we will not get the visitors.

Part of what they need to do is strengthen some rules around if somebody comes, you know, as a visitor and then refuses to leave. We have not had the rules in place to send them back. Consequently, that's changed the whole picture. So the federal government needs to get their work done around this issue in order for us to be assured of being able to open those markets in the future. I just go back to that all the world is looking at those markets right now because they know those are the emerging markets for tourism in particular. So I agree with the hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Okay. Thank you very much, Minister. You were talking, you know, in terms of promoting your ministry and opening up, perhaps, some tourism offices. What are some of the countries specifically that your ministry is thinking about marketing to, for one, and opening up, perhaps, some of the offices in?

Mrs. Ady: Well, I mean, I think I've mentioned some of them already. A real new market for us, obviously, is Mexico right now because the direct flight is there, and again they don't need a special visa to get here, so it makes it easier. As far as where we're working, we work in our traditional markets of England and Germany. Those have all been very strong markets for a long time although they are suffering a bit because of the economy right now.

I had mentioned before Korea and China. I was able to go to China this year and spend some time doing something called the Perfect Family. That's where – I don't know if you remember – they took the ice-skating couple that took third in the Winter Olympics, and they named them as the perfect family. Now, fortunately, this couple got married. They were travelling across Canada doing everything that you could do in a province and then shipping that tape back home to China. We didn't have approved-destination status yet, so you couldn't direct advertise into China. But what we could do through this couple was show all the wonderful experiences that you could have in Canada and show that tape

and that footage. Because they're a very famous couple there, we could show that footage across China, and then the Chinese could go to travel bureaus or travel offices and say: I want to go to Canada. It's another way of marketing without, you know, being a direct marketer. So China is very much an emerging market.

We are looking at India as well. I don't think we're putting a lot of dollars there yet because we've got to solve some of the visa issues there as well. But those are where we're looking at. We did a few niche markets last year. Orange County, California, ended up being a niche market, believe it or not. Sometimes we go in in very targeted ways. New York City continues to be a very good market for us and so in the past has been the state of Texas.

Those are kind of where we're focusing our tourism dollars. Some people say, "Well, go here or go there," but we know that, in all honesty, we don't get great returns in some areas, so we can put a lot of money there and not get a good return. Those are the areas that I know that the Travel Alberta corporation is looking at quite intently right now.

9:30

Mr. Bhardwaj: Okay. Thank you very much. You know, I agree with the minister that immigration is a federal responsibility. Yes, it is hard if somebody – I was asked that question: what if somebody comes for a visit and does not go back? What would you do other than to report that person? Then all of a sudden the federal government will have to, you know, invest in resources and track that person down. But I think, in all honesty, that there are perhaps more people who are honest than dishonest. I don't disagree with you that there are people here who will come and sort of take off.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bhardwaj.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you.

The Chair: Well, members, our time is pretty much used up this evening. I want to express my appreciation to everyone for your participation here this evening. First of all, to the public who may be tuned into the broadcast, we appreciate your interest in this subject area. I also want to thank the members at the table as well as the support staff, who have made sure this evening ran very smoothly, and also particularly the minister and her staff for the extensive exchange that you've engaged in this evening but, I think, more broadly for the promotion of the people places in this province that you engage in on behalf of all of us in the province of Alberta to not only fellow Albertans but around the world. I think the comments heard here this evening really do acknowledge broad support for the kind of work that you're doing, and we appreciate that.

It really is a flagship for Alberta. I think it's part of our identity, the whole matter of recreation, parks, and tourism and the pleasure that it brings all of us, so I thank you for your work. I do look forward to hosting you down in southern Alberta at Dinosaur provincial park or Kinbrook Island park this summer. I realize that you have taken the opportunity to see many of the places in this province that all Albertans enjoy, so that's good.

I would like to remind the members of the committee that we are scheduled to meet again on Monday, April 27, 2009, to consider the estimates of the Department of Municipal Affairs.

Pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(2)(a), with the time now run out, the meeting is now adjourned. Thank you very much for your participation this evening.

[The committee adjourned at 9:32 p.m.]

