

**Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Third Reading**

**Bill 201
Smoke-free Places Act**

Mr. Rodney: Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise today and introduce third reading of Bill 201, the Smoke-free Places Act. As sponsor of the bill it should come as no surprise that I would have preferred an unamended version in third reading, but I want to point out that I'm very appreciative of the work that was done to find a wording that could be agreed upon by the majority. I'd therefore like to thank the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster for bringing forward the amendments during Committee of the Whole debate. I would also like to thank all of the other hon. members who participated in the debate.

I believe Bill 201 in its current form supports and reflects AADAC's Alberta tobacco reduction strategy as well as government policy. This is an important aspect of any private member's legislation. Bill 201 also respects the authority of municipalities to make what they think are the best decisions for their constituents and for their local business community.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to acknowledge the remarkable debate which has taken place on this issue over the past couple of months both in the Legislature and throughout the province of Alberta. Upon reviewing *Hansard*, I was encouraged by the level of debate which took place. I also recall the number of members who in their maiden speeches and replies to the throne speech called for a session full of lively and productive debate, and I'm pleased that this bill provided an avenue for exactly that. I believe that this has at least in part inspired the majority of Albertans to take again an active interest in the proceedings of this House, and that can only be a very good thing.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to acknowledge all of the Albertans who have called, e-mailed, and written letters to me over the last number of weeks. It's evident that this is an issue Albertans are concerned about and have an opinion on.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the support of my colleagues. It's unlikely that Bill 201 could have made it to third reading without the work that the members in this House have done to establish a compromise that is acceptable to the majority of Albertans both urban and rural.

Mr. Speaker, there are individuals who feel that this legislation is not going far enough, and I will not disagree with that opinion. However, the fact of the matter is that not every Albertan is ready for an extensive, province-wide ban on smoking quite yet. What may be most important to this process, however, is the increased awareness of the impact of second-hand smoke, the increased support for the wellness agenda, and the increased personal interest in a healthy lifestyle by Albertans. I believe that the amended bill does at least two things extremely well. It protects children and respects choice, and these are both extremely important ideals.

I do not believe that the Smoke-free Places Act as Bill 201 was in its original form would have received majority support anywhere in Alberta 20 years ago. However, an increase in information and education concerning the hazards of smoking and the health effects of second-hand smoke has resulted in smoke-free places being established throughout the province in the last while, and I find that extremely encouraging. Cities such as Edmonton and Calgary have reached a point where they along with their constituents are ready for an extensive prohibition on smoking in public places and workplaces, as are the municipalities of Banff, Airdrie, St. Albert, and others.

However, there are other jurisdictions throughout Alberta that

have held municipal plebiscites on this issue which did not pass. So it is clear that these areas are not yet ready for an extensive prohibition on smoking in public places and workplaces. I am confident, however, that in a short amount of time these jurisdictions will be ready. In the meantime, Mr. Speaker, it is not the duty of this Legislature to force all Albertans to prohibit smoking. Instead, it is our duty as stewards to provide the tools necessary to promote a healthier province.

At this point I would like to remind our hon. members that although this legislation is in a sense a smoking ban, it is not about forcing smokers to quit smoking. Rather, its focus and purpose is about protecting the health and rights of nonsmokers who are involuntarily exposed to second-hand smoke. Unfortunately, this basic objective of Bill 201 may have gotten lost during debate from time to time. It's crucial that we keep this objective of protecting nonsmokers from second-hand smoke as the priority of this legislation. Mr. Speaker, Bill 201 is not about protecting the health of smokers or taking away the rights of smokers. It is about protecting the health of nonsmokers and protecting the rights of nonsmokers.

There is no doubt that smokers put a strain on Alberta's health care system, as do alcoholics, and obesity is also considered a strain on the health care system. In fact, many consider that it is quickly becoming a major epidemic. However, the difference between these afflictions and those of second-hand smoke is that drinking alcohol and problems with weight are more often than not addictions and health problems that are isolated to the individual.

Exposure to second-hand smoke is different from these diseases in that it does not just affect the individual who chooses to smoke and put their own health at risk; it also affects individuals in the area around them, especially children. It's important that we make this distinction between affecting the rights of smokers and protecting the health of Albertans, especially children, who are involuntarily exposed to second-hand smoke.

I'm confident that Bill 201 in its current form establishes an acceptable provincial baseline throughout Alberta concerning smoking in public places and workplaces. It provides the bottom rung of the ladder, which municipalities, the province, and our country will hopefully continue to climb one rung at a time soon.

While this legislation has been altered from the original intent, more importantly, it is a step in the right direction. One of the most important lessons I've learned in life is that overcoming obstacles is best achieved through the utilization of careful, well-thought-out strategies. I've also learned that achievement is gained in increments with both individual responsibility and team effort that allow for proper consideration for the consequences of others.

I'm confident that our municipal partners will continue to institute smoking bylaws which reflect what is best for their constituents and their areas of business. I am confident that Alberta will one day soon see a province-wide smoking ban equal to the original intent of Bill 201. Until that time I know that we will continue to move forward in small steps, and I hope that all members will agree that prohibiting smoking in establishments which permit minors is an appropriate step at this time. While we protect the health of Alberta's children and respect the choice of Alberta's municipalities and businesses, we continue to move toward the ultimate goal of a healthier, safer Alberta for all Albertans.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I would again like to thank my colleagues for their support and consideration. It's been an incredible experience, and I'm honoured and humbled to have been a small part of it. I look forward to this last stage of debate of Bill 201, the Smoke-free Places Act, and I encourage all members to support this legislation as a sign of our mutual progress towards a healthier Alberta and a step in the right direction.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.