

Camping in Provincial Parks and Recreation Areas

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past May long weekend thousands of Albertans enjoyed our beautiful public lands and provincial parks for a weekend of camping and other recreational activities. Unfortunately, there are always a small number of people who abuse this privilege and damage the environment, leave their garbage behind, and break other rules and laws. My first question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Can the minister please explain what his ministry has done to combat this problem?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The May long weekend has indeed become an annual event where Albertans go out and enjoy themselves in our forests and parks, and we think that's a good thing. We want them to enjoy, get out and be in our forests and parks, but what we don't want them to do is to destroy them. I'm happy to report that thanks to the joint task force this year – the combined efforts of SRD, Parks, Solicitor General, and the RCMP – for the third year in a row we reduced the type of destruction and lawlessness that has occurred over the past few years. Part of it is education, a respect-the-land theme. SRD focuses on that with good co-operation, though, from Solicitor General and the RCMP and Parks on enforcement. I'll leave that to the other ministers.

Mr. Rodney: My second question is to the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation. There were temporary liquor bans in place in certain provincial campgrounds over the long weekend. I'm wondering what the minister can tell us about the bans and their effectiveness in cutting down problems in parks this past May long weekend.

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is right. We had about 225,000 campers in the parks system over the May long weekend, and I'm happy to say that of that number of people in the parks only about 1 per cent presented a problem. Generally speaking, it was related to alcohol in banned areas and noise levels. We did have to evict about 275 campers, but, again, a very, very small percentage when you look at how many people enjoyed the parks. We think our enforcement efforts are working, and we're pleased that we're able to offer a very safe and wonderful place for Albertans to recreate.

Mr. Rodney: My final supplemental is for our Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. I'm hoping that the minister can be specific and include numbers in informing Albertans and this House exactly what his department did this past long weekend to enforce our laws and keep Albertans as safe as possible.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the number of people travelling during the long weekend, we knew that we needed to provide increased enforcement to improve highway safety. Almost half of the fatalities that occur in Alberta occur between the May and September long weekends. As part of our agreement with SRD and other agencies, 90 members of our Alberta Sheriff Highway Patrol together with the RCMP provided extra enforcement to not only enforce the Traffic Safety Act but also other offences. On the past weekend our sheriffs laid over 4,000 charges and took 21 suspected impaired drivers off the road. We will continue with this program of education and awareness of motorists concerning highway safety to ensure that our highways remain safe.