

Oral Question Period

Assistance for Alberta Athletes

Mr. Rodney: Mr. Speaker, while it's true that Alberta athletes have enjoyed tremendous success on the international stage, including the Olympics, Paralympics, and Commonwealth Games recently, many of these athletes continue to struggle to make ends meet even as they're representing our country and dedicating themselves to be their absolute best. My question is to the Minister of Community Development. I know that these athletes currently receive some funding from Sport Canada through the athletes' assistance program, but what is this province doing to support its athletes?

Mr. Ducharme: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member alluded to, these athletes who compete for Canada are supported through Sport Canada, an organization of the federal government. I'm unable to speak to their funding levels as it's not in the jurisdiction of this House. However, with Sport Canada responsible for funding national athletes, it allows this government to focus on two priorities. One, in supporting the development of provincial-level athletes, last fiscal year this government provided \$12.8 million in funding to provincial sport associations and to sponsor the Alberta Games and Team Alberta at interprovincial and national events. Two, we are working with partners to provide exceptional training and competition facilities in our province for Canada's national athletes.

Mr. Rodney: Mr. Speaker, I only have one supplemental question for the same minister. There's some good news; I'm hoping there's a little more. Over the years I've spoken with a lot of athletes at all levels across the province, and there's a common theme about this stretching of resources. My final question is: can they look forward to increased support when it comes to sport development programs and renewal of facilities that need renewal?

Mr. Ducharme: Mr. Speaker, we recently addressed these issues. The Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks & Wildlife Foundation will be receiving an additional \$2.8 million to their annual operating budget this year, bringing that to \$15.6 million for sport development. A portion of the increase will go to developing athletes by strengthening programs which have already produced many talented competitors who went on to become international stars.

Our second priority is to strengthen and renew our existing facilities, many of which are legacy projects from the 1988 Olympics in Calgary. These facilities are 20 years old now, Mr. Speaker, and need to be renewed to continue to be effective. The government is doing its part. We committed over \$23 million this past year for the renewal of the Canmore Nordic Centre in time to host the first World Cup event in 16 years. The centre is also home to the national cross-country ski and biathlon team. We also provided \$600,000 to upgrade the ski jump at Canada Olympic Park, ensuring that athletes can continue to train in Canada, and we will continue to work with our partners to see what else can be done.