

Saskatchewan Second Reading Debates Athletics Commission Act

Bill No. 108 — The Athletics Commission Act

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Parks, Culture and Sport.

Hon. Mr. Doherty: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today I rise to speak about The Athletics Commission Act, 2013, which is a new Act respecting the Athletics Commission, professional boxing, mixed martial arts contests and exhibitions.

Until recently, Saskatchewan was one of only three provinces that had not taken the necessary steps to sanction professional combative sports events, including mixed martial arts and boxing. Without a mechanism that sanctions and oversees professional combative sports events in Saskatchewan, promoters may stage unsanctioned events and hold them without appropriate standards or safety precautions that help protect participants and spectators.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation is not about promoting mixed martial arts as a sport, but about regulating it. By regulating this sport, we help eliminate illegal fights putting athletes and, in some cases, children, Mr. Speaker, at risk.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, amendments were made recently to the Criminal Code which had implications for Saskatchewan. Bill S-209 was passed in June 2013. This bill amends section 83 of the Criminal Code, legalizing the sport of mixed martial arts across Canada under the authority of a provincial athletics commission or similar established body.

Mr. Speaker, the changes to the Criminal Code provided our province with clarity and an ideal opportunity to put legislation in place to regulate the legitimate side of the sport yet shut down the unsanctioned events that put participants at risk for serious injury.

Mr. Speaker, for these reasons, this government has committed to establishing a provincial athletics commission. The commission will hold the authority to sanction professional boxing and mixed martial arts events. This commission will be designed to ensure a consistent standard of qualifications, rules,

regulations, and safety protocols for all participants and officials across the province. Furthermore, the commission will have the authority to provide protocols for licence applications, event permits, as well as the terms and conditions of a particular event.

It also ensures that competitors participate in appropriate pre-fight medical testing such as blood tests, concussion screening, and eye exams. It ensures that qualified medical staff and event officials are hired, that promoters and competitors have the proper licenses, and that promoters have suitable liability insurance.

The commission will also be responsible for tracking competitors' fighting histories and ensuring safety protocols are enforced. The proposed commission will consist of five individuals, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Parks, Culture and Sport will appoint an athletics commissioner who is to be an employee of the ministry. The minister will also establish an advisory committee of three subject matter experts. The Lieutenant Governor in Council will appoint an adjudicator who will be responsible to consider appeals for administrative penalties, licences, and event permits.

My ministry has been working with stakeholders to ensure the legislation and regulations have proper protocols and clauses in place to operate an effective and successful commission.

Ministry officials have been working closely with the Ministry of Justice and stakeholders who are closely impacted by this issue. Other provincial jurisdictions and commissions have also been consulted with and primarily include individuals from British Columbia, Ontario, and Manitoba.

Five of the seven provinces that regulate professional MMA [mixed martial arts] events have provincial commissions. From speaking with provinces across Canada, we know provincial commissions are proving to be the most effective governance model. According to provincial jurisdictions, establishing a provincial athletics commission provides a number of benefits including consistency in rules, regulations, and processes across the province; enhanced ability to hold large-scale events; potential overall cost efficiencies; and effective use of a limited group of individuals properly qualified and knowledgeable about the sector.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to provide an overview of what the legislation will outline. The legislation frames areas such as responsibilities and powers of the commissioner, licensing and event permits, security deposit, inspections and investigations, administrative penalties, appeals, and the regulations necessary for this Act. Within the legislation, the Minister of Parks, Culture and Sport will also have the authority to apply for a compliance order to prevent individuals from proceeding with an event contrary to the Act and regulations. We want to ensure illegal activity is prevented before occurring.

Over the past 15 years, mixed martial arts has been one of the fastest growing professional sports across Canada and North America, due mostly to the Ultimate Fighting Championship, UFC. Growth in this sport and support for the provincial Athletics Commission in Saskatchewan has been demonstrated in recent months. The city of Saskatoon and the city mayors' caucus formally requested that government establish a provincial commission. From their perspective, a commission contributes to part of the province's growth plan through increasing economic opportunities.

With the growth in the sport there has also been an increase of unsanctioned events in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. I am concerned that without some type of mechanism that sanctions and oversees such events, these unsanctioned events may continue.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to move second reading of The Athletics Commission Act, 2013. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — The minister has moved second reading of Bill No. 108, The Athletics Commission Act. Is the Assembly ready for the question? I recognize the member for Athabasca.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased on behalf of the official opposition to stand today to give our initial comments on Bill 108. And I certainly want to point out to the folks that are listening, one of the values of the Assembly here is to be able to share information, via the official legislative channel here of course, and to the media and through the government press process to advise people what is being planned with the bill that's before the Assembly today, Bill 108, The Athletics Commission Act.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the minister very briefly pointed out the process that he wishes to undertake to establish an athletics commission, in the sense of trying to make sure that one of the processes of putting a commission in place is to ensure that we have a way to monitor some of the mixed martial arts fights that may have occurred or will occur in Saskatchewan. And I think the notion, Mr. Speaker, is obviously on the unsanctioned fights. This is something that I think the people of Saskatchewan certainly don't want to see occur. And of course when you have unsanctioned fights, there is a lot of illegal activities around those fights and we obviously, from the perspective of the opposition, want to make sure that we don't allow that to continue.

Now, Mr. Speaker, there's no question as you look through the bill that the official opposition certainly want to know who the government consulted on this particular bill. I think myself being a fight fan, I watch a lot of the UFC fights. In fact Saturday night I attended a function where I seen our Canadian champ retain his title.

And, Mr. Speaker, it's a great opportunity for folks back home to fundraise and to see the sport at its best in terms of being legal, to see the sport at its best in terms of making sure that there's no injury, to make sure that they're properly monitored, and that there is some generation of wealth for the participants and of course for the promoters and for those that are hosting the events. So there's no question that from our perspective we look at boxing as a sport. We look at the mixed martial arts venue, as we see on the UFC front, as a sport. And these sporting events certainly have the ability to draw some great crowds and some great groups and organizations.

Now, Mr. Speaker, it really . . . pointing out that this move that we're doing today, Bill 108, is actually a move that comes after the House of Commons motion, in which they passed a bill in June legalizing contact sports such as MMA, mixed martial arts. And certainly I think having a provincial athletics commission put in place to monitor that burgeoning opportunity in the sport field I think is probably pretty sound because you obviously want to make sure that that is done properly.

Mr. Speaker, we talk about boxing being only allowed under the old prizefighting law, leaving other combat sports such as

karate, tae kwon do, and again mixed martial arts in legal limbo. And what you want to do is you want to refine and define those particular sports to make sure that it's properly monitored and that there is a good process to oversee these particular prizefighting events.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I understand, just basically from the discussions that we had and some of the comments made by the government, that the proposed commission will consist of five people: an athletics commissioner, an advisory committee comprised of three subject matter experts, and an adjudicator. So obviously I'm assuming that there will be people from the karate and tae kwon do and mixed martial arts background that would be part of the three people that are on this new committee.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I think what's also important is that they do the medical exams, the pre-fight and the post-fight, because obviously the mixed martial arts contests are very, very, are very tough on the performers or the participants. And we all see the fights on television, and there's a lot of violence of course. But the amazing thing, Mr. Speaker, is you watch that particular UFC fight — and again I admit that I watch a number of them — but you notice before the fight and after the fight there is a lot of respect between the participants.

And I think that we notice that as a fan or somebody just simply observing the fight, that they know that these participants view this as a sport and that they don't view this in a negative way, that clearly that there are some that have really bad attitudes after a fight, of course, but the vast majority of the participants in mixed martial arts competition, you will notice that they abide by the rules. They abide by the process in terms of exams. They abide by the decisions. Sometimes they don't like the choices that the judges make, but by and large after the fight is over they generally have a lot of respect for each other. They shake hands and they often hug each other because the bottom line is that they look at this as not a violent act against each other but more or less a combative sport event that they are trying to excel at and be good at.

And there's no question, Mr. Speaker, when you look at the incredible fundraising opportunity that many organizations

uld participate on or can participate with when it comes to the mixed martial arts opportunity, that this could be certainly a lot of opportunity for different groups in different organizations.

[15:30]

Obviously I think the government has the same train of thought and certainly the same manner in which we hope that the Athletics Commission would operate, in the sense that health and safety must be a top priority.

Obviously we see in hockey lately there's been a lot of discussion around injuries to hockey players. And obviously concussion is one of the biggest things that people are worried about. And we see some great athletes over the years become injured. We obviously . . . It's big business, and I think business wants to ensure that their athletes are not being hurt needlessly. And they need to have this kind of oversight.

So I think safety and health of the participants ought to be a top priority, and also protection in the long run. Because obviously you look at some of the NHL [National Hockey League] players, as I give you the example of hockey, professional hockey's very fast. It's very hard-hitting. It's very competitive and there's a huge, huge fan base. But obviously as you play hockey and you begin to get subjected to some of the hits and some of the pressures and some of the challenges of being a professional hockey player, over time your body does pay a price.

So I think a lot of the players recognize that and that's why you have the NHL Players' Association to look after their members. And you would assume and hope that a commission of this sort that looks after the mixed martial arts fight contests, that they also look after their participants as well. I think that goes without saying that it's something that's really, really important when it comes to this particular art itself.

So, Mr. Speaker, there's a lot of different things that we need to be aware of when it comes to this particular bill. We want to see more of the information and the details around what the legislation involves. Obviously the minister gave a very brief synopsis of what they would like to do, and we want to see the detail. There's a lot of detail that we need to look at. And some of the things that we want to talk about, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is things like who they consulted along the way.

I know that other provinces have different or individual municipalities that oversee a local athletics commission. Was this taken into consideration? Obviously being a five-member commission, you'd obviously want to consult with the different municipal structures throughout our province to see what kind of advice that they may offer. And was SUMA [Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association] and was SARM [Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities] advised? Did they participate in the discussion of this particular event? Obviously we talk a bit about the potential for injury or worse, brain damage, as we unveil this sport and as more and more venues provide this fundraising opportunity, that you obviously have to make sure that the combatants are properly insured and that there is careful consideration for their current health. Now, Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned earlier at the outset, the brain injuries in sport is something that we ought to be careful. I'm sure that the minister's aware of that particular concern that we all have. There's a number of people out there in the province that can attest to some of the challenges when it comes to concussions in different sports, whether it'd be hockey or football or now MMA. So it is certainly something that we ought to be concerned with.

And again I know that people could legally protect themselves by having the participants or the combatants sign a waiver and full well know what they're getting into. But, Mr. Speaker, I think it's incumbent upon the higher supporters of this particular sport, and that being government, that they put the proper protection in place to ensure that if a fighter gets hurt, or worse, gets brain injury, then that there is provisions to ensure that they have a decent income after if they get injured, and that there's provisions that would care for them following their career if there is some MMA event in the province of Saskatchewan.

Now a lot of people would certainly point out that if you look at the brain injury itself, the particular field of brain injury, it's really not understood to the extent that it should be understood. We have a lot of experts indicating that over time. And you look at some of the football players. You look at some of the hockey players, MMA players, or participants rather. These are some of the folks that would certainly have a lot of experience

in the industry, would know exactly what are the latest trends in brain injury.

So we want to make sure that if we embark on this particular trial run of MMA in Saskatchewan, that safety and certainly health concerns are a huge part of our effort to try and legalize this particular sporting event, and to make sure that the participants and the public know that these participants are insured and cared for, and that there are stringent rules to ensure that they aren't hurt any more than they have to be hurt.

Now, Mr. Speaker, there's a number of questions we have.

Obviously when people want to fundraise . . . And we see this happen on a number of occasions where you have alcohol served at some of these events. Is that part of the overall process when we look through this particular bill, Bill 108?

What kind of venues would be allowed? What organizations can host some of these venues? How would you consider the class of fighters? How many events can a five-person Athletics Commission really sanction and monitor? What's the number of staff dedicated to this? These are some of the specific information that we would want as an opposition, because it's important that we get that information.

Because as we mentioned at the outset, there are hundreds of groups and organizations throughout the province that might look at this particular bill as an opportunity for them to bring a MMA fight to their community and to determine . . . You know, it may be a great fundraiser, but how would they participate? Who would get priorities on some of the MMA fights? And these are some of the things that we need to find out, Mr. Speaker, as we begin the discussion of talking about this particular bill.

And I know that there'll be a lot of organizations, whether it be municipal government, whether it be First Nations, whether it be community organizations, whether it be your local minor hockey association — these are some of the players that will probably apply for some of these MMA events. So how would that process work for them? How would they undertake an application process? How would they be approved? And where would they get the fighters from? Who would sanction these fighters? What's the process to insure the fighters? What's the process to making sure that there's medical clearance? Like all

this information, Mr. Speaker, is important that we know beforehand so absolutely everybody in the province is aware of how this MMA bill could possibly work to their benefit when it comes to fundraising in the province of Saskatchewan.

Now, Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned at the outset, Saskatchewan is a vast province. There are events throughout the province that people do on a daily basis to try and fundraise for their various needs. And, Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, it could be an event in Black Lake. It could be an event in Swift Current. And there's a wide difference in terms of the people. There's a wide difference in terms of the venues and of course the extent of the venues in each of these communities. So there's a lot of questions that we have as to how you would prioritize these different venues based on the application process.

So one would assume that basically that Bill 108 is to talk about setting up this MMA process, that they have an athletics commission that could approve these events. They have their strict guidelines, as the minister indicated. But we want to know as to, how would they prioritize these fights? Where do you normally get some of the participants? Is there a provision for local combatants to be able to participate in some of these events, following a rigid process of course? So these are some of the things that we look at in terms of the initial blush or our take on this particular bill, and to point out to the folks that it is indeed a great opportunity I think for people that might want to use this event as a fundraiser.

Saskatchewan I think has led the province . . . or the country in years as a province. We have led the country in years in the effort to be able to fundraise locally. The number of volunteers we have in our communities, that is something that Saskatchewan could be proud of. And we're going to see a lot of that activity in this next week because obviously the Roughriders won, and we're going to see Saskatchewan really burst at the seams in terms of having visitors. We're all very, very excited about that, and we're all of course cheering for the Roughriders. In fact we're wearing Roughrider ties to make sure that, to give them as much support as we can.

And it's really, really important, as I mentioned at the outset, when you have a sport that connects with the people . . . And the Roughriders are one of the organizations in our province

that has a really strong base of support. They've got a lot of fans all over the place, and some of them are rabid fans, including the member from Athabasca. And I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, when the Roughriders lose, I'm kind of cranky for a week because when I know they ought to have won that game and they lose it, then the whole week I'm kind of cranky till their next win. And I think I share that same sentiment with a lot of folks out there, that when you identify with a sport and with a team like the Roughriders, then you know that it's a classy organization. They're a successful organization. They have built up their organization over the years, and they represent our province.

So obviously there's a great deal of opportunity with this Bill 108 when you look at MMA, to make sure that we have the same values, the same fan base, the same followers, and the same expectations of professional conduct that we have of the Roughriders be afforded to many other venues such as MMA. That's a good example that I would say is important for folks out there to watch is, from our perspective, we look at MMA as a sport. And if you want to really set up MMA as a professional sport, then you need not look further than the Saskatchewan Roughriders as a team that shows you a number of values that the province of Saskatchewan love and like, and that of course being professional, being vigilant, being successful on the field and off the field and also, Mr. Speaker, showing their fans a lot of support over the years.

And this weekend I think is going to be a great event and a great celebration of the Roughriders, something that any aspiring group and organization such as MMA wants to emulate. Then the benefits are there because the Saskatchewan people will certainly embrace your sport and your industry much like they have the Saskatchewan Roughriders.

So I think there's a lot riding on this particular bill, Mr. Speaker. We see the economic value, there's no question, that local fundraising perspective. Recognizing it as a sport, taking care of the potential health threats and safety, making sure there's no unsanctioned fights — all the value points as you look down this particular bill. There's a lot of good value to what is going on.

And we would just basically point out that it's important that perhaps they should have afforded the same opportunity to the arts, the same opportunity to the film and employment tax credit, Mr. Speaker, because much of that industry was shut down by this government. And they bring along MMA in the hopes of trying to match the lost revenues of the film employment tax credit.

And, Mr. Speaker, imagine for a moment if the province not only had MMA, but also had the film employment tax credit to continue bolstering our local economies and supporting the working families out there that are impacted by these industries. Then that's our point from our perspective as the opposition, is that you should not have done that to the employment tax credit when it comes to the film industry. You should have kept that because it was working. You should have, if you wanted to refine it and make it better, you should have kept it and not simply thrown it away. And now has the same minister bringing in the MMA bill.

And, Mr. Speaker, they should have kept both of those particular perspectives as a revenue generating opportunity for the province to strengthen our economy, and that's exactly what we mean on this side of the Assembly when we talk about smart growth. The film employment tax credit was a great opportunity for a province and to continue building that industry in this province, and the Saskatchewan Party destroyed that industry. And they're bringing MMA in, Mr. Speaker. We hope that it pays off in dividends in terms of the economy. It's makes sense. We'll continue keeping that.

And I can tell you if the MMA, through this particular bill, is successful in Saskatchewan, something that the NDP will not do is throw it out when we assume government, whether that be in a couple of years, Mr. Speaker. And from our perspective, if it works, the groups that are organizing it want that continued support, then I think from our perspective we wouldn't throw it out because it wasn't our idea. We would support it because it's good for the province. And I think that's a message that we want to continually press on to the people of Saskatchewan as per our new leader's directives. If it makes sense for the people of Saskatchewan, then we will support that initiative.

However it's incumbent upon us to make sure we get all the detail to make sure exactly what is happening with this particular bill or any other bill, that we do two things: that we watch very carefully what's in the bill to make sure we invite the public because that's our job as MLAs [Member of the Legislative Assembly] in opposition; and the second thing is we invite people in the province to participate in this particular bill, that if you have a concern or a question that you want the opposition to raise or you want to participate by giving us some letters or some feedback on this bill, then rest assured that that information is valued. And we would encourage you to participate in that process as well.

So on that note, Mr. Speaker, we have a lot more to say on this particular bill, but we have my colleagues who will be looking to the bill as we continue to seek more advice and more input on this bill from the different players that may be involved in our province. So again on that note, I move that we adjourn debate on Bill No. 108.

[15:45]

The Deputy Speaker: — The member from Athabasca has moved to adjourn debate on Bill No. 108, The Athletics Commission Act. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion? Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: — Carried.

[The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Doherty that Bill No. 108 — The Athletics Commission Act be now read a second time.]

The Speaker: — I recognize the Opposition House Leader.

Mr. McCall: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Glad to take my place today to rise and join the debate on Bill No. 108, The Athletics Commission Act. This is a really interesting piece

of legislation, Mr. Speaker, and it's timely. It's topical. It's dealing with something that is fairly contentious in our society, but on the face of this, Mr. Speaker, I'm pretty interested in the approach that the government has taken and I'm pretty interested to see how this . . . certain assumptions we make about provisions in the legislation actually working out on the ground or not.

First off I'd say, to sort of own up to some of my own sort of biases in this, Mr. Speaker. The commission that has been brought forward, the individuals that have taken place or will take place on the commission, I think that the government, again as our leader says, when the government is doing something well, we'll certainly be there to say so. Where there's something going wrong, we'll certainly be there to call that out as well. But I am quite impressed with some of the individuals they've put on the commission, Mr. Speaker.

And first and foremost, I'm talking about AJ Scales. And AJ is — as I was relating to one of the Pages, Mr. Speaker — is one tough dude and certainly a bit of a pioneer when it comes to mixed martial arts in Saskatchewan. His home training studio is in Regina Elphinstone-Centre, I'm proud to say, Mr. Speaker, and I've known AJ as a person. We have friends in common. Certain of my friends trained with AJ Scales over the years.

And anyway in AJ I find someone who's quite impressive, not just as an athlete but as an entrepreneur and as a community-minded person trying to build his support, his passion, out into the community. And so again I'll say it clear for the record: I was generally impressed with the calibre of individuals brought forward for the commission, Mr. Speaker, but particularly impressed with the nomination of AJ Scales to that body.

[16:30]

Again we've got the former mayor of Regina, Pat Fiocco, who's been named to the commission. And I should also explain here, Mr. Speaker, that of the boxing fans in my life, my father for many, many years has been a pretty enthusiastic boxing fan.

And certainly . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . The member from Walsh Acres is looking to get into the debate and maybe he will, but if he's going to heckle, I guess if he could state it a little more clearly, Mr. Speaker, and then maybe I could make it out. If he could, you know, state it clear and then not just recede into the giggling right away, that would be helpful.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of growing up in the McCall family, there is nothing my father delighted in more than getting the gloves on my brother and I and having us go at it. And I think it's an

ongoing disappointment in his life that none of the kids went into boxing in a fairly serious way, but we've tried to make up for it in other ways, Mr. Speaker. But certainly in the McCall household we weren't strangers to the notion of going out to the fights or going to see a card, and that is certainly where I first gained knowledge of an individual named Pat Fiacco.

And certainly having worked with Pat Fiacco as one elected official to another and knowing something of his passion for the sport of boxing, and not just his passion and his own individual accomplishment in that regard, but his globally recognized credentials when it comes to refereeing and serving as a boxing official, and obviously his considerable talents as somebody that's done a lot for the sport of boxing . . . And not just the training side of things, you know, the Ken Goff classic and the various sort of cards that he's been party to either as a fighter or as an organizer over the years. This is an individual that again is well placed on this commission, and we're glad to see him there.

And you know, again the general calibre of the individuals for the commission was impressive across the piece, but in particular from . . . given the role that municipalities have played in the question of how to properly regulate and introduce regulations around mixed martial arts, carrying on from the

previous sort of regime as regarded regulations in boxing, both amateur and professional, in the province, Mr. Speaker.

And given the role that the municipalities have played in this question, I think that the city mayors' caucus and SUMA and the way that they have come forward and said, you know, this is something that we hear a lot about from our constituents; this is something that we want to work in partnership with the province on, and again to see the mayor of Humboldt, Mayor Eaton, is to see His Worship on this commission, again Mayor Eaton being an individual who's brought . . . does a tremendous job in the kind of work that he has endeavoured on behalf of his constituents and the kind of statement that makes about what I think Mayor Eaton will bring to the panel, bring to the commission again is encouraging.

And to get back around to where I'd started, Mr. Speaker, again when we see encouraging things happen, it's not for us to . . . We're not johnny-one-note or one-trick pony on this side of the House. If we see something good, we're going to call it up.

But again the other individuals on the commission, that they're coming forward. But I just wanted to mention those three individuals, Mr. Speaker, as people that I know something about, know something about both as individuals and what

they've done in their professional lives, and looking forward to see how the commission rolls out with them putting their shoulders to the wheel. And again I guess closing off this sort of segment of my comments, Mr. Speaker, to say thank you to them for offering up their passion and their expertise to make sure that as good a job can be done on this commission as is possible. So we're glad to see that, Mr. Speaker.

But again the question of mixed martial arts generally and the proper regulation thereof is a fairly contentious question, Mr. Speaker, and there are necessary and absolutely urgent questions to be answered around the way that the whole question of head trauma is taken care of in all kinds of different professional sports.

In the last number of years, Mr. Speaker, we've seen the question of head trauma coming to the fore in professional hockey, in professional football, and certainly in boxing, Mr. Speaker. Head trauma has long, long been part of the question about whether or not this is something that people should be doing and how to properly regulate it.

We'll be watching very closely to see how those questions are addressed in the legislation, looking for reassurance in the committee stage I'm sure, Mr. Speaker. But I guess what I'd

like to do at this stage is to go through the second reading speech of the minister and pull out some of the things there that I think bear greater reflection and examination. And then, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to turn to the legislation itself and draw some of that into question or into greater examination.

In the minister's second reading speech he referenced the fact that, "Saskatchewan was one of only three provinces that had not taken the necessary steps to sanction professional combative sports events, including mixed martial arts and boxing." And states further:

Without a mechanism that sanctions and oversees professional combative sports events in Saskatchewan, promoters may stage unsanctioned events and hold them without appropriate standards or safety precautions that help protect participants and spectators.

Again, Mr. Speaker, the minister rightfully pointed to the fact that this is a question that has been on the plate for regulators in Saskatchewan for quite some time, the way that this has already been brought forward and the request for action has proceeded from municipalities and from the big city mayors' caucus here in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. One aspect of that in terms of the appropriate jurisdictions and how different venues relate

into this question, Mr. Speaker, something that the minister's second reading speech was silent on I believe, but it begs the question, is the question of how this relates to events that might take place on-reserve or on First Nations. It'll be interesting to see how that is anticipated or dealt with in the legislation or not, whether any consultation has taken place with the FSIN [Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations] or individual tribal councils or First Nations.

And again how that question of proper regulation in the province of Saskatchewan, if we're going to be taking a border-to-border approach on this, Mr. Speaker, what anticipation the Government of Saskatchewan is making as regards the holding of mixed martial arts or combative sports events on-reserve. We'll be interested to see what sort of anticipation or consideration of that has been made.

Carrying on in the second reading speech, Mr. Speaker, the minister stated that:

. . . this legislation is not about promoting mixed martial arts as a sport, but about regulating it. By regulating this sport, we help eliminate illegal fights putting athletes and, in some cases, children, Mr. Speaker, at risk.

Again, Mr. Speaker, there's one of the fundamental questions

that government gets to wrestle with from time to time, is the question of regulation. And if you're going to be regulating something, if you're going to be regulating a societal trend, something of which there's a greater incidence taking place, you know, which is obviously the case of the rise of mixed martial arts, the way that this has grown in popularity and in participation, how you properly regulate that and whether or not you're putting in place the proper oversight, proper procedures, proper protocols or if you're going to continue to turn a blind eye or turn away from solidly addressing these questions, there comes a time when a government has to step forward and make those decisions. And again given that we are one of three provincial jurisdictions that have not taken the steps to sanction these type of events, obviously that question was coming due.

And how the regulation either impacts or makes for a safer engagement on this front, Mr. Speaker, and then in terms of, you know, the enforcement regime attached to it, we'll see how this plays out in the days ahead. But as I'd referenced earlier, I have some encouragement from the fact of the individuals who have been appointed to this commission to get this work off the ground.

Again referring to the minister's second reading speech:

. . . amendments were made recently to the Criminal Code which had implications for Saskatchewan. Bill S-209 was passed in June 2013. This bill amends section 83 of the Criminal Code, legalizing the sport of mixed martial arts across Canada under the authority of a provincial athletics commission or similar established body.

Carrying on in the quote:

. . . the changes to the Criminal Code provided our province with clarity and an ideal opportunity to put legislation in place to regulate the legitimate side of the sport yet shut down the unsanctioned events that put participants at risk of serious injury.

Again, Mr. Speaker, that question of regulation and events that are ongoing, we would be interested to hear from the minister, and I imagine at committee stage, what the incidence of unsanctioned events has been like, what the experience to date in Saskatchewan has been, and what kind of number or frequency of events that would meet the criteria outlined there.

Again as relates to the federal legislation, Mr. Speaker, what kind of interaction the province had, what kind of representation the province made to advance that Saskatchewan interest as that federal law was coming down the line, and what

sort of lessons can be learned from other jurisdictions. All those questions bear answers, Mr. Speaker.

So the . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . I hear my friend across the way, the member from Cypress Hills, hitting an oldie but a goody. You know, you pause to take a drink of water and the heckle goes, I've never seen a windmill run on water before. But I certainly have heard that heckle before, Mr. Speaker, and I never tire of it nor the member for Cypress Hills' delivery thereof.

But returning to my comments, Mr. Speaker. The government, quote again from the minister's second reading speech:

. . . this government has committed to establishing a provincial athletics commission. The commission will hold the authority to sanction professional boxing and mixed martial arts events. This commission will be designed to ensure a consistent standard of qualifications, rules, regulations, and safety protocols for all participants and officials across the province. Furthermore, the commission will have the authority to provide protocols for licence applications, event permits, as well as the terms and conditions of a particular event.

And again, Mr. Speaker, in terms of in the case of AJ Scales or in the case of Pat Fiacco, two individuals that have substantial experience both from the athletic participant side of the equation, but also from the promoter, regulator, officiating standpoint, those are two individuals well placed to provide expert advice as this commission does its work and gets established and gets rolling. And again good to see Mayor Eaton in the mix there, bringing that municipal perspective and the perspective of somebody that is making government work for people.

[16:45]

Again returning to the minister's second reading speech:

It also ensures that competitors participate in appropriate pre-fight medical testing such as blood tests, concussion screening, and eye exams. It ensures that qualified medical staff and event officials are hired, that promoters and competitors have the proper licences, and that promoters have suitable liability insurance.

Again, Mr. Speaker, all of these conditions — if you're going to, if we're going to as a society proceed with mixed martial arts and the interest is there, Mr. Speaker, if we're going to

appropriately regulate that activity as a society — all of these activities as outlined in the minister's second reading speech in the portion I just referenced are critical, again in terms of the pre-fight medical testing, in terms of ensuring qualified medical staff and event officials being hired, and that promoters and competitors have the proper licences and that promoters have suitable liability insurance.

Again, Mr. Speaker, this is, this is a dangerous thing. This is a dangerous sport and I don't think it is alarmist or stretches the point in any way, shape, or form to say that this is an activity from which serious, life-altering damage can arise. And again if you've got . . . If you don't have the regulation and you don't have the proper protocol in place, then what is by its very nature a risky endeavour, Mr. Speaker, becomes that much more so. And the chance for lasting damage, physically the last, you know, possible fatality, again it's not stretching the point that if you look through the history of boxing alone, Mr. Speaker, it is not . . . The question of death in the ring is not a farfetched one or alarmist. It's a real and present danger within the sport and if you're not taking the appropriate steps, it becomes an evermore urgent, evermore risky proposition for the individuals to be participating in the activity.

And again, Mr. Speaker, if these are trained athletes, they're

individuals that have put a fair amount of work and passion and training into getting into the octagon, Mr. Speaker, or into the boxing ring, but again it's a . . . If we're going to make this as safe and as best regulated as is humanly possible, Mr. Speaker, these are all rightful questions to be entertained and acted upon by the commission.

Carrying on in the second reading speech, Mr. Speaker, the minister states:

The commission will also be responsible for tracking competitors' fighting histories and ensuring safety protocols are enforced. The proposed commission will consist of five individuals, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Parks, Culture and Sport will appoint an athletics commissioner who is to be an employee of the ministry. The minister will also establish an advisory committee of three subject matter experts. The Lieutenant Governor in Council will appoint an adjudicator who will be responsible to consider appeals for administrative penalties, licences, and event permits.

Again, Mr. Speaker, how this is operationalized, how this is executed are questions of vital importance, and whether or not it's properly resourced to do the job, the fairly significant job

that is set out before it in Bill No. 108, that will tell the tale of the effectiveness of this commission. And again we'll be looking to see how that rolls out. In terms of the commission itself, in terms of the commissioner, in terms of the subject matter, advisory committee experts, and in terms of the adjudicator, we'll be looking to see that these things are properly functioning, and how that carries forward.

Again in the second reading speech, Mr. Speaker:

My ministry has been working with stakeholders to ensure the legislation and regulations have proper protocols and clauses in place to operate an effective and successful commission. Ministry officials have been working closely with the Ministry of Justice and stakeholders who are closely impacted by this issue. Other provincial jurisdictions and commissions have also been consulted with and primarily include individuals from British Columbia, Ontario, and Manitoba.

Again, Mr. Speaker, we're always glad to see when the example and the experience of other jurisdictions is being considered and benefited from by the provincial government. It's not that Saskatchewan's got any shortage of innovation or good public policy, Mr. Speaker, but it's always I think the test of a

province to be looking without, making sure that we're not just nurturing these approaches within the province, but making sure that we're learning and benefiting from the experiences in other jurisdictions as regards to best practices, as regards to the experience of the rollout of something like the Athletics Commission contained herein. So again that is something that I look to in this legislation. We'll look to gain greater detail as to the specific sort of impact of the experience in those jurisdictions and how it is then translated into the legislation that is here before us today.

Carrying on in the speech, Mr. Speaker:

Five of the seven provinces that regulate . . . MMA [mixed martial arts] events have provincial commissions. From speaking with provinces across Canada, we know provincial commissions are proving to be the most effective governance model. According to provincial jurisdictions, establishing a provincial athletics commission provides a number of benefits including consistency in rules, regulations, and processes across the province; enhanced ability to hold large-scale events; potential overall cost efficiencies; and effective use of a limited group of individuals properly qualified and knowledgeable about the sector.

Again, Mr. Speaker, this would seem to, on the face of it, make good sense, you know, making sure you've got that right mix between mission and mandates, making sure that the task that presents itself is being properly addressed. And again in terms of having a province-wide commission that addresses these questions, I think there's some good sense to that.

I'd be interested to know more about the other jurisdictions — the minority of jurisdictions, I would acknowledge — wherein this has been a municipally led, in the main question, Mr. Speaker, in terms of the benefits that are there to be observed. You know, what holds the provincial approach over the municipal approach? And in a province of 1.1 million people, Mr. Speaker, again logically there'd be some benefits that accrue between striking that balance between, you know, having that province-wide jurisdiction, that province-wide scope in mandate, as well as addressing the activities as they present across the province.

But it would be good to hear specifically what was considered about the other jurisdictions, again in the minority, but the other jurisdictions where they have a different approach. What are the benefits of that and what ultimately led to deciding against adopting that approach and instead going with the provincial

focus to this legislation? But the questions that are anticipated by the commission in terms of the benefit of consistency in rules, regulations, and processes across the province, very important for . . . You know, we've got no end of geography, Mr. Speaker. But if you get into sort of jurisdiction chopping and one municipality versus the other, it's the way that that could roll out.

We think that that's a potential gain to be had in province-wide jurisdiction being asserted and regulated in this body. But with that again comes a number of questions as regards to jurisdiction and what anticipation has been made again in a province like Saskatchewan. What sort of anticipation and consultation has been made with the First Nations people in this province and the way that First Nations jurisdiction on-reserve ties into this broader question? That needs an answer, Mr. Speaker.

But again the question of enhanced ability to hold large-scale events in terms of, you know . . . That potential is out there, the interest is there, and having a commission equal to that task again would seem to, on the face of it, make some sense. The potential overall cost efficiencies again seem a reasonable proposition. And the effective use of a limited group of individuals properly qualified and knowledgeable about the sector, again, if prologue is indeed . . . if past is indeed prologue

that they've got individuals like AJ Scales and Pat Fiacco on the commission, that should bode well for again effective use of a limited group of individuals properly qualified and knowledgeable about the sector because Pat Fiacco and AJ Scales certainly are that, knowledgeable and properly qualified about the sector.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to provide an overview from the . . .
Again quoting from the minister's second reading speech:

I also want to provide an overview of what the legislation will outline. The legislation frames areas such as responsibilities and powers of the commissioner, licensing and event permits, security deposits, inspections and investigations, administrative penalties, appeals, and the regulations necessary for this Act. Within the legislation, the Minister of Parks, Culture and Sport will also have the authority to apply for a compliance order to prevent individuals from proceeding with an event contrary to the Act and regulations. We want to ensure illegal activity is prevented before occurring.

Again, Mr. Speaker, it would be interesting to have a broader or a more precise understanding of what the experience is in other jurisdictions, whether or not the mechanism of a compliance

order administered by the minister, if that is indeed the experience in other jurisdictions. What is the frequency with which such compliance orders are issued and what other sort of penalties attach to that compliance order, Mr. Speaker? All this will be interesting to contemplate in the days and weeks ahead.

And it also begs the question, quite frankly, of resources. And last I checked I'm not sure that the Ministry of — I want to call it culture and youth — but the Minister of Parks, Culture and Sport, what resources the minister has to deploy in terms of the enforcement side of this regime remains to be seen, Mr. Speaker. And are there individuals currently within the ministry that can perform this function? Is there a need for new hirings?

All of these things again, Mr. Speaker, it's fine to write it down in legislation, but legislation begs enforcement. And to enforce the provisions of this legislation of course will require resources and how the question of resources has been addressed by this government. What's being anticipated by the minister for this new task being set out in front of this commission remains to be seen. And we await the greater detail on that from the minister.

The close of the minister's remarks . . . There's a lot of interest on the other side, Mr. Speaker, and they keep calling for more, so we'll come back after supper and oblige them.

The Speaker: — It now being after the hour of 5 o'clock, the House stands recessed to 7 p.m.

[The Assembly recessed from 17:00 until 19:00.]

Bill No. 108

[The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Doherty that Bill No. 108 — The Athletics Commission Act be now read a second time.]

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Riversdale.

Ms. Chartier: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am pleased to enter the discussion today on Bill No. 108, The Athletics Commission Act. This is a brand new bill, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And what it aims to do is it will sanction and oversee professional combative sports events in Saskatchewan, which would include professional boxing, mixed martial art contests, and exhibitions.

According to the minister, the minister has pointed out that Saskatchewan was only one of three jurisdictions that had not

yet regulated mixed or combative sports, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So there seemed to be a bit of a vacuum here where some of the . . . particularly the mixed martial arts or any of the combative sports could be held in such an environment that wouldn't be safe for competitors.

But interestingly enough, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I actually have recently taken up kick-boxing myself for no other reason than exercise and stress relief, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I have to say, despite my coach's suggestion that I put faces on the pads that I . . .

[Interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: — It appears that a number of members would like to enter into the debate on this bill, but currently the member from Saskatoon Riversdale has the floor, and I would recognize her. And I'm sure other members wishing to enter into the debate will have ample opportunity. I recognize the member from Saskatoon Riversdale.

Ms. Chartier: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As I was saying, I've recently taken up kick-boxing for no other reason than stress relief and some good exercise — stress relief in part from this place. And it's interesting. My coach has offered the

opportunity to put pictures on my kick-boxing . . . on the pads.

But I've declined actually, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the members opposite will be happy to know.

Anyway I've never been a big spectator of combative sports, but you know, having recently taken it up, I quite enjoy it. And I maybe have found my true calling. It's too bad I'm a little older than most athletes who embark upon this career, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

But with all seriousness, this is an absolutely imperative bill. I know that there were many people in Saskatoon in particular advocating for regulation of mixed martial arts and combative sports, and many other jurisdictions. It had been regulated at the municipal level but, as we see, seven other jurisdictions had taken this very . . . to the next level and have regulated it provincially. The one thing that the minister also pointed out is that in June of 2013 the federal government passed Bill S-209, amending section 83 of the Criminal Code, which legalized the sport of mixed martial arts across Canada under the authority of provincial athletics commissions or similar established bodies. So it would be very important to in fact have that athletics commission in place.

I just want to go on and talk a little bit more about the

minister's remarks here. So the minister says, the reason for this commission:

. . . this government has committed to establishing a provincial athletics commission [which] . . . will hold the authority to sanction professional boxing and mixed martial arts events. This commission will be designed to ensure a consistent standard of qualifications, rules, regulations, and safety protocols for all participants and officials across the province. [And he goes on to say] . . . the commission will have the authority to provide protocols for licence applications, event permits, as well as the terms and conditions of a particular event.

This I think it's an important piece, mister deputy, Mr. Speaker, now:

It also ensures that competitors participate in appropriate pre-fight medical testing such as blood tests, concussion screening, and eye exams. It ensures that qualified medical staff and event officials are hired, that promoters and competitors have the proper licences, and that promoters have suitable liability insurance.

And as well I think this is another very important piece: "The

commission will also be responsible for tracking competitors' fighting histories and ensuring safety protocols are enforced."

[16:15]

I know one of the things that has been in the news in very recent years which applies to anybody who is in contact sports — whether you're a football player, a hockey player, you're involved in mixed martial arts or boxing — has been concussions. And as most of us or all of us know, concussions are in fact a brain injury, and all concussions are very serious. We've had recent stories, or stories in the last few years about, in particular, two NHL [National Hockey League] enforcers who had turned out to have, well had multiple concussions over their careers and ended up having a condition called chronic traumatic encephalopathy. I'm probably not saying that accurately, Mr. Speaker, but both Reggie Fleming and Bob Probert, following study of their brains, both proved to have CTE [chronic traumatic encephalopathy].

And what exactly is CTE? It's a progressive degenerative disease which can only be definitively diagnosed after death, which was the case of Reggie Fleming and Bob Probert. And it used to be called dementia pugilistica, or DP, as it was initially found in those with a history of boxing. And as I've said, it's

most commonly found in athletes in football, hockey, professional wrestling and other contact sports, and also in soldiers who have been exposed to a blast or concussive injury, in both cases resulting in degeneration of the brain tissue and an accumulation of a particular protein. And that's how they diagnose CTE.

And what comes from CTE are symptoms of dementia such as memory loss, aggression, confusion, and depression, which generally appear years or many decades after the series of brain traumas. And Reggie Fleming and Bob Probert both died very tragically. Actually in leading up until — I read a news article actually — reading up until about May 2004, in the previous four months, three NHL enforcers had died tragically. Derek Boogaard had been found to have taken painkillers and alcohol. And Rick Rypien was assumed to, I believe he committed suicide, and Wade Belak. And they were all thought possibly at that point to have CTE. So it's very serious.

To ensure that any athletes who are participating in these sports are monitored pre-fight and through their careers, I think, is absolutely imperative, Mr. Speaker. We want to ensure that professional athletes are well taken care of — it is a very physical sport — and to ensure that we aren't just preventing concussions but long-term brain injuries that lead to depression

and in many cases they've led to suicide, Mr. Speaker.

I think one of the things to prevent unsanctioned fights and dealing with unsanctioned fights, ensuring that there's a regulatory system in place is more than a good idea. And I know that that's what many people in Saskatoon who are lobbying city council to regulate fights in Saskatoon were looking for.

So on the face of it, this legislation looks to be very good. It's a very good idea to put in place an athletics commission, especially in light of the fact that the federal government has legalized the sport of mixed martial arts and that we were laggards. And we were one of only three provinces who had yet to put in place legislation.

I think the one thing that our job now as opposition will be to do is to make sure that this legislation addresses what the minister says it's going to do. Are there any pieces that are missing, or anything in it that might be problematic? So over the next several months, we'll be reaching out to stakeholders to ask them if this meets the needs of regulating combative sports in Saskatchewan.

I know the minister had said in his remarks he had looked to some other provinces to see what they were doing. I think that

will be our goal too, to compare and contrast our legislation with what other jurisdictions are doing, again to see if there are any gaps or any gaps in what and how we're regulating and if we can improve upon that. So that's what we'll be doing over the next few months, Mr. Speaker.

But on the face of it, Bill No. 108, the Athletics Commission is by and large an important piece of legislation to ensure that athletes are protected and that events are sanctioned and run properly. So I know that I will have colleagues who will be weighing in on Bill 108 at some point in the future, but with that I would like to move to adjourn debate.

The Speaker: — The member has moved adjournment of debate on Bill No. 108, The Athletics Commission Act. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried.

Bill No. 108

[The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Doherty that Bill No. 108 — The

Athletics Commission Act be now read a second time.]

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Regina Rosemont.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to enter discussion as it relates to Bill No. 108, The Athletics Commission Act, an Act respecting the Athletics Commission, professional boxing, mixed martial arts contests, and exhibitions.

This Act itself works to enable the establishment of an athletics commission that would have the authority to sanction professional combative sports including mixed martial arts.

This move follows a move by the House of Commons that passed a bill in June legalizing contact sports such as mixed martial arts. And this legislation makes professional boxing and MMA [mixed martial arts] contests legal in Canada when they have the authorization of a provincial athletics commission.

I understand that this piece of legislation and the establishment of an athletics commission was called for by the cities' mayors caucus across the province, also called for by the city of Saskatoon. Certainly we recognize that this would leave opportunities for many other sports to sanction and compete, to hold events, bring together athletes, bring together

communities, and bring together new sporting opportunities.

In looking at the bill, it seems that the proposed commission would consist of five people: an athletics commissioner — I believe appointed by that government; we'll seek some further clarification from that government at committee on that front — and an advisory committee comprised of three subject matter experts, as well as an adjudicator. So we'll be seeking further information, more detail on that front.

The commission itself I understand would be in charge of approving events for the province and would also be responsible for making sure that competitors participate in appropriate pre- and post-fight medical exams, and that would include, as I understand, eye tests and blood tests. And certainly all of those provisions provide a level of confidence, from my perspective, that these are actions that are there to provide some concern and some regard for the safety of the participants as well.

And certainly that's what the goal of legislation like this should be aimed towards: making sure that the proper protections are in place; the organization of events; the athletes themselves, making sure that they are in appropriate and fair condition to compete; making sure that there's safety provisions in place;

making sure there's proper regulation and oversight of an event; making sure that the appropriate medical staff that should be retained for an event are retained for an event; and making sure that the consequences of the event are contemplated and that risks are mitigated.

Certainly we understand that other provinces have made changes on these fronts. They've started or have developed sporting commissions on these fronts for this very purpose. Certainly we want to ensure what . . . and learn from government what they've learned from other jurisdictions. We know that some municipalities have taken this space. We'd call on government to provide what experiences they've learned from those municipalities.

Of course we want to ensure that it's understood who's liable from a financial perspective for potential injury or damage as a result of one of these events. And what role does the province have in that? Who's financially liable and responsible? So those are questions for government and just questions that we'll certainly flesh out around the safety of the participants, of the athletes.

Certainly we recognize that many of these sports, whether it's karate or whether it's different martial arts or different mixed martial arts, we need to make sure that we're providing

opportunities for our athletes but also protecting them. And I believe that's the purpose of this legislation. Certainly it will or could provide good opportunities for communities and for athletes to come together. It could provide some economic opportunities within a region. But we do need to make sure that this is done in a way that's going to be safe and going to protect participants and really, as I say, contemplate all of the consequences.

Certainly worth this . . . The benefit of this legislation is that it would provide a body to be providing some of these considerations and then approval potentially of certain events or sanctioning of events. And that certainly could add a level of safety to these events where currently those events may be illegal, where they may be non-sanctioned, where they may be quite dangerous. So we certainly need to recognize the I guess evolving world of sport and making sure that we as a jurisdiction keep pace and that in doing so we're protecting those participants, those exceptional athletes across our province.

So as we move forward as the official opposition, we'll be consulting with all those impacted. We'll be seeking from government some detail on their plan. We'll be seeking a list of who's been consulted to date and the various consequences and

concerns that may have been shared to date. But on the whole we look forward to that discussion. I think there's a lot of promise in the opportunities of sanctioning these events and bringing a level of safety and protection to participants in doing so and creating good opportunities for those that want to come together in these sorts of events.

With that being said, Mr. Speaker, I don't have much else to say at this point in time as it relates to Bill No. 108, The Athletics Commission Act, and I'll adjourn debate.

The Speaker: — The member has moved adjournment of debate on Bill No. 108, The Athletics Commission Act. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried.

Bill No. 108

[The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Doherty that Bill No. 108 — The Athletics Commission Act be now read a second time.]

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Cumberland.

Mr. Vermette: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, to enter Bill 108,
The Athletics Commission Act.

It's interesting. We want to support different I guess activities and sports events in the province, and we know the federal government has made provisions now to open it up and has given the opportunity to the provinces to do that. And the government is introducing legislation that will bring I guess regulations, licensing, rules, and a commission, and I will talk about that a little bit.

But I guess I want to talk about . . . You know, it reminds of a young man back home who truly wants to . . . He graduated, he's working. He's a young man. He graduated a couple of years ago, a year ago. And he's thinking about doing some type of a trainer and he likes martial arts. And the different things, the different activities he really gets into, and he talks about it. And when you talk to this young man, he talks about, you know, his vision and what he would like to see to get young people involved for the idea. And he talks about it, and it's about discipline and he talks about what he sees.

And when you listen to him talk about the event . . . And as an athlete he talks about conditioning oneself to make sure that

you can handle the activity that he wants to engage in. And watching him talk about and present what he would like to see happen, this is something I know where he will think about it and say, hey maybe there's provisions to bring this up north, whether it's a promoter to bring it in, whether the commission.

So I just want to talk about this individual and his heart that he has and what he wants to do. And he wants to mentor or he wants to use it to take young people and make sure they understand. And I asked him about this, well you know, whether it's fighting . . . And I referred to it as fighting. And it was interesting to watch him, Mr. Speaker. He talked about, well no, it's teaching young people discipline, knowing how to handle the responsibility, you know, not using it in a bad way if you've got training. And we see that, whether it's judo, karate — different activities going on that athletes use for training.

You know, in La Ronge we know that we have that. But we don't see those individuals as students going out and causing grief. They're trained. They use discipline. And if you get that training and if you get an instructor, someone who's teaching you to make sure that you understand what it is you're doing and you respect the training that he provides for you . . . And we know that there are many instructors, many people who teach young people, whether it's karate, judo, tae kwon do.

There's many different ones that people are bringing in.

And you know, we'll talk about a little bit about the commission, but watching this young man talk about getting his own training program, his own, whether it be as an entrepreneur, a business, watching him develop a business plan and what he sees it doing, whether it's going to add . . . And he knows that he has to bring in more than just one area, so he has to make sure that there's opportunity. Maybe he's going to sell goods. So there's different opportunities, Mr. Speaker, for him to do, and he's going to move forward. So it's kind of encouraging to see a young person come forward, especially the timing of this, that the federal government made provisions and now provinces will too.

And I think the minister refers to I think there's three provinces, and I don't know if that includes ourselves, that currently do not have the regulations, the legislation that's needed to come up with either a commission or some form of a body that would look after sanctioning, regulating, ensuring that there's certain provisions that have to be met. And in here it talks about the commission, a body of five that would be a commission would be appointed to govern and to make sure licensing . . . making sure that the promoters make sure they have the licence but also that they are going through the insurance, the liability insurance

that the fighters and those that are competing, whether it be in an activity.

And they talk about a lot of different activities and whether . . .

They talk about also testing, making sure blood testing, making sure the insurance is there, having a medical for the individual.

But when they're in the ring and they're competing in their events and they're promoted and everything else, they're making sure that the trainers and the people that are assisting them in those events are trained properly and they're regulated to make sure that they're taking good care of the individuals that are competing in the competitions, whether, you know, it's martial arts or whatever, MMA [mixed martial arts], whatever they're going to do that they develop.

But at the end of the day, I think it's to make sure that the sport, you know, has that commission to ensure that safety is number one with the individuals competing. And we wish them well.

And if it develops, I think they're going to have to do some educating to make people understand what it is. I mean a lot people watch different fights and, you know, whether it's boxing here in the province, you know, we have that. But this is opening it up so that they can, a commission could sanction, you know, and give the licensing to promoters to promote certain activities. And it could open it up and this could be good

for the province, for the business people, hotels, for, you know, economics and our entrepreneurs. And this could be great. You know, we could sponsor or host certain activities, events.

So we're not, we're not opposed to this type of a, you know, commission. But making sure that the regulations and how that commission conducts itself I think is some . . . We will have some questions making sure that the public's well aware, making sure that people . . . it's safe, making sure that the provisions are in there, that the commission would follow, you know, the regulations. And making sure, enforcing the rules that, you know, are developed by legislation or powers that are granted to the commission to carry out, to make sure that those promoters, the licence, they've complied to the licence, the regulations.

And it's about safety. And I want to make it very clear. It's a sport. It's, you know, athletics. It's encouraged. People want to encourage that. It has a lot of potential. But we have to make sure, number one, safety of residents, safety of that type of a sport is clearly there. We want to, you know, we want to make sure that, you know, people are protected and that's important that the athletes have the protection so you can do what you can do.

And we know like some of the sports and we see some of the injuries that certain sports have with them. And we want to be clear, Mr. Speaker. We want to make sure safety is number one. So having said this, I know there'll be a lot of questions and on, whether it's my colleagues or it's in committee. And they'll be, you know, regulations or commission may ask what do they think; what are other provinces doing in Canada and maybe around the world to protect the athletes and to make sure the promoters, you know, are in compliance with the licence, with regulations, regulating the industry.

This is some opportunity, and it is. It's opening it up. But we think, you know, let's make sure at the end that you open up, that we want to have that competition and we want our province to do well. And we encourage business and we, you know, we want to make sure that those, that industry and sports . . . And we've seen that. You know, people want to watch the sport and then they talk about it as a sport.

So we want to make sure that it's done correctly; the proper training's in place. We want to make sure the proper training's in place to protect the athletes, to make sure that the facilities, to make sure the equipment, whatever it is they're needing, that the commission that would sanction these events are making sure that the promoters and everyone else that's part of it covers

the liability and make sure that they have enough insurance, that there's protection should something go wrong, that, you know, with an athlete, they're protected with some liability. Or if something would happen at an event, God forbid that that would happen, where there is some liability to protect people that are there even watching it or whatever. So that liability is clear. It talks about that. So there's a lot of different, you know, talking about the commission, you know, and the powers that they will have. And it's going to be a five-person commission, and we'll see where it goes.

And I think they talk about, they refer to the five of them. And there'll be a commissioner appointed, and I think they referred to about three individuals. And then there also will be . . . Now let's see. I just want to make sure as I go through that. There would be five of them. It might be someone who is involved in that, within the industry itself that gets appointed to that commission, so that they would have an opportunity to . . . Adjudicator might be one of the ones that would be involved in that. And I think they referred to that individual as well. So you'd have the commissioner, adjudicator, and maybe three others that would sit on that. So that would be very important to have. And they would oversee and make sure that this body would have the powers with regulations to oversee these events. And there could be some good events.

And some people might have concern. And I think if they have concerns, they need to bring them forward because there may be residents out there that are concerned about this. And it might be that the industry will have to educate people at what it is and what it isn't to make sure people understand. It's about athletes, and they're asking this and they want to be able to bring in those activities. So there might be some education, some work to do as promoters, you know, as an organization, as they bring in the activities. So they're going to have to do a lot of work educating maybe some of the residents that do show concern.

And if there are concerns, I encourage those individuals to get a hold of the opposition, to raise those concerns with the government and with the minister to make sure they understand. You know, if there are issues or concerns that people have in the province about bringing this in and allowing a commission to carry on certain activities, I think it's important that they share that with the government, share that with the opposition to clearly bring that forward. But at this time, Mr. Speaker, I'm prepared to adjourn debate on this bill.

The Speaker: — The member has moved adjournment of debate on Bill No. 108, The Athletics Commission Act. Is it the

pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — It now being close to the hour of 5 o'clock,
this House recesses to 7 p.m.

[The Assembly recessed from 17:00 until 19:00.]

Bill No. 108

[The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed
motion by the Hon. Mr. Doherty that Bill No. 108 — The
Athletics Commission Act be now read a second time.]

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member from
Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise today and enter into debate on Bill No.

108, An Act respecting the Athletics Commission and

Professional Contests or Exhibitions.

It's a very interesting piece of legislation we have before us.

And of course we've heard so much about these kind of things.

And I don't know if others have been lobbied for movement on this type of thing. I know I have been over the last few years.

And so it will be an interesting thing as we move this forward and we hear more. I hope we do hear more from the people involved. Quite often I mean these folks will contact the government, but it's important to contact us too because it helps us to understand. Because so often we get our information from the media. And I can just tell you that, you know, I've been actively watching and following the acquired brain injury folks and what they do and their concerns, and we've not heard anything from them on this. And that's a big, big issue, you know.

And I know SGI [Saskatchewan Government Insurance] has been actively involved in that. And we often think of acquired brain injury as something that comes from accidents, but ironically we're seeing more and more that it's coming from sports. And you know, we've heard of two big lawsuits in professional sports, one of course in the professional football arena with the NFL [National Football League] and the settlement of that in terms of concussions. Now we've just heard now that a group of NHL [National Hockey League] players have put together a lawsuit in a very similar fashion, talking about brain injury through concussions and the impact it

has on the sport.

So that has not really been addressed here, and I hope that we will hear more about that. And I'm going to take a minute to review the minister's comments on this. And while I think it is an important area to actually have a position so we can have that discussion, hopefully he's landing on the right spot on that.

And I know that I don't have all the information I would like to have on this to feel confident in saying yea or nay. I understand there are commercial interests of course that drive this, partly because there is a lot of these things going on across the country in terms of UFC [Ultimate Fighting Championship] and in different . . . boxing or different kind of fight type of things.

And I think that it's important that we have a good, frank discussion on that.

But is this the right way to go? That's something we'll have to determine. And we hope that it is, that the government is not creating a situation where there are unintended consequences, particularly when it comes to health.

And you know, we are dealing with a situation where, you know, as we do age more, and we have seniors and we have more and more seniors, that people are living longer, that in fact

if there is an unintended consequence from creating this kind of athletics commission for professional contests or exhibitions, and what are the . . . We know what the intended consequences are: to regulate it. And the government's very clear, it's not to promote it. But the fact of the matter is that once you've opened the floodgates and we're going to have this kind of licensing, that it will happen. It will happen, and then it becomes an issue of safety. And that's really truly the issue here, isn't it? And it is one that we would like to hear more about, we would like to hear more about.

And I'm wondering, have they done a full set of consultations with everyone who could be connected to this? Obviously there are the people who are in the pro camp, those people who see a lot of value in this. And clearly they do, whether they're the different sport organizations or whether they're the sport tourism organizations who say, this kind of thing would be good for our cities and we could fill the hotels. We could fill the arenas. Fair enough, fair enough. But are we creating a situation that we might regret 10, 20, 30, 40 years down the road?

You know, I think that I find it interesting. And we all heard the news of the big, big Rogers contract last week and what might be the future of Hockey Night in Canada. And it is an interesting thing, you know, when you listen to . . . I listened to

CBC [Canadian Broadcasting Corporation] radio on Sunday on the way down, people talking about what hockey meant to them in the good old days. It is a sport. I feel it's a sport. For many people though, for many people they feel it's entertainment and the game doesn't really start until the first fight starts. And I feel that's relatively . . . That's very sad. It's really sad, you know, because it's much more than that. There's so much skill involved in hockey, and it's a great sport.

But what does it mean for smaller markets? What does it mean for cities like Saskatoon, was at one point hoping to land an NHL franchise. And now with these huge broadcasting rights and the package that came along with it, \$5.2 billion over 12 years, what does that mean? What does that mean?

And of course this is all kind of related to the same question: is it sport? Is it entertainment? Is it entertainment, and what are the limitations around that in terms of quality of life? We're promoting a certain thing, you know. It was interesting on Saturday, TSN [The Sports Network] had the 10 top hits, 10 top hits and they meant physical hits. And it was really interesting to see some of the brutal hits that hockey players were taking and some of the ones who were knocked out like Paul Kariya when he got hit, Eric Lindros. And they showed that video over and over again, and I couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe it, that hit. You know, but it ended or shortened a career, shortened

a career.

And folks were saying, well it's part of the game. People should've known, people were aware of it. Yes but, you know, when you have such finesse players as Paul Kariya, you know, and others that you can go on and on. And I may be wandering a bit from the topic at hand when I'm talking about hockey and I should be talking about boxing, but boy, you know. What's that old joke? Went to a hockey game and a boxing match broke out, you know. And so this is, I don't know if it's a sad commentary or just a commentary on sport in our world now that we, on one hand, emulate skill and finesse and a bit of risk. A bit of risk, I think that's always part of sport.

[16:15]

But at the end of the day, you know, when you're watching Montreal and Toronto on Saturday night and Montreal was up 2-0 and of course then Toronto starts a fight, you know. And it sort of changes the gears, and you can see the people in the stands very happy about the fight, you know. But it does change the momentum, and we see that in junior hockey.

And I just have to say, when we're talking about sport and this kind of sport, then really I have some concerns. I have some

concerns because how do you make sure that truly it is a sport?

And it is interesting that, and as I read the legislation, it talks about, you know, well it has definitions. And of course it does talk about, talks about professional athlete, person who participates as a contestant in a professional contest or exhibition. I mean, that's interesting because it doesn't really talk about what a . . . You know, I know what it means to a professional teacher, it talks about decision making, about being paid, that type of thing. So you're a professional athlete just because you sign up? That doesn't sound like a really well-thought-out . . . He's very aware of the decisions, the risks involved in the sport. I think that's kind of a different type of definition.

I was hoping that you would have a more fuller definition of what it means to be professional. Just somebody who participates — hmm, that's it. And a professional contest or exhibition means a contest or an exhibition of professional boxing, mixed martial arts, or any other prescribed sport. So we were kind of leaving that open, and we'll have that in regulations. Maybe the next one will be hockey, you know. I just, I'm worried about where this may go. We need to know more information about this.

But the point I wanted to say was part II talks about how the commission is set up, you know:

Commission established

3(1) The Athletics Commission is established.

(2) The commission is to consist of an employee of the ministry who is to be appointed by the minister and who is to serve as chairperson of the commission.

So that becomes, in a sense, the commissioner. So is that going to be something that somebody's going to do off the side of their desk, or are they going to be quite actively involved? I would hope that in some ways that it could be someone who knows the area of the sport. So are now we going to create a position? And this is somewhat ironic that a government that is so keen about lean is setting up a commissioner. That's an interesting concept, that we're going to have a commissioner of sport here, a commissioner of the Athletics Commission. Either that person's going to do off the side of their desk, or are they going to be a full-time commissioner? I don't know.

Is it going to grow into being a full-time commissioner? And will that person be hired as an athletics commissioner? So we'll see the ad in the Leader-Post, The StarPhoenix, or The Globe

and Mail: come to Saskatchewan and become the athletics commissioner for the province of Saskatchewan. That will be interesting, Mr. Speaker. And how do we rate that person? Is that person equivalent to an executive director, a deputy minister, or will we have to pay them some exorbitant wage because these people may be paying a lot of money in other provinces? We understand that seven other provinces have commissions, so what does a commissioner make in those provinces? Is that what we'll be paying our commissioner here?

When we see that discontent among, you know, public employees — and I'm thinking particularly of teachers — now will principals be comparing themselves to athletic commissioners? So I mean we're getting into some grey area here, but I think that this Act opens up a lot of questions about what road we might be going down when we start to do this. So we don't know, and we need a lot of questions about this, a lot of answers. We have the questions. There may be even more about this kind of thing.

So I am really curious about this though because when you start a new sport, and particularly when you get the government actively involved . . . And it may be an honourable thing and the right thing that we do have our foot in the door; we have our finger on the pulse because we have the commissioner working

out of the ministry. But really, is this an appropriate thing? Will there be a conflict of interest because we're promoting the sport? We're promoting the sport. You know, will the government then, because it's got this high-priced commissioner, want to make sure that it actually succeeds? Or will there at some point have to say, you know what? We didn't do our due diligence. We jumped on a bandwagon, and we should have got more information. This should have been more well thought out.

So it would be interesting to know if other commissioners actually work for the provinces or the municipalities, what kind of background do they have, or do they do it off the side of their desk? Now we often see this government does a lot of things off the side of their desk, and so maybe this might be just that kind of thing, you know, off the side of the desk. And then we'll see what happens from there.

So I think there's a huge responsibility for the commission and the commissioner, and I think this might have been the time where you wanted it to be arm's length. I think it would have been quite appropriate to have somebody who, from the government, be on the commission. That's reasonable. But to be the commissioner, I don't know. I think that's an interesting dilemma that we have.

So will they be responsible for promotion? I'm not sure. Will the government in effect become, you know . . . And it is interesting, you know. And I just found out that, you know, the NHL lawsuit now has grown to over 200 players are involved and had 10 players at the beginning.

So are we now opening up a lot of liability because the commissioner is an employee of the Government of Saskatchewan, and in a sense that we may be the ones who will be on a hook for future liability. Now I don't know if the government's thought that through. They should of probably had this commission be arm's length, but it's not arm's length because specifically it's a function of this government. And I mean, will they consider it to be an agency of the government? Is this another Crown corporation? It would be interesting to think of that as that, you know.

But the liability and all of that . . . you know because it does say, right, powers of the commission: issues licenses, events, and all of that in terms of this Act. Conduct any investigations and that type of thing. Collects data, conducts research, do the reports respecting professional boxing, martial arts, other prescribed sports, and what that might be, or professional contests or exhibitions and any other duties that may be

designated by the Lieutenant Governor in Council. And do any other things the commission considers advisable or necessary for the purpose of carrying out the intent of this Act.

So you know, I do think that it is, this Act is something that is timely, though as I said, because there's a real pressure to deal with this. But is this as well thought out as it might be? I'm not sure. Because I can just tell you, I've been thinking a lot about this, particularly when it comes to concussions and the emphasis on violence in sport and how does that play out. Because we know that while there's some . . . And I have to tell you that boxing in so many ways can be a fine sport, but when it gets to . . . in a very unprofessional way. And this is what alarms me about this definition, it doesn't define professional. It just says whoever shows up is a professional. I think there should be a little bit more to it than that. You know, you sign up or you participate in an event and all of sudden you're a professional boxer? That doesn't make sense. You know I think you need a little more rigour than that. So maybe, maybe there's more to this than meets the eye, but it should really be in these documents that we're examining today.

So I want to take a minute to take a look at what the minister had said about this. And this goes back to November 18th, and he introduced this. And I know that there were in fact many

people, in fact I think the day before, a couple of days before, he had people who were in the audience, in the gallery who were interested in this. And I can understand that they're keen to see this move forward. I know that this was back on November 5th when people came to see and support the creation of a provincial athletics commission to oversee professional boxing and mixed martial arts events here in the province.

And I'm just reviewing the minister's introduction, and he talks about Pat Fiacco, former mayor of Regina and currently the CEO of Tourism Saskatchewan. And he is the current president of Boxing Canada. And I know he's an outstanding referee and he's travelled around the world. And he seems to be able to bring that . . . You know, it's a physical toughness. It's a mental toughness. And I think Pat Fiacco embodies all of that. And I've seen that. But there's also the sense of fairness, a sense of sportsmanship, and so you know, it's good to see that he's involved.

There was Anthony Scales, head of . . . Brazilian jiu-jitsu instructor and co-owner of the Complete Martial Arts and Fitness in Regina. Other folks were here as well. Malcolm Eaton, mayor of the city of Humboldt, was here and I understand representing SUMA [Saskatchewan Urban

Municipalities Association]; and Randy Fernets, who I know quite well, director of industry development and sports tourism for Tourism Saskatoon. And so they were here, and they were wanting to see the introduction of this bill. So clearly the sports side has been, and tourism side has been consulted.

But I don't know if they had invited the folks from the acquired brain injury group to have a conversation about allaying any fears or concerns they might have. I think that's very clear that we have to make sure that when we are promoting . . . or regulating — and I know the minister is very clear — it's not promoting. But when you're regulating, and it's out there, you know, and taking it out from the underground, which is a good thing, bringing it from the underground . . . Because then it is clearly even more dangerous. But I think we needed to . . . The government really should have cast its net further in terms of the consultations.

It's so clear that, you know, in a world where you can have a \$5.2 billion media package for 12 years for one sport that kids are watching, families are watching, but then this ugly side comes out. And I would really hope that we can do a very good job here. But I have to tell you that, you know, even when my son watches some of these fights on TV I go, I can't believe what we're watching here. This is not sport. But this is I guess

just many . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Well just because you say it's a sport doesn't make it a sport. And it's like professional boxing. Just because you're a boxer doesn't mean you're a professional boxer. You're a boxer. And I think we need to pay more attention to this. We need to pay more attention.

And I think that if in our province we do this well — and I think we can do it well — that's a good thing. But if we do it poorly and we do it off the side of our desk, it doesn't help anybody. It doesn't help anybody at all.

But I want to just review some of the things that the minister talked about. And you know, he talked about how it's a new Act respecting the Athletics Commission, professional boxing, mixed martial arts and exhibitions and other things. And we're one of the only three provinces that haven't taken the necessary steps to sanction the professional combative sports events.

And I know this government is not alone, is not worried about . . . You know, I mean I always find it interesting when they bring up, we're going to be the last, or we want to be the first, and they seem to be really inconsistent. But today it seems that they don't want to be the last one to have an athletics commission. I think the problem is though, Mr. Deputy

Speaker, is we want to do it well. We want to do it well. So we have a lot of information from the other seven provinces, and that's what we're really curious to know. And I'm hoping that the minister can share that with us.

[16:30]

And the one area that I really do have some questions about is the role and function of the commissioner. When the minister says it's going to be an employee, is it going to be like the person who inspects the elevators? You just sign, and he's very silent. You never see the person who inspects the elevators, and you have that little card up on the elevator. Is that the kind of role that person is? Or is it going to be a very public person? A very public person, and one that may have come out from the . . . up through the ranks in say boxing and understands what it means to be a professional boxer, what it means to have trained, what it means to have the different levels of fights. Or is it going to be a bureaucrat, as I said, who may sign those inspection certificates, and you never see them again? So I'm curious about that.

So one of only three provinces that haven't taken the necessary steps to sanction professional combative sports. And they're concerned that many of these . . . what's driving this is, in fact,

that there's been many unsanctioned events and they hold them without appropriate standards or safety precautions that help protect participants and spectators. And I think that's a huge concern. And we often raise this issue around safety, and of course this would fall into that whole issue around occupational health and safety. And I think that's a really critical, critical concern.

And as I've talked about the fact that we've seen this both in the NFL and the NHL where the NFL had a very . . . the players had a very successful lawsuit around concussions and safety. And we're not sure if that's the end of it and that's all, but that involved I believe several hundred million. I'm not sure of the number off the top of my head, but it was several hundred million, and how that was divided up amongst the players and ensuring that actually concussions are taken seriously. So if this is part of this, this is huge. This is huge.

And if we can grow from the previous experience of the previous seven provinces and their rules and their regulations, that'll be some of the questions we will want to know. And as I said, it's not just a matter of doing it off the side of the desk but really, really benefiting from the seven provinces and what they've done to protect participants and also spectators.

Now it's interesting to include spectators. We don't often think of spectators, and I'd be curious to know what kind of dangers spectators would find themselves at these kind of exhibitions or events that would be different than a regular hockey game or a baseball game or a basketball game. I know sometimes particularly hockey fans can get out of hand. Maybe that they're thinking along those lines already, anticipating that fans will get too, too engaged.

Now I've not been to any of these kind of events, so I don't know what fans do at these kind of events. Maybe they really get into it and it's a dangerous thing, and how they're going to protect the fans from the professional participants or how the participants are going to be protected from the professional fans. Now I don't know. This'll be the question.

An Hon. Member: — Proof is in the pudding.

Mr. Forbes: — Proof is in the pudding. But that could be a dangerous thing. That could be a dangerous thing. This proof could be dangerous. I appreciate the engagement because I think this is what we should . . . this kind of debate. And so proof will be in the pudding. But I think it will be a danger, could be potentially a dangerous thing.

I'm not sure I want to be one of those fans who will be experimenting and going to one of these events just to see how it goes. I think that . . . I don't know if I'll be up for that.

Definitely, I will not be one of those participants. I would not recommend myself as a professional boxer or anything that would say . . . Yes, I might be talked into watching, but I don't know about them.

But he goes on to say this legislation is not about promoting mixed martial art as a sport, but as regulating it, and as regulating this sport, we help eliminate fights putting athletes, in some cases, children at risk. So I'm curious about that, that statement there about children. Are we talking about . . . Now I do think that he refers to an age limit in this. Now maybe I'm not sure what the . . . if there is an age limit. So that'll be again another question because he does talk about children and what that means and what we see in that area and what kind of . . . particularly if there will be a lot of research done on that.

And again it will be growing from the experience of the other seven provinces. Do they have age limits? And what does that mean? And again, I don't know if this is discriminatory in terms of youth and older, but I think the . . . This is one that will be interesting to do this.

And it would be interesting to know, Mr. Speaker, how many illegal fights? What has been the trend here in Saskatchewan around illegal fights, you know? And so what . . . Has this been really a problem here in the province? How many fights have there been? What's been the situation behind them? Is it something that the police are calling about and saying, listen, we've got to, we've got to do something about this. There's just too many fights on the weekend. I mean I know there are fights on the weekend, but whether they're this kind of fight, I don't know. But this is the question we have.

You know, I live just off of Idylwyld and I know right across the street, in the bars across the street, there's the odd fight. Now I don't know if we're talking about that kind of fight . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . I only hear about them and I don't go out there to check. Again as a spectator, it's not wise to go out after midnight to check out what's happening in the parking lot across the street. But, Mr. Speaker, I hope we're not mixing up apples and oranges in terms of illegal fights here. But again, it's important.

So he talks about the Criminal Code and legalizing the sport of mixed martial arts across Canada and that there has to be some sort of provincial athletics commission or similar established body. And that's important. And so that we have the vehicle and we can do it now, and that's really clear. So there's some

clarity and an opportunity to put this forward and make sure.

And again the minister keeps coming back to this point that we don't have participants put at risk for serious injuries.

Again this would be the case where I would like to know how much . . . How many fights are there? What kind of situation are we having? I think it is an important discussion to have just because I know that there is a real presence. And we hear, and people talk about . . . And as I said, we do get lobbied about this an awful lot. But I think that it's one that I would like . . . And I hope the minister . . . I know sometimes they keep track of some of our questions, and I hope the minister would be prepared to answer that question about how many illegal fights because he's referring to it a few times, this illegal activity. So could he describe that illegal activity?

You know, sometimes we come to committee meetings and the officials are often very prepared, very prepared and can answer any question, but sometimes they're not ready for questions. And I think one question I would hope that we'll be asking is to describe the illegal activity that's happening in Saskatchewan, whether it's illegal fights, that type of thing. What's really the context, the environment that we're really creating here, and how much of this . . . You know, it'd be interesting to know how much of this professional sport is already in existence in

Saskatchewan and is waiting for a venue to happen, but in fact have to travel to other provinces to do their sport, and what kind of things we're missing. So there's a lot of, there's a lot of solid questions that we'll have to get some answers to.

So he goes on, Mr. Speaker, and he talks about three main reasons that he's talked about. And the first is, the government is committed to establish a provincial athletics commission and will be able to design to . . . "This commission will be designed to ensure a consistent standard of qualifications, rules, regulations, and safety protocols for all participants and officials across the province."

Now he'd also talked about earlier protecting participants, spectators. So I don't know if he's just neglected that one in the first reason, but I think that we'll be making that connection for him because he did say, and I don't know if it's in the Act, about protecting spectators. I don't see right off the top of . . . And so we'll definitely have to find out more about that. I think that's an important, very critical part.

He also talks about ensuring ". . . that competitors participate in appropriate pre-fight medical testing such as blood tests, concussion screening, and eye exams . . . [and ensuring] that qualified medical staff and event officials are hired, that promoters and competitors have the proper licences, and that

promoters have suitable liability insurance.”

And that’s hugely important, especially that last part about liability insurance, and hopefully that that is the kind of liability insurance that has fair access. I don’t know if I want to use the word easily access but fair access for injuries such as concussion, that because of the limitations of the definition of professional athlete, that you’re essentially just a participant. And I think that should be stronger. I mean it talks about qualified medical staff. You would think that you would have qualified competitors so that you’re not having competitors who really shouldn’t be in the fight fighting, but there’s some level of that.

Now he does go on in reason three, talks about “. . . will also be responsible for tracking competitors’ fighting histories and ensuring safety protocols are enforced.” So there will be five . . . So that’s again about the closest that we get to any sort of professional standing. Or who are these athletes and what are they . . . Are they just . . . You know, we keep track of their histories, and that’s a good thing so if there is potential for concussions and repeat concussions, that that’s happening. Now it will be interesting to know if this is part of a national tracking system so that fighters across the country are in the same database. Is that the plan? Which I think would be a reasonable

plan. So that if you've had two or three concussions in this province, that they would know about that in Ontario. And likewise, if you've had a serious concussion in Ontario and you've come out here to fight, that in fact that we're aware of that as well. So you know, I think this is all very interesting and I think this is something that we should be debating.

And I just want to go on to . . . He talks about five of the seven provinces that regulate professional MMA, mixed martial arts events, have provincial commissions. And from speaking with these other provinces, we know that that tends to be the most effective governance model. So fair enough. There's benefits: consistency, rules, regulations, processes across the province. And that's fair. I think that's a good idea. You would not want to have a situation where, you know, tough rules in Regina or Saskatoon, then you go up to La Ronge and it's the wild, wild west up north. That would not be a good thing. I think that you want to have it consistent right across the province, right across the province. And this is important stuff. Okay. So just to be clear on that, I think that makes a lot of sense.

[16:45]

What I'm looking for is a sense of how will this work in terms of again this commissioner. And I've talked about that at

length, and I'm going to be very interested when we get a chance to meet with the minister and talk more about this in committee about, is this commissioner somebody who is stand-alone, you know, a specific employee dedicated to mixed martial arts and boxing? Or will he be doing it off the side of their desk? Again will it be the kind of thing you sign a certificate like you see in the elevator, or a very prominent commissioner that you might see like the CFL [Canadian Football League], where you're out doing interviews and talking a lot about the sport and in fact promoting the sport? Now the minister's been very clear that this is not about promoting the sport but it's about regulating it. And I think that's a good point. That's a very good point, a valid point, and that the safety element is huge, huge.

But I need to say that there is a lot of questions about this, and particularly when we've seen what's happening in other sports that are actually not as combative but at many times are, and that's hockey and football.

And as I was saying earlier, when I saw the TSN's top 10 hits, they were pretty major hits. And I would not want to be on the other side of those hits, that's for sure, and how they can be, in a sport that's as well regulated as hockey, it can be so very, very dangerous. And we're seeing that where I was talking earlier

about this lawsuit that started out with 10, and that now I understand it's over 200 players. And this is a big, big deal. People are saying, you know, athletes are saying, I'm in it for the game. I'm in it for the sport. But I also have the rest of my life to live, and I don't want to live with a concussion for the rest of my life, you know. The career of an athlete is short enough, and you don't want it to be shortened by injuries that could have been prevented.

And so this is something we're going to be watching very carefully. And we understand that there are some very compelling reasons for moving forward with this. Obviously the Criminal Code has been amended to allow this to happen. And there are interests, whether it be tourism, that . . . And I understand it, tourism. We saw that with the Grey Cup, what a huge economic impact it had on the city and on the province. And in a much smaller way, this kind of thing could have, might have an impact in our cities as well.

And it has definitely got a fan base. And people are very interested in it and want to see more of it. And they want to see it in our towns and in our cities. But I also know that there has to be more to it than that, and there has to be more due diligence than just saying, hey we can make a bit of money at this. We need to make sure that it's done in the right way, the best way.

So I know that my colleagues here will want to have an opportunity to speak to this bill and other bills before us. But as I said, I'll be looking forward to the spring when this goes to committee, that we'll be talking more about this and finding out a lot more about what the impacts are for this.

So at this point, Mr. Speaker, I would like to move adjournment of Bill No. 108, An Act respecting the Athletics Commission and Professional Contests or Exhibitions. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: — The member has moved adjournment of debate of Bill No. 108, The Athletics Commission Act.

Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried.
Bill No. 108

[The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Doherty that Bill No. 108 — The Athletics Commission Act be now read a second time.]

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Regina Lakeview.

Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill No. 108, An Act respecting the Athletics Commission and Professional Contests or Exhibitions.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation has been brought forward at the request of many groups throughout Saskatchewan. And it's clearly legislation that is based on precedents from other provinces and I think states in the United States where the rules are created that govern the activities of sports that have a certain possibility of injury involved in them. And traditionally it's been sports like boxing or wrestling that have been involved in this, but in the last few decades there have been an increase in the number of sports that are effectively violent contests between individuals.

And, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to understand why this type of legislation is important for the people of the province, but also more importantly why it's important for those who are contestants in the various battles that may occur, also those people who rent the venues where these activities may take place and also where the general public stands as far as coming to be a spectator related to some of these activities.

Now ultimately I think the big question for the hosting of these kinds of activities in Saskatchewan relates to the ability to provide insurance coverage as it relates to the particular event. And I think the types of insurance and insurance coverage that's been available usually will have a clause that relates to the fact that the activity is regulated within the province where the activity takes place. And up until this point when this legislation was brought forward, we have not had regulation in this particular area.

Now it ends up being that there will be, the way this legislation is drafted is that there will be a special commission created which is called the Athletics Commission, and this particular commission's job will be to regulate and supervise professional contests and license and permit these and then enforce the Act and the regulations that are set out in this Act.

[14:45]

Now practically, the commission will be citizens of the province and maybe some from outside of the province who understand these particular activities, but it's very clear that the powers of the commission will be delegated to officials or employees of the commission. And as I said before, some of the main activities will be issuing the licences that allow the

activities to go forward, setting up special permits. If something goes wrong, then their job will be to investigate what happened and why things went wrong, and also then to keep track of these activities and what things have gone well or what things have gone wrong.

What we know is that this is an area where people are willing to spend much money to attend the events. We see some of these events that are hosted in other provinces or states in North America, and people are willing to spend quite a bit of money. And so what this legislation does is sets up the procedure whereby Saskatchewan entrepreneurs, or entrepreneurs from other places who want to do business in Saskatchewan, will be able to rent the largest venues that we have in the province and host the kinds of fights or martial arts activities that are to be licensed here. And as I said, the reason that the industry, if I can call it that, pushes for legislation like this is because that they're concerned to make sure that they are fully insured to cover any kind of injury that may occur.

I think it's important in a jurisdiction where these activities haven't taken place in any official capacity that we will have good legislation that provides the regulation, that provides the rules, that makes sure that all of these activities are done appropriately.

Now, Mr. Speaker, why is it important that we have this good legislation? Well we know that in activities that are presently taking place in the province, people are identifying issues that have arisen. We know last week that there are now 200 hockey players that are involved in a lawsuit against the National Hockey League. And, Mr. Speaker, that's a . . . It's those kinds of injuries, the concussions and some of the others that are the concern and that relate to some of the kinds of activities that will be regulated under this athletics commission.

And, Mr. Speaker, I think that making sure that we have a very robust system, that we've taken all of the best rules from other jurisdictions, will give us some assurance that people attending events in Saskatchewan will be seeing things that are done in an appropriate way, and also that those people who participate in these events will have some of the best protection possible.

Now unfortunately, I don't think that setting up an athletics commission is going to be an insurance policy against something going wrong. And so I know that there would be some people who say, why are we even allowing these kinds of activities in our province? So I know that that perspective exists. I think that our role here is to make sure that we have the best system in place and make sure that it's here and available for the public.

Now, Mr. Speaker, there are a number of other ways of doing the kind of thing that we're doing here. We know for example that there are many places where each municipality has their own rules and sets up their own methods of dealing with this. I think that given the size of Saskatchewan, having a province-wide athletics commission makes sense, but we have to acknowledge that it would be possible to allow for municipalities to set up their own system and follow some province-wide rules.

Ultimately the questions are the ones that relate to the liability for any injuries that may happen. What happens if there are the brain injuries that come from these sports as well? How will they be dealt with? Also I think that it will also relate to how the forum or the whole place where this activity takes place will be regulated. We know that quite often there are crossovers or there are connections with some of our liquor and gaming rules as it relates to these types of contests, and that will have to be monitored as well. I assume that there would be some interconnection between this legislation that creates the Athletics Commission and some of the rules as it relates to liquor and gaming.

Another question that arises is one that we have to ask all the

time. Where there are First Nations jurisdictions, will they be part of this particular legislation or will there be some accommodations? Has there been consultation around activities under an athletics commission that may or may not take place on a First Nation? Some of these are the kinds of questions that we all need to look at as we proceed with what we have here.

Now, Mr. Speaker, there are, as I said, entrepreneurial options and opportunities that this type of legislation will provide. We had a number of guests in the legislature that clearly identified that. And what we'll have to make sure is that everything will be done in a straightforward manner to protect our Saskatchewan people who may want to be participants and spectators as it relates to this legislation.

Now it's interesting. One other piece around the protection of the actual participants in these events is clearly something that's been learned from other jurisdictions. And that's where the minister set out in his second reading speech where he said that "The commission will . . . be responsible for tracking competitors' fighting histories and ensuring safety protocols are enforced."

Mr. Speaker, this goes to this not necessarily new-found but very much emphasized situation now where head injuries and

the information about head injuries becomes crucial in monitoring sporting activities. And it's true in hockey or football or lacrosse or other sports, but as it relates to these contests, these physical contests, it's even more crucial. And so, Mr. Speaker, I know that the people who will be appointed to do this kind of work, to be on the commission, and then the staff that they hire will be diligent in enforcing these kind of safety protocols. But, Mr. Speaker, I think it's an area where we can't do enough to emphasize the fact that there is a responsibility to protect the participants in these types of activities.

Mr. Speaker, the legislation itself has been presented around to people who have some knowledge of this activity. I know that we will have some chance over this winter to review the legislation even in more detail and talk to some of the people who may have some questions about it. And, Mr. Speaker, I think that that will be entirely appropriate.

From my initial review, they appear to have captured most of the issues that are of concern. I think there would be one area that may be helpful for all of us is to understand how the insurance policies work as it relates to the certification or regulation by an athletics commission. And that may be something we can get before the next, before the spring session

or that we may be able to discuss when it goes to committee.

But at this point, Mr. Speaker, I have no further comments, and I will adjourn debate.

The Speaker: — The member has moved adjournment of debate of Bill No. 108, The Athletics Commission Act. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried.