



Albertans can make their own sports choices

Response of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation
to the Alberta Sport Plan Questionnaire

presented to the
Honourable Gene Zwozdesky
Minister of Community Development

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About the Canadian Taxpayers Federation

The Canadian Taxpayers Federation (CTF) is a federally incorporated, non-profit, non-partisan, education and advocacy organization. The CTF was founded in 1990 when the Association of Saskatchewan Taxpayers and the Resolution One Association of Alberta joined forces to create a national taxpayers organization. In twelve years it has grown to over 60,000 supporters nation-wide.

The CTF's three-fold mission statement is:

1. To act as a watchdog on government spending and to inform taxpayers of governments' impact on their economic well-being;
2. To promote responsible fiscal and democratic reforms, and to advocate the common interest of taxpayers; and
3. To mobilize taxpayers to exercise their democratic responsibilities.

The CTF maintains a federal office in Ottawa, and offices in the five provincial capitals of British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario. In addition, the CTF has a Centre for Aboriginal Policy Change dedicated to monitor, research and provide alternatives to current aboriginal policy and court decisions. Provincial offices and the Centre conduct research and advocacy activities specific to their provinces or issue in addition to acting as regional organizers of Canada-wide initiatives.

CTF offices field hundreds of media interviews each month, hold press conferences and issue regular news releases, commentaries and publications to advocate the common interest of taxpayers. The CTF's official publication, *The Taxpayer* magazine, is published six times a year. CTF offices also send out weekly *Let's Talk Taxes* commentaries to more than 800 media outlets and personalities nationally.

CTF representatives speak at functions, make presentations to government, meet with politicians, and organize petition drives, events and campaigns to mobilize citizens to effect public policy change.

All CTF staff and board directors are prohibited from holding a membership in any political party. The CTF is independent of any institutional affiliations. The CTF is not a registered charity, and contributions are not tax deductible.

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Executive Summary

The Alberta Government spends over seven million tax dollars each year to promote and to finance sports and recreation. In so doing, the government merely redistributes seven million dollars which it first takes from Albertans through taxation.

Albertans are smart enough to make their own choices about sports and recreation. Albertans are capable of deciding the degree to which they want to be physically active, the amount of money they wish to spend on sports and recreation, and which kinds of sports and recreation they want to pay for. When government redistributes money through taxation and spending, it removes freedom and choice from individuals to make their own decisions.

Albertans work hard for their money. When politicians want to take and spend a portion of that money the onus should be on politicians to justify why this is necessary. Albertans should not have to explain why they should be allowed to keep their own earnings.

Unfortunately the report prepared by Alberta's Sport Plan Task Force ("*A New Century for Amateur Sport: From Participation to Excellence*") does not justify or even explain why government should use taxpayers' money to promote amateur sport. This report merely *assumes* that government should be in the business of influencing Albertans' personal lifestyle choices, without offering an explanation.

Taxpayers deserve better. Taxpayers deserve an explanation as to why they cannot make their own choices regarding how much money they wish to spend on sports and recreation. Why should taxpayers have to relinquish a portion of their earnings to be spent at the discretion of politicians and bureaucrats?

Taxpayers in Lethbridge should not have to pay for a new swimming pool in Calgary. Taxpayers in Calgary should not have to pay to upgrade a hockey arena in Edmonton. Taxpayers in Edmonton should not have to pay for a karate tournament in Lethbridge. Bearing in mind that government has no money of its own, why should the Alberta Government take on the task of redistributing money across the province? Any so-called "funding" for sports is an illusion, since every penny of the "funding" was taken out of Albertans' pockets in the first place.

Sports events should be funded by people who choose to fund them, whether as spectators, athletes, parents, advertisers, or in some other capacity. Why not let Albertans keep their own money and make their own choice as to how much of it they will spend on sports and recreation?

In the pages which follow, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation (CTF) presents its response to some of the Recommendations contained in "*A New Century for Amateur Sports: From Participation to Excellence.*"

Recommendation #1

Spend tax dollars to “encourage and support” participation in sport and recreation

The degree of physical fitness pursued by each individual is a personal choice. Some people choose to spend all of their spare time behind a computer or in front of a television set, without engaging in any physical activity. That choice may be regrettable. But should government be in the business of preaching the gospel of physical fitness to the pagan couch potato? Or are Albertans responsible both for their own lifestyle choices and for the consequences of those choices? These are questions which deserve clear answers before the Alberta Government takes even more money away from taxpayers and redistributes it.

Is it the government’s role to promote attitudes and behaviours which it considers to be worthwhile and beneficial? Should the government be in the business of micro-managing, directing, controlling, manipulating or influencing the personal lifestyle choices made by Albertans?

As the average Canadian loses 49% of her or his earnings to pay for the spending of three levels of government (Tax Freedom Day 2003, Fraser Institute), these are questions which deserve an answer.

Unfortunately the report prepared by Alberta’s Sport Plan Task Force (“A New Century for Amateur Sport: From Participation to Excellence”) does not bother to justify why government should use taxpayers’ money to promote amateur sport. This report merely *assumes* that government should be in the business of influencing Albertans’ personal lifestyle choices, without offering an explanation.

If it is a legitimate function of the Alberta Government to “encourage and support” participation in sports and recreation because they are worthwhile, it is also legitimate for the government to “encourage and support” loving relationships and neighbourly kindness, because these things, too, are worthwhile.

Many things in life are worthwhile and beneficial. Remembering that government has no money of its own, should the government take money from taxpayers to spend a portion of that money on persuading taxpayers to change their attitudes and behaviours? Why not leave the promotion of health and morality to individuals, parents, families, faith communities, and other voluntary associations? Can government do a better job of promoting what is worthwhile than voluntary associations? Is it legitimate for government to take money away from people and use that money to persuade those very same people that they ought to change their attitudes and behaviours?

None of these questions are answered in the Sport Plan report.

One might ask why any of these questions deserve an answer. The reason is that Albertans work hard for their money, and when politicians want to take and spend a portion of that money the onus should be on politicians to justify why this is necessary. Albertans should not have to explain why they should be allowed to keep their own earnings.

Like all Albertans, members of the “underrepresented groups” referred to in Recommendation #1 (girls, women, Indians, economically depressed and disadvantaged individuals, people with disabilities) also deserve to know why their tax dollars ought to be spent on “encouraging” them to change their behaviour.

The more active a government is in trying to manage and manipulate people, the less responsibility people assume for their own lives and choices. Taking money from people through taxation and then using a portion of that money to nag, cajole, remind and “encourage” participation in sports is patronizing and

insulting. This kind of spending assumes that people are not smart enough to make their own choices, by forcing people to pay for the promotion of one particular message which is directed back to themselves. The nobility of the goal (eg. increased physical activity) does not justify the violation of a person's dignity and autonomy, which occurs when people are forced to pay for propaganda directed at themselves.

In short, the Alberta government should not be in the business of spending tax dollars to promote physical fitness or other things which are beneficial and worthwhile, because that is the role of individuals, families, faith-based groups, and other voluntary associations. When government engages in social engineering through propaganda to influence attitudes and behaviours, government diminishes personal responsibility and weakens the fabric of society – a fabric that is made up of communities, families, and other voluntary associations.

Recommendation #2

Spend tax dollars to upgrade sport and recreation facilities, and to build new ones

As with Recommendation #1, the objective is worthwhile but there is no need for the provincial government to take money from taxpayers and redistribute it on their behalf. Taxpayers in Lethbridge should not have to pay for a new swimming pool in Calgary. Taxpayers in Calgary should not have to pay to upgrade a hockey arena in Edmonton. Taxpayers in Edmonton should not have to pay for a karate tournament in Lethbridge. Bearing in mind that government has no money of its own, why should the Alberta Government take on the task of redistributing money across the province? The so-called “funding” is an illusion, since every penny of the “funding” was taken out of Albertans' pockets in the first place. So why not let Albertans keep their own money and make their own choice as to how much of it they will spend on sports and recreation?

There is much more accountability when citizens in Alberta's cities and towns pay for their own facilities, because they are directly aware of both the costs and the benefits. But accountability is decreased – if not destroyed – when the province hands out tax dollars to various sports clubs and facilities chosen by politicians and bureaucrats. For the sake of accountability, if any level of government does involve itself in building or upgrading facilities, it should be municipal government, not the provincial government.

The utilization of school facilities during non-school hours is also a worthwhile objective, but one that can be accomplished within each city, town and village by those directly involved.

Recommendation #3

Spend tax dollars to create training programs to recruit, recognize and retain volunteers and staff who provide sport and recreation opportunities

Local training programs cease to be local when they are run, controlled, managed, or funded by the provincial government. Why should the Alberta government be responsible for recruiting, recognizing and retaining volunteers and staff? Should that not be the responsibility of each local organization?

If people in a community are sufficiently motivated to set up and run a soccer league (for example), they don't need tax dollars to do this. They will charge fees, conduct bottle drives, and solicit advertising revenues from local businesses. Conversely, if people in a community are not sufficiently motivated to set up their own soccer league, why should they have free access to money earned by other people, ie. tax

dollars? When the Alberta government redistributes tax dollars to local sports and recreation groups, it destroys local initiative and local pride, and distorts accountability by putting money into the hands of those who either don't need it or don't deserve it.

Recommendation #4

Spend tax dollars to host regional, national and international sport events in Alberta

Sports events should be funded by people who choose to fund them, whether as spectators, athletes, parents, advertisers, or in some other capacity. Why should Albertans who are not interested in karate be forced to contribute a portion of their earnings to pay for a karate tournament? And why should Albertans who are interested in karate be forced to part with their money to pay for someone else's hockey tournament? The word "forced" is used deliberately here, as not one penny of the Alberta Government's \$23.6 billion in tax revenues was contributed voluntarily.

Government funding for sports means forcing taxpayers to give a portion of their earnings to those sports clubs and facilities chosen by politicians and bureaucrats. This will cease to be true only when government starts obtaining its money from a source other than taxpayers. Government funding for sports means that each taxpayer has less choice and less autonomy in spending her own, or his own, earnings on the sport of his or her choice.

It is often argued that hosting sports events leads to huge economic benefits for everyone. If this argument is true, why is it necessary to subsidize sport events with taxpayers' money? If sport events truly "pay for themselves," why not let them do so? Conversely, if a particular sports event won't go ahead without a subsidy from taxpayers, it obviously won't "pay for itself." If there really are such big "spin-off effects," surely private businesses and investors will rush forward to get their share? But if companies and investors are not willing to part with their own money voluntarily to invest in a particular sports event, why should taxpayers be forced to do so? Why should governments give away taxpayers' money to sporting events that taxpayers are not willing to pay for voluntarily?

As with other questions raised in this submission, the onus is on politicians to justify why people should have to relinquish a portion of their earnings.

Recommendation #5

Increase provincial funding to sport and recreation associations

If government received its money from Santa Claus, this recommendation would make a lot of sense. But government merely redistributes the money it takes from taxpayers, such that government doesn't truly "fund" anything. The \$20,000 given as a government grant to upgrade the local curling rink were first taken from Albertans' wallets, then redistributed by politicians. Government redistribution of money destroys accountability, because users of the curling club don't appreciate the cost of the upgrade, and taxpayers throughout Alberta don't receive the benefits of the upgraded curling club which they have paid for.

Can Albertans be trusted to give sufficient financial support to sports clubs and recreation facilities?

If yes, why would the Alberta Government insist on destroying accountability by maintaining a bureaucracy to redistribute money?

And if no, why would the Alberta Government spend money on something that Albertans are not interested in?

Recommendation #6

Spend more tax dollars on a high performance athlete development program

This Recommendation should also be rejected, for the reasons set out in response to Recommendation #5.

Recommendation #7

Spend tax dollars to develop a provincial sport training and sciences network, to provide enhanced training opportunities and improved access for coach/athlete support services

Throughout history, people have created their own networks for economic, social, religious, scientific and cultural purposes.

The Alberta Sport Plan report doesn't explain why government should be spending tax dollars to develop this network, instead of letting sports organizations build up their own networks and pay for their own coach/athlete support services.

If the Alberta Government someday finds a revenue source other than taxpayers, it will be in a position to truly "fund" this network. But until such time, why should the Alberta Government be in the business of redistributing other people's money? If the answer to this question is that this "network" won't get started without government funding, that indicates that those who will benefit from the "network" don't value it highly enough to pay for it themselves. If those who will benefit from the "network" refuse to pay for its full cost, why should taxpayers be on the hook?

The creation of a government-run and government-funded "provincial network" to provide "enhanced training opportunities" will diminish the sense of pride and accomplishment which local clubs and communities experience when they build their own facilities and create their own networks. Networks should be created and sustained from the bottom up, not from the top down.

Recommendation #8

Spend tax dollars to provide coaches with an enhanced accreditation, certification, re-certification program to ensure a superior science based approach

Each sport has its athletes, coaches, parents and volunteers who commit their time, talent, energy and money to sustaining that sport. The people who are involved in a particular sport have the ability and the expertise to establish their own accreditation and certification programs. Many sports have existed for centuries – even millennia – without government funding, government regulation, or other government involvement. Sports and recreation come naturally to people, without any "help" from government.

There is no reason for government to involve itself in matters in which it has less expertise, less experience, and less knowledge than do the coaches and athletes who participate in any given sport. For example, numerous Tae Kwon Do schools in Edmonton actually do quite well without the help and

involvement of Community Development bureaucrats or funding. Schools affiliate themselves with national and international Tae Kwon Do federations, which establish their own accreditation procedures without government interference.

Sports do well on their own – why not leave them alone?

Recommendation #9

Spend more tax dollars to host provincial multi-sport Games including Alberta Summer/Winter Games and Alberta Seniors Games

If the Alberta Government stopped taking \$528 per senior per year through the so-called “health care premium” tax, seniors would have more than enough money to put on Alberta Seniors Games themselves, without taxpayers’ money. Unfortunately the Alberta Government is playing a shell game, taking money from seniors through property taxes, the health care premium tax and other taxes, and then returning pennies on the dollar for the Alberta Seniors Games. Alberta seniors deserve the dignity and respect which come from paying for their own sporting events.

As for other multi-sport games, the government should not redistribute money for the reasons set out in response to Recommendation #4.

Recommendation #10

Encourage the private/corporate sector to play a more prominent role in support of sport development

The Alberta Government should implement this Recommendation, by ceasing to give tax dollars to sports organizations, sports facilities and sports events, and let Albertans make their own sports choices.

Recommendation #11

Establish an advocacy group for sport and by sport that is independent of government

Who will “establish” this new advocacy group, and who will pay for it?

The Alberta Government should not play any role in founding or funding an advocacy group. Sports organizations which wish to form an advocacy group have the freedom to do so, and to seek funding from their own supporters for such a group.

Recommendations #13 to #17 concern the education system, eg. continue to include K-10 physical education as a part of core programming for Alberta students

In its submission to the Learning Commission in 2002, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation (CTF) advocated excellence in education through accountability and choice. The CTF’s submission is available on its web site at www.taxpayer.com. Schools should be responsive to parents, most of whom no doubt support the inclusion of physical education as part of the curriculum.

Recommendation #18

“Produce and deliver a social marketing campaign promoting the benefits of participation in sport and recreation as well as information that assists Albertans in accessing opportunities to participate.”

Is there a difference between “social marketing” and “social engineering”?

If so, what is that difference?

Before the Alberta Government spends any more taxpayers’ money on a crusade to convert the pagan couch potato to the true gospel of physical fitness, it needs to answer the questions raised in the CTF’s response to Recommendation #1.

Taking money from Albertans and using a portion of that money to preach a message to Albertans is an insult to the intelligence of Albertans.

Albertans who choose to spend all of their spare time behind a computer or in front of a television have already heard the message of health and fitness, as have those Albertans who choose to smoke or who don’t eat a lot of vegetables. The message of health and fitness is already available to couch potatoes through books, television, newspapers, the internet, etc. Is it right to spend tax dollars to pay for more preaching to those who have no interest in listening?

Recommendation #19

“Develop joint projects for sport that feature collaborative efforts by government departments impacted by sport (ie. the ministries responsible for sport, tourism, lotteries, health, justice, economic development, etc.)”

Government should get out of the business of redistributing money to sports clubs, events and facilities which are chosen by politicians and bureaucrats.

Albertans are smart enough to make their own choices about sports and recreation.