



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Fourth Session

Standing Committee
on
Alberta's Economic Future

Bill 201, Employment Standards (Firefighter Leave)
Amendment Act, 2018

Thursday, May 3, 2018
5 p.m.

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The 29th Legislature
Fourth Session**

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (NDP), Chair
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (UCP), Deputy Chair

Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-Meadowlark (NDP)
Connolly, Michael R.D., Calgary-Hawkwood (NDP)
Coolahan, Craig, Calgary-Klein (NDP)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
Fitzpatrick, Maria M., Lethbridge-East (NDP)
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UCP)
Horne, Trevor A.R., Spruce Grove-St. Albert (NDP)
Kleinstauber, Jamie, Calgary-Northern Hills (NDP)*
Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (NDP)
McPherson, Karen M., Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill (AP)
Piquette, Colin, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (NDP)
Schneider, David A., Little Bow (UCP)
Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (UCP)

* substitution for Craig Coolahan

Also in Attendance

Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (UCP)

Bill 201 Sponsor

Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (UCP)

Support Staff

Robert H. Reynolds, QC	Clerk
Shannon Dean	Law Clerk and Director of House Services
Stephanie LeBlanc	Senior Parliamentary Counsel
Trafton Koenig	Parliamentary Counsel
Philip Massolin	Manager of Research and Committee Services
Sarah Amato	Research Officer
Nancy Robert	Research Officer
Corinne Dacyshyn	Committee Clerk
Jody Rempel	Committee Clerk
Aaron Roth	Committee Clerk
Karen Sawchuk	Committee Clerk
Rhonda Sorensen	Manager of Corporate Communications
Shannon Parke	Communications Officer
Jeanette Dotimas	Communications Consultant
Tracey Sales	Communications Consultant
Janet Schwegel	Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Participants

Ministry of Labour

Lenore Neudorf, Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategy and Policy

Humyra Sabir, Executive Director, Workplace Policy, Legislation and Program Development

5 p.m.

Thursday, May 3, 2018

[Mr. Sucha in the chair]

The Chair: All right. Good afternoon. I'd like to call the meeting to order and welcome all members, staff, guests to this meeting of the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future.

My name is Graham Sucha, the MLA for Calgary-Shaw and the chair of this committee. I'd ask that members and those joining the committee at the table introduce themselves for the record, starting to the right with my deputy chair.

Mr. van Dijken: Glenn van Dijken, MLA, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Ms Sorensen: Rhonda Sorensen, manager of corporate communications with the LAO.

Ms Parke: Shannon Parke, communications services with the LAO.

Mr. Taylor: Wes Taylor, MLA, Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Schneider: Dave Schneider, Little Bow.

Mr. Gotfried: Richard Gotfried, MLA, Calgary-Fish Creek.

Dr. Starke: Richard Starke, MLA, Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Mr. W. Anderson: Wayne Anderson, MLA for Highwood.

Ms Sabir: Humyra Sabir, executive director, Labour.

Ms Neudorf: Lenore Neudorf, ADM, Labour.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Jamie Kleinsteuber, MLA for Calgary-Northern Hills.

Mr. Dach: Lorne Dach, MLA, Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Piquette: Hello. Colin Piquette, MLA for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Carson: Good evening. Jon Carson, MLA for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Horne: Good afternoon. Trevor Horne, MLA for Spruce Grove-St. Albert.

Mrs. Littlewood: Good evening. Jessica Littlewood, MLA, representing the beautiful rural constituency of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Connolly: Michael Connolly, MLA for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Maria Fitzpatrick, MLA, Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Koenig: Good evening. I'm Trafton Koenig with the Parliamentary Counsel office.

Dr. Amato: Hi. I'm Sarah Amato, research officer.

Dr. Massolin: Good afternoon. Philip Massolin, manager of research and committee services.

Mr. Roth: Good afternoon. Aaron Roth, committee clerk.

The Chair: Excellent. And those on the phone?

Ms McPherson: Hello. Karen McPherson, MLA for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

The Chair: Excellent.

For the record I'd like to note that Mr. Kleinsteuber is substituting for Mr. Coolahan.

Before we turn to the business at hand, a few operational items. Please note that the microphones are operated by *Hansard*, and the committee proceedings are being live streamed on the Internet and broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV. Please set your cellphones and other devices to silent for the duration of the meeting.

I'll move on to the agenda. Are there any additions or changes to the agenda that a member would like to propose? Seeing and hearing none, would a member like to move a motion to approve the agenda? Moved by MLA Dach that the May 3, 2018, meeting of the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future be adopted as circulated. All those in favour, please say aye. All those opposed, please say no. And on the phones? Excellent. That is carried.

We will move on to the minutes from our last meeting, March 29, 2018. Are there any errors or omissions to note? Seeing and hearing none, would a member like to move adoption of the minutes? Moved by MLA Fitzpatrick that the minutes of the March 29, 2018, meeting of the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future be adopted as circulated. All those in favour, please say aye. All those opposed, please say no. And on the phone? Excellent. That is carried.

We'll now move on to item 4, review of Bill 201, Employment Standards (Firefighter Leave) Amendment Act, 2018. Hon. members, at our March 29, 2018, meeting the committee agreed to invite a presentation from the sponsor of Bill 201, Mr. Anderson, as well as a technical briefing on the Employment Standards Code from the Ministry of Labour. We'll hear first from our invited guests, and then members will have an opportunity to ask questions.

At this time I would like to invite Mr. Anderson to make his presentation. You have 10 minutes.

Mr. W. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, everybody, for the opportunity this evening to address you all on this wonderful Thursday night. Much appreciated. I want to thank everybody for giving me the chance to discuss my private member's Bill 201, Employment Standards (Firefighter Leave) Amendment Act, 2018.

Just as a personal note, it's probably the shortest addition to any legislation that I've seen here for a while, so I'm surprised we're sitting here, but I'm grateful for the opportunity because this legislation is to help firefighters, who risk their lives every day when responding to emergencies. The bill simply proposes to amend the Employment Standards Code by including unpaid leave for part-time, casual, or volunteer firefighters and also protects the firefighters from loss of employment. Currently, without this piece of legislation, employers can and may terminate part-time, casual, or volunteer firefighters from their employment for missed time due to fulfilling their duties as a firefighter.

To me, I think this is unacceptable, and I'd like to talk a bit about how the economic downturn has affected the mindset about volunteering or holding part-time positions as a firefighter in the communities that cannot afford a full-time roster. As I spoke about before, I was an MLA for less than six months when I received a phone call from a young man from southern Alberta. He had been a volunteer firefighter for one of the municipal districts, and I said "he had been" because his regular full-time employer had recently given him an ultimatum, quote: quit your job, or quit firefighting because as long as you work here, you aren't a firefighter. End of quote.

My initial thought was that there had to be some protection in Alberta's labour legislation preventing termination based on an individual's participation as a volunteer firefighter. I think I was wrong. From my research I don't think Alberta has any protection for volunteer or part-time firefighters. In Alberta emergency service is also stretched so thin that rural Alberta routinely experiences code reds, and we've all been witness to that, especially recently. So if that's the case, why are we refusing job protection for those who volunteer or work part-time as an emergency first responder? It was at that moment that I decided something needed to change. These firefighters do more than just respond to fires; they also respond to everything from medical emergencies and chemical spills to traffic collisions.

Now, some municipalities and rural communities cannot afford to fill the firefighter hall roster with full-time employees. They rely on the part-time and volunteer firefighters in their communities to meet those sometimes life-threatening situations. Now, as you may or may not be aware, according to the Alberta Volunteer Fire Fighters Association 80 per cent of the firefighters in Alberta are volunteers, and 97 per cent of Alberta's fire departments are run by volunteers.

Ever since we've been faced with the economic downturn, many of these individuals, who give their time for such a noble cause, have been cautious regarding their volunteer visibility with their employers as many fear there may be unnecessary repercussions regarding taking leave to fight fires or respond to emergencies within their county. This bill simply closes a loophole and will protect employees from being discriminated against by their employers. Employees simply want to serve their community and put their own safety and comfort at risk for the safety of their community. I think it's remarkable that any employee would actually be discriminated against in such a community – these communities focus on individuals – yet that does happen. It illustrates the need for this type of legislation.

The rural crime strain has hit rural Alberta hard, and the resources provided to combat this problem have been overstretched and proved inadequate. Certainly, at times this government is attempting to but, as of today, has been unable to provide the security for rural residents. With the government's support of this bill, they will at least be able to provide for their safety.

This isn't an issue that affects urban Alberta, where we're having this meeting right now. Here union firefighters are ready and available. Rather, this committee needs to see the communities in the rural parts of this province, communities that are struggling to ensure the safety of their residents because of the lack of firefighters. Residents in these communities are hard working and are vital contributors to the Alberta economy. Rural residents deserve to have their safety protected just as much as urban residents. Bill 201 is an important piece of legislation that aids rural communities to recruit and retain volunteer firefighters to help to ensure the safety of their rural residents.

In closing, Mr. Chair, I believe that Bill 201 is a vital piece of common-sense legislation which will give needed protection to part-time, volunteer firefighters. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Anderson.

We will now call upon Lenore Neudorf and Humyra Sabir from the Ministry of Labour to provide the committee with a technical briefing on the Employment Standards Code.

Ms Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Chair. We are here today to provide the committee with some information about the Employment Standards Code and its application. This is in response to a request

from the committee for some information in relation to the proposal to amend the code.

The code is minimum standards conferring legislation and only applies to employment relationships under provincial jurisdiction. The code does not distinguish between part-time and full-time and does not define the term "full-time." The code establishes standards for all employers regardless of size, even small or major corporations. Volunteers are not considered to be employees, and therefore the work arrangements they may enter into are not considered employment. Some of the standards the code establishes are for hours of work; entitlement to and treatment of overtime; and rules for general holidays or statutory holidays, vacations, and breaks. If there is a dispute about whether these standards have been met, the recourse is primarily through a complaint system. There are several job-protected leaves in the code, with the majority tied to corresponding employment insurance benefits.

Volunteers participate in an unpaid activity where someone gives them time to help out an organization or a cause. It is of benefit for both parties involved and does not involve a financial payment. Volunteering is usually done on a part-time basis, depending on the availability of the volunteer and the organization's need.

5:10

Employees tend to be characterized as having more control exerted over their hours of work, their pay, and their movement as compared to volunteers. Employees tend to receive hourly, weekly, and monthly pay, usually work specified hours set by the employer, and work under the direction and control of an employer, usually with no choice to refuse work.

Alberta's treatment of volunteers not covered under the Employment Standards Code is consistent with other Canadian jurisdictions.

There were a number of amendments made to the code this year following a public consultation process. The changes ranged from simplifying some of the rules to improving employee protections for young workers. Changes were made to job-protected leaves, primarily to align the changes with changes to the federal employment insurance benefit programs; for example, changing the length of leave or eligibility. The list on this slide identifies currently available leaves which establish job protection for the employee. Generally leaves are available for significant life events or circumstances that may be beyond the employee's control. There are a few exceptions such as reservist leave and citizenship ceremony leave.

Employees also cannot be terminated during the notice or entitlement period unless the business is suspended or discontinued. With all job-protected leaves, an employee cannot be terminated for the sole reason that they are requesting or taking an entitlement which they are owed under the code. Some common elements of the provisions around leaves are that they generally prescribe the amount of notice an employee must provide to their employer of their intent to take a leave, the amount of notice to return to work, and in some cases they must provide documentation such as a medical note.

If an employee is terminated while on leave despite these prohibitions, they may file a complaint with employment standards for wrongful termination. While employment standards can reinstate employees who are wrongfully terminated, in reality employees often do not want to return to the workplace as their relationship with their employer is severed at this point. Instead, a settlement is usually reached in compensation for the lost wages that the employee would have earned. When accessing what is owed to the employee, the investigating officer may take into

account whether the employee was able to find work and whether they have other sources of income available to them.

Failure to comply with leave provisions can result in a level 2 administrative penalty, starting at a minimum of \$1,000 for the first offence. Failure to provide a leave or failure to provide an entitlement which an employee is owed is prohibited under the code. Similar to the above situation, reinstatement will not always work in situations where an employee was fired for taking a leave even though they may have had grounds to take the leave in the first place and for the duration. This is because the employment relationship is severed, and in many cases both parties are not interested in working together anymore.

Some quick facts about volunteer firefighters, about whom we are speaking today. Volunteer firefighters are typically serving rural areas. According to the Alberta Volunteer Fire Fighters Association – and we heard this already from Mr. Anderson – 80 per cent of firefighters in Alberta are volunteers, 97 per cent of fire departments are run by volunteers, and there are over 450 volunteer-operated fire departments in Alberta.

Reservist leave is the only leave in Alberta that is tied to a specific type of duty. To be eligible for reservist leave, you must be employed for 26 consecutive weeks with the same employer, as opposed to the 90 days that is proposed in Bill 201, and reservists can take the leave if they are deployed to a Canadian Forces operation outside of Canada; inside Canada if assisting with an emergency or the aftermath of an emergency; or for 20 days of annual training a year. Of the leaves in the code currently, the most similar to what is being proposed by this bill is the reservist leave.

Some key considerations. The following are key considerations for Bill 201, Employment Standards (Firefighter Leave) Amendment Act, 2018. Consultation with employers and volunteer fire departments could be useful to determine the level of need. Depending on what the full-time employment role is, this could create some hardship for employers, particularly in communities where fire departments respond to motor vehicle collisions on highways. It is possible that some volunteer firefighters are employed full-time in other important roles, where unexpected absences could have a negative effect on the employer and/or the health and safety of the public or other workers. Job-protected leave could benefit volunteer firefighters by allowing those employees the ability to assist during emergencies while knowing that their primary employment is secure.

Consideration may also be given to whether job protection is needed for short-term events versus long-term absences; for example, responding to a significant wildfire versus a local emergency call for a structural fire. Changes may disproportionately affect small businesses in rural areas. Most cities have paid fire departments.

While Bill 201 may attract volunteer firefighters, this may disincentivize employers from hiring these individuals as their schedules may be unpredictable. Their proposed leave may provide certainty to employees who are also volunteer firefighters in that they can respond to a call in that capacity and they do not have to risk losing their jobs as a result. The proposed leave may attract new volunteers who wish to provide firefighting services in times of an emergency but have concerns about the potential of losing their job.

There is no direct monetary cost to employers to provide the proposed leave as the leave would be job protection only.

Thank you.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you both very much.

I'll now open up the floor for questions for either MLA Anderson or for our experts from the Ministry of Labour. Member Connolly.

Connolly: Sure. I just have a few questions for Mr. Anderson. If you need to go back and forth, just let me know, and I'll wait. My first question. I believe that during debate on the bill you mentioned that you heard from constituents on the need for this protection. How many constituents did you hear from?

Mr. W. Anderson: Not just constituents, but I had the three local fire chiefs in my constituency communicate with me as well, and all three of them are fully supportive of this bill. As far as constituents go, I don't have any direct record of the number of constituents, but several constituents had contacted me after we initially put this bill into play, I think over a year and a half ago, and they were all in favour of it as well.

Connolly: Great. Thanks.

Did you hold any consultations with the general public or stakeholders?

Mr. W. Anderson: Not with the general public but with stakeholders; i.e., the fire chiefs in my constituency and telephone conversations with other fire chiefs as well.

Connolly: Sorry. Just in your constituency?

Mr. W. Anderson: In my constituency, and my colleagues and my caucus had done the same thing as well with their constituents.

Connolly: Okay. Great. How many stakeholder organizations have you heard from altogether, and have you heard from any since introducing the bill?

Mr. W. Anderson: The only stakeholder organizations I spoke with were the fire chiefs in my constituency, and my caucus members did the same in their constituencies as well.

Connolly: Have you talked to the association?

Mr. W. Anderson: No, we did not talk specifically or directly to any associations.

Connolly: Okay. I just want to clarify. All your caucus colleagues have talked to . . .

Mr. W. Anderson: Several have, and one of my caucus colleagues was actually once a volunteer firefighter.

Connolly: Great. I noticed that the UCP caucus did not submit any prospective stakeholders for the consultation list. Is this because you already consulted with or otherwise heard from stakeholders, and if so, which ones?

Mr. W. Anderson: Our intent is to do a verbal consultation list today, to introduce that with the committee. I'm not able to do that, but members of the committee will be.

Connolly: Is the intent of your bill to provide unpaid leave for short-term fire situations or long-term fire situations or both? I'm thinking about how an employer may need to hire someone temporarily to do the work of an employee on a longer term leave for firefighting.

Mr. W. Anderson: A combination of both, but external things do happen. The Waterton fire last year, down in southern Alberta, was fairly devastating, and several firefighters were made available to assist in that endeavour. Let's keep in mind that for every position required during any emergency, typically four or five volunteers are

available at any one time, so it doesn't really dilute the employment requirements for a number of employers.

That being said, this request has been well received by several individuals as well, so if we were to go to the stakeholder list, maybe we'd want to open it up to a number of individual firefighters who may want to speak on this bill as well.

5:20

Connolly: Great. Thanks. Those are all my questions.

Mr. W. Anderson: Excellent.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to ask any questions? Mr. Piquette.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Chair. I guess, first, just a general comment. I think the member is to be commended for being concerned with the situation of volunteer firefighters, and I appreciate that he's brought this issue up. You know, as our province becomes more and more urbanized, sometimes people from urban areas don't necessarily realize when they're travelling through rural Alberta that if they do have a road accident or they're involved in an emergency, chances are that it's going to be volunteers who are going to be responding. I think it's good to put the spotlight on that. I come from Boyle myself, and throughout my entire constituency it's all volunteers except for a couple of professionals who work with volunteers in Sturgeon county. So it's definitely important.

Now, of course, on this particular issue has the ministry heard similar concerns from either the public or volunteer firefighters, you know, as have been raised by MLA Anderson?

Ms Sabir: In recent years we have not, but that could also be because there is no existing protection. If there were grounds for a complaint, that's typically when we would hear from someone who's been denied an entitlement that they are owed. In this case there is no existing job protection, so most likely, if a volunteer firefighter found themselves in that situation, they would not think to come and bring a complaint to Labour.

Mr. Piquette: Okay. Well, how about members of the public advocating for this type of leave protection? Is that something?

Ms Sabir: I'm not familiar in the last few years with more than one or two concerns that I've seen.

Mr. Piquette: Since MLA Anderson proposed this bill, has there been any direct contact from the public?

Ms Sabir: My direct contact with the public is somewhat limited in my role. So in terms of what I'm aware of, no, there has not been.

Mr. Piquette: Okay. What are other jurisdictions doing on this issue? Is the ministry aware of any other Canadian jurisdictions who are currently considering making these types of changes – I mean, specifically protecting the job leave of volunteer firefighters – or that have?

Ms Sabir: We understand that there is at least one jurisdiction that has established job protection. They've done it through a fire services piece of legislation. In terms of through labour standards codes or employment standards codes there is no other jurisdiction that we're aware of that has plans to introduce a similar leave.

One of the things that we've heard in conversations with colleagues across the country has been that generally there is an acceptance in terms of the importance and the value of this work.

I'm not aware of any drivers towards changing legislation in other provinces.

Mr. Piquette: Okay. Then maybe just sort of going back, you said that there is one jurisdiction that's looking under different pieces of legislation. Maybe you could expand on the difference between that and what's being proposed here.

Ms Sabir: I'm not very familiar with what exactly their provisions say. They're not under the Employment Standards Code. We could bring that information back. But I do know there is job protection for an individual, which essentially, I believe, prohibits their termination if the person is acting in the capacity of a volunteer firefighter.

Mr. Piquette: Okay. Thanks.

I just have one more question, with your indulgence.

The Chair: Yeah. One more, and then we'll move on to Dr. Starke.

Mr. Piquette: Okay. Of course, last spring the ministry conducted a focused review of the Employment Standards Code – and I know that thousands of Albertans participated in this review – and since then you've moved to modernize, you know, the code to reflect what was heard and, of course, what was needed to bring our standards up to date. Now, I'm just wondering: during this review was this particular issue raised?

Ms Sabir: To my knowledge, during the review this particular leave was not identified.

Mr. Piquette: Okay. Now, I guess this will be my last question, with your indulgence. Or would you like me to take . . .

The Chair: I'll allow Dr. Starke to have an opportunity here.

Mr. Piquette: I can cede the floor to Dr. Starke, then.

Dr. Starke: Thank you. Thanks, Chair. Thanks to both Mr. Anderson and to the officials from the Labour department here. I'm going to preface my comments by saying that I have a great deal of familiarity with volunteer fire departments. That really started when I was on city council in Lloydminster. It may come as a surprise to some people in the room here, but the city of Lloydminster, with a population of 30,000 people, still operates on a volunteer fire department basis. We have a paid chief and a couple of paid deputy chiefs that deal with inspections and training, but all of the active members of the Lloydminster fire department are volunteers. In fact, every other municipality, every other community, ranging down to tiny hamlets, places like Clandonald and Paradise Valley and Dewberry, which maybe you've never heard of or certainly have never been to, also rely on volunteer fire departments.

We're very fortunate in our part of the world because we also have at Lakeland College in Vermilion the fire training school, which is outstanding and, in fact, is used by fire departments from around the world to train their personnel. Many of the firefighters in our area have taken the full training and have gotten very high levels of qualification.

What my concern is – and I was hoping that perhaps Mr. Anderson or somebody could give some data on this – and what I am hearing from the volunteer fire departments is that they are seeing a significant increase in call volume over the last number of years and that a lot of that increase in call volume is driven by medical emergencies, medical response, not so much, necessarily, by fires. Certainly, the number of fires goes up and it goes down. Some springs, when it's dry, there are a lot of grass fires. Structural

fires are always sort of a sporadic hit-or-miss thing, but when they do happen, of course, they can be quite significant. What we are seeing is a significant – or at least I've heard anecdotally that there's a significant increase in medical response, and in many communities it is the volunteer firefighters that are called to the scene of many motor vehicle collisions first.

I was just wondering, Mr. Anderson: do you have data on that, or could we get some data on what the volume of calls is for some of our volunteers? That's through either the Fire Chiefs Association or that sort of thing.

Mr. W. Anderson: Excellent question, Member Starke. Unfortunately, I don't have access to that data, but perhaps through the committee that request could be put forward to the chair to provide that data back to this committee. I myself don't have direct access to that information, and I doubt that if I personally requested it, they would provide it to me. As an official from the committee you may want to request and recommend that.

Dr. Starke: Yeah. I think it's information that would be helpful because I think it would help frame the potential impact of this legislation. You know, on a broad basis, Mr. Chair, I'm in favour of this bill. I'm in favour of these measures. I have tremendous respect for the people who are prepared to volunteer to provide security to human life and property and, in our part of the world, livestock as well. These are folks that are prepared to drop everything.

In fact, I'll even give you an example. We were lining up the vehicles for the Clandonald ag society annual parade, which is interesting because it actually does two laps of town. You don't get rid of all the candy just doing one lap. They set me on top of a high-wheel sprayer last year, and they said that a manure spreader might be more appropriate. But in Clandonald we were about to start the parade, and it was August, and all of sudden all of the fire trucks took off. There was a fire call. Unfortunately, it depleted about half of the parade. They just took off. On a moment's notice they were gone. You know, this is the kind of level of dedication of these folks. They get precious little in return.

My concern, though, is the other side of the coin. You know, you almost hate to bring this up, but I think it has to be stated – and it has to be stated on the record – that the other part of this whole equation is the employers of these volunteers. During the time that I was a business owner in Lloydminster, I did not have a volunteer firefighter on my staff, but had somebody come to me and said, "Look, I want to be a volunteer firefighter," I would have had to ask a number of very pointed questions. It's not that I don't support the idea of them volunteering for their community, but in the nature of the type of business that I run, if a fire call comes in, it's difficult to be able to drop everything and go to a fire call.

5:30

That's why I ask, again, the question about frequency of calls. If this happens maybe once a month, well, it's not a big deal, but if it starts happening two or three times a week, then for the employer it becomes significantly disruptive to the business that they're trying to run. I do think we need to get that, and I'm afraid I missed the deadline for stakeholders. I'm not even sure there would be a stakeholder group that we could call on to speak on behalf of employers. I mean, it would be pretty hard to find them. Maybe the provincial Chambers of Commerce, but even then it's difficult.

You know, I will tell you that my concern in this bill is that I agree with the idea of providing protections for the firefighters; I absolutely do. No firefighter who is willing to volunteer should have to worry about losing his or her job because they're

volunteering on behalf of their community. But I am worried. Where does that leave the employer? If you're an employer and you have an employee that maybe when they started with you they were doing one call a month, a couple of calls a month, it was no big deal, but now because of the increased call frequency, they're doing two, three, four calls a week. In some areas that's what it's getting up to. If I've got an associate veterinarian in the middle of surgery and they get called out, they can't drop everything and go, and if they do, they are placing other lives in danger. There's an issue there. I mean, I'm glad I was never faced with sort of the issue of the ultimatum that your constituent was given. I don't agree with it, but I understand it. I think I wanted that on the record.

Certainly, I think we need some numbers in order to be able to understand this better. Finally, a question to the folks from the Department of Labour. The volunteer nature of all of these workers is problematic in terms of trying to codify this. I mean, there is no contract. You know, all of the employment standards, the labour codes, don't cover volunteers, nor are they likely to in the future because I think that would be something that would be very, very difficult. I guess I'm wondering: in your cross-jurisdictional work have you found anything in terms of other jurisdictions where volunteers are dealt with that they have some sort of thing despite their lack of a formal employment arrangement?

Ms Sabir: I think in terms of occupational health and safety coverage, that does apply to volunteers. In terms of employment standards, because of the nature of the rules which are around the times that you report to work, overtime, breaks, no, there is no coverage or extension of that to volunteers in other jurisdictions.

Dr. Starke: Okay.

Thanks, Chair. That's everything.

The Chair: MLA Littlewood.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you very much, Chair. One of the things that I find interesting when I go to different chambers of commerce events in rural Alberta is that there is always the volunteer firefighter group there, and they're always there pitching for members. The president is always pitching for members because, you know, when you obviously go out further away from large urban centres, you're more dependent on each other. There's always the ask of employers that if they can't join themselves to ask their employees to join because you do have these sort of symbiotic relationships.

If someone is going to be there to either fight the fire on your own structure or to be able to go out to the highway for those calls for motor vehicle collisions, the community actually has to often provide those services. It is in a business' best interests to be part of bringing together a labour contingent to be able to do that work. One of the things that I was wondering when we were discussing this in the Legislature was if you had spoken to the chambers of commerce in your area or if you had spoken to the Alberta Chambers of Commerce.

I know that, you know, the Vegreville chamber of commerce always has people asking for more representation of businesses to come and be members. Phil Rowe: I've also seen him come to events in Fort Saskatchewan and talk about the importance of either being a member yourself or encouraging your employees to be members of these because the communities out there are quite connected. You know, all these fire chiefs, I know that in my own constituency between Bruderheim and Tofield and Vegreville, they're all good friends, so they're able to help mobilize in each other's areas and figure out how you get more people to be members.

In Bruderheim there have been challenges in recent years of having members be there for longer than a year, so they work really hard at trying to have a cohesive community, where they can rely on each other and do team-building events. If you can get people, I think it's over the three-year hump, they'll usually be members for much longer as opposed to dropping out because, of course, the demands of life are what they are when you have families and businesses and you have to travel to work and all of that.

That's my question: if you had consulted with the chambers to see to see if they have heard this concern, if they have heard this concern from businesses releasing employees if that employee gets called on a call. I know that being in Mundare and often seeing the mayor, who was a member of the volunteer fire service, he would get called out to collisions that were out on the highway. There is always that effort, an ongoing effort, to recruit more people. I see in my own experience more encouragement to be members of the volunteer fire service, not less, but if you haven't had those conversations, I would suggest that when we talk about the stakeholder list, we invite the Chambers of Commerce to be part of that consultation.

I know that Ken Kobly is quite close in dealing with chambers throughout the province. Yeah. I think it would be probably good to talk to some of the ones further out, but I know also that Ken Kobly, probably because of how well he works with the chambers of commerce across the province, would be able to bring feedback from our more remote chambers in Alberta on this issue and get some feedback that way. Part a question and part just some remarks of what I've experienced.

Mr. W. Anderson: How fortunate you are to live in a constituency where the people are always helping and wanting to help each other because that's the same way in southern Alberta as well. We're always reaching out.

Yes, I did talk to the Chambers of Commerce. I've been a member of the Okotoks and High River chambers of commerce for several years. No, no employer has stated anything that's negative about it, but the fact is that I think this bill will streamline the process to make it easier for people who do want to volunteer. Listening to your preamble, and maybe I misinterpreted it, it sounded to me like there was some difficulty in your constituency, the specific points that you mentioned, that people may not want to volunteer for whatever reason. Maybe one of the reasons they don't want to volunteer is because, as I said earlier in my preamble, you know, in the economic downturn people are a little afraid of losing their jobs or causing discomfort with their employer. This bill would streamline that process and maybe make it easier for your constituents.

I notice on the stakeholder list that Okotoks and High River are not on it. I'm hoping to have those people included on the stakeholder list to be contacted, but I think, generally, speaking to the chambers of commerce is an excellent idea because they have the pulse of the small communities. As I said earlier, I've worked with both chambers in my constituency, and I'm looking forward to working with the ones in Turner Valley and Black Diamond. People may not be aware, but I believe the boundaries are changing, and if I seek to run in the next election, I'll have to introduce them as well. But I did speak to the fire chiefs in both Black Diamond and Turner Valley, and they both are very supportive of this and would like to be on the stakeholders list.

5:40

Then, again, Member Littlewood, thank you for that. You're very lucky that people at all those meetings are asking for help. I mean, what a great opportunity. That being said, if it's difficult for them

to provide it because, as Member Starke stated, there are a lot more calls. We've seen a lot of red zones in southern Alberta, EMS situations, ambulances and EMS and firefighters being taken away from what we think would be their regular jobs or their volunteer jobs because of the situation. I think that overall maybe we need to consider looking at our health services component in all rural constituencies.

In the meantime, if this one small bill will streamline process and help people or encourage them to become volunteers and work a little harder in their community, what a great thing to do.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Gotfried.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Chair, and thank you to our presenters from the Ministry of Labour and to the Member for Highwood. I guess I've got both some comments and some questions as well. I'd like to think that, you know, the numbers that we looked at, the high percentage of volunteer fire chiefs and volunteer firefighters in this province, mean that we are basically a volunteer fire department province, hence the importance of this. We've talked about security. We've talked about safety of our communities, and I think that that's extremely important. All of us in this Legislature hope that people care about safety and security, and we hope that they care about their neighbours, a key issue here and a key factor in this.

You know, when we think about it on a community basis, whether it's in St. Albert or whether it's in Okotoks or High River or around the province, people understand that it might be their neighbour's place that's being saved by a fire today, but it could be their own place the next day. I think that that brings that whole sense of community spirit together. Of course, we see what happens when those tragedies and disasters happen. We see the communities pull together, and I think that that happens upstream of the disasters in terms of protection.

I think that the idea that there would be no job loss risk, as proposed in this private member's bill, will also give us that great ability to attract more people. I reflect on what the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster mentioned about the employers. As somebody in from the private sector myself in the past, you know, we can do these things, we can embark on them, but we also have to think about the consequences to others and their livelihoods and their life as well.

I'm hoping that if we can attract more people because there's no penalty, we'll actually have a larger pool of volunteers to draw from, whereby if you're in the middle of helping one of your clients as a veterinarian, that you're not stuck in the middle of a procedure and somebody is running off, if that actually is a choice and they've got a system in place to be able to opt in when there's a call and to get the number of people they need to address that situation. Of course, there could be emergencies where everyone is needed. Certainly, again, I think that is a community issue. I think that that safer communities issue is a really positive one, and I'd like to see us move forward with this.

Dr. Starke had mentioned as well about the stakeholder consultation. I think we've got some reasonably good coverage. We're going to talk about the draft stakeholders list here in a bit, but we've got chambers of commerce represented and an opportunity for them to poll their members, which in turn will poll their members within their communities, the business people who may have some concerns. If we look at this as a cascading down list, we will have an opportunity through consultation to find out what the concerns of small businesses or businesses in the communities might be in terms of challenges.

Again, we know it's tough times, and nobody wants to be losing half their crew in the middle of a construction job or whatever it is in their communities, but if there are greater numbers and greater protection and some parameters around what the requirements are going to be and when they may not be able to do it – I know one of my colleagues was telling me about their son, who was a volunteer firefighter and on their farm. He actually came across their combine sitting in the middle of the field with the door open, still running, and wondered what the heck had gone on. In fact, there'd been a fire, and his son had basically jumped out of the combine and jumped into his truck and gone to it. That's the kind of passion that these volunteers have.

This is a bill that I think is going to help those numbers, so the fire chiefs and 97 per cent of the firefighters in this province. This is beyond the big centres. We're well protected in the urban areas. We have well-paid and well-entrenched and well-managed firefighting departments in the larger cities and in some of the secondary large cities as well, but this really addresses those places that are challenged because of the distances involved. The closer we can have those safety forces, those volunteer firefighters and their, in some cases, managed leadership, I think the better it is for Alberta.

I'd like to thank the member for bringing this forward and maybe just ask for some comments in terms of what you think is the opportunity to expand the volunteer base through this legislation that may reduce the burden on employers.

Mr. W. Anderson: Just a comment, and then I'm going to ask one of my other colleagues in the caucus, who was a part-time firefighter.

Back to the comment of Dr. Starke, usually for every volunteer position needed at any given time, there are four or five volunteers that are available. Those are the numbers we've got in southern Alberta. That being said, as far as making it easier for employers, I think consultation with the chambers is a prudent idea, but rest assured that this legislation is to protect the volunteer firefighters, not to protect the employers.

That being said, I don't believe that the employers really need protection, because more often than not a volunteer firefighter will explain to the employer: I am a volunteer, and I may be called to duty. It's just that in some particular cases it has come up because some individuals have felt uncomfortable. It becomes a tenuous situation, and I do not want to have a volunteer firefighter have to debate with their employer. I think the employer in most cases would understand. I just want to make sure that the firefighter is covered and that they feel comfortable in doing so. That's the loophole, I thought, in the labour legislation. I just want to fill that loophole.

Mr. Gotfried: Okay. Thank you. That's awesome.

The Chair: I will go to MLA Horne, then MLA Taylor, and then cut the list off because we still have quite a few things on the agenda. I'm going to ask if we can limit our preambles just so that we can get to the items at hand. There will be an opportunity to discuss stakeholder lists and consultations coming up on the agenda as well.

MLA Horne.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Chair. You know, I was just reflecting on my interactions with several firefighters and also, in part, on the comments by Dr. Starke, and I was wondering if MLA Anderson – I suppose Labour might know, but I don't think you would have that off the top of your head – knows what pool of employment the average volunteer firefighter comes from. I know I've met several paid firefighters who work in the city but live in the county, and

they also volunteer when they're not on shift. I could imagine that there are probably a few nurses that are also in that situation. If you're in the middle of work and end up getting called, that could pose some challenges. I'm trying to figure out where to look for impacts, I suppose.

Mr. W. Anderson: As far as who volunteers, it's a dichotomy of individuals. I'll tell you: management, labourers, farm workers, you name it. Len Zebedee is the just-retired fire chief from High River, 47 years in the business. He's one of my stakeholders that I'm hoping to put on the list. He had come out of the ranks as a volunteer firefighter in southern Alberta long before High River had a full-time fire department. I'll tell you: car salesmen, retail clerks, other professionals, nonprofessionals, whoever wants to give their time to their community. The nice thing is that they want to give their time, and it's a wide variety of individuals. There's not one specific character or nature of individual who wants to volunteer. I couldn't provide that to you. I'm not a sociologist.

Mr. Horne: Okay.

The Chair: Mr. Taylor.

5:50

Mr. Taylor: Okay. Well, thank you. For some of these, I feel like I can answer some of the questions in regard to me having been a volunteer firefighter in the past. You know, the importance of firefighters cannot be overstated. These volunteer firefighters, again, make up 80 per cent right there.

When you're looking at what he's been asking for, it's simple. It's to propose and make an amendment to include unpaid leave for part-time, casual, and volunteer firefighters. Without this piece of legislation, employers can and may terminate part-time, casual, and volunteer firefighters' employment for missed time due to fulfilling these duties.

There is so much that the volunteer firefighters do. I found that when I was out in the community, I'd be thanked frequently by people that were employers saying: thank you for doing this. Even last week, if you want to look at it, during those few days of warm weather we had, several fires started to encroach upon the town of Wainwright. You know, it's shocking because everybody else was wet, but we had forest and grass fires. Like I say, these fires were encroaching, and they thought they were in trouble. They had to do an extra call-out and make sure that everybody that was available could come out.

Typically speaking, we get probably half a dozen, maybe eight people come out for a call, depending on what the call is. We do get a text message that alerts us to what it is. Sometimes it may be a single-vehicle accident; somebody went off the road. It could be a house that's fully engulfed in flames, or it could be, you know, a grass fire. It could be just about anything, and I have seen just about everything.

Again, what they do is so important, and we need to be able to protect these people. From people that I've talked to in our communities, the employers, I haven't gotten a whole lot of push-back saying that we shouldn't have volunteer firefighters, but we need to protect these people in case this is going to happen. There are fewer jobs at this present time, so we need to make sure that there are protections for these people.

I'm kind of wondering: are there fewer people becoming volunteer firefighters at this time? Is that one of the concerns? I was going to ask Mr. Anderson: are you finding that?

Mr. W. Anderson: As I stated earlier – and I'll repeat myself – you know, in the last couple of years, during the recession and the

economic downturn, there were a lot of individuals who have been cautious about volunteering for a position like this given the fact that they're in fear for their positions and their jobs. That being said, I can't give you hard data. I can only give you some of the people who have approached me and talked to me and spoken to me, the one particular case with this one young man who was given the ultimatum.

I'll bring up a point of reference. In a rural fire situation there are no fire hydrants. You've got to get a water-haul truck, and it's got to follow you. Just last year a young man lost his life driving the water-haul truck. He was a volunteer. Are you aware: are his benefits still there? I mean, is his wife being taken care of? I don't know. But I'll tell you that everything went into jeopardy.

You know, when you live in the country, you take care of yourself. I often used to joke: just recently we finally got a fire hall, that's about 15 kilometres away, but until then, if my place ever started on fire, the only thing they would save would be the foundation. Get the animals out of the barn, you know, take the valuables and your paperwork out, and get the hell out because there ain't nothing that's going to take care of it. People take it for granted in the city that when you turn your tap on, there's water. In the country, especially in Alberta, water is always an issue with a well. I'm on my second well now, and it's only two and a half, three gallons per minute, so I have to put a cistern in the house. Having a cistern means you've got limited water access.

If my place starts on fire, thankfully now we have a fire hall down the street. Because of some lobbying by myself and several others, we managed to have the MD put one in. But a lot of places are not like that, and a lot of things are in jeopardy, so that water-haul truck is very important. That young man, you know, took it upon himself to maybe take a curve too far or too tight or whatever happened, but he's gone. And is he protected? I don't know.

Mr. Taylor: I would like to ask you. Again, you talked about the pool of employees. Well, I was a volunteer firefighter up to the time that I had my heart operated on, so that was when I basically had to quit. They can come from anywhere, all the way to being an MLA, obviously. In the pool of employees we have people that are nurses, we have people that are in the RCMP, we have people that are teachers, we have people that work in welding, and the list goes on of people that were in the fire department, so a huge pool of people that are just passionate about what they're doing.

But you were talking, obviously, to the different stakeholders, being the chiefs or the main people that are trying to find people to work there. Do they, I guess, agree with you that this would help increase the number of firefighters that would potentially be there for them?

Mr. W. Anderson: Yeah. My three local fire chiefs are obviously supportive of this.

Mr. Taylor: Okay. I think that would be what I've heard from the fire chiefs that I've talked to in my riding.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Taylor.

Being cognizant of the time, we'll move on to the next item of business.

Ministry folks as well as Mr. Anderson, you're free to stay if you wish, or you may excuse yourself as well. Thank you for your presentations.

Mr. W. Anderson: Thank you very much for the opportunity. I will move on. Go, Jets, go.

The Chair: Oh, that's another reason we've got to move through the agenda here as well.

Hon. members, at the March 29, 2018, meeting the committee directed research services to prepare a crossjurisdictional comparison as part of the committee's review of Bill 201. The crossjurisdictional comparison was posted on the committee's internal website on April 28 of this year. In addition, members had requested information in regard to the impacts that Bill 201 might have on volunteer firefighter services, the situations involving municipal and industrial shared firefighting resources.

I'd like to ask Dr. Amato to speak to the crossjurisdictional comparison as well as any additional research that's been requested.

Dr. Amato: Hi. Good evening. In the interests of time I'll attempt to be very, very brief. I hope everyone has a copy of the crossjurisdictional. Perhaps what I'll do is that I'll reiterate and supplement some of the information that was provided by the Ministry of Labour. As the Ministry of Labour just informed the committee, there are no similar provisions to that which is proposed in Bill 201 in employment standards legislation across the country, including at the federal level. That being said, there are three statutes across Canada which pertain in some way to the status of volunteer, part-time, and auxiliary firefighters.

Two statutes, one in Nova Scotia and one in Quebec, include provisions on leave that is granted to part-time and/or volunteer firefighters. Let me start with Nova Scotia. The relevant provision in Nova Scotia's Civil Service Act provides leave with pay in certain circumstances for volunteer firefighters who are employed in Nova Scotia's civil service. The relevant provisions in Quebec's Fire Safety Act provide protection for the employment of volunteer and part-time firefighters, and Quebec's Fire Safety Act includes sanctions and remedies protecting that employment.

I also note British Columbia, which has a regulation to its Employment Standards Act. British Columbia is a bit of an outlier because it explicitly excludes auxiliary or volunteer firefighters from the part of British Columbia's Employment Standards Act which pertains to leave.

Finally, the crossjurisdictional notes that at the federal level private members' bills have been proposed to amend the Canada Labour Code between 2013 and 2016, but none have been enacted.

I apologize again if that was a bit of a quick information dump, but I'm happy to answer any questions. There are lots of details about each of the provisions in the crossjurisdictional as well as about the way in which I went about my research to come to that conclusion. The survey of legislation is in section 2.0 and also in the appendix. I hope that's somewhat helpful.

6:00

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you very much, Dr. Amato.

Are there any questions or comments in regard to the research that's been presented?

Seeing and hearing none, I'll move on to the next item of business, which is consultation. Going on to the draft stakeholder list – oh, sorry. Go ahead.

Dr. Amato: Sorry. May I also provide an answer to the research request that was given at the last meeting?

The Chair: Yes.

Dr. Amato: I'll be very, very brief. The question was simply pertaining to arrangements that industrial firefighters might have with municipalities throughout the province. Endeavouring to answer the question, I had a very, very helpful conversation with the fire commissioner of Alberta. If I may, Mr. Chair, if the

committee decides to approve the stakeholder list and to call on stakeholders, the fire commissioner of Alberta may be a very, very helpful resource to answer all sorts of questions and indeed the question that was asked to me in a much more fulsome manner. The short answer, very, very briefly, is that, of course, yes, there are arrangements between industrial firefighters with municipalities. Industrial firefighters who work for industry tend to be full-time firefighters, and their arrangements with municipalities are governed through mutual aid agreements. That's the very, very short, brief answer. I hope that's somewhat helpful.

Thank you.

The Chair: All right. Now, any additional questions or comments?

Okay. We'll move on to consultation. Hon. members, as directed at our March 29 meeting, research services has prepared a draft stakeholder list in relation to our review of Bill 201. At that meeting members were asked to put forward additional stakeholders to add to the draft list. The draft stakeholder list, which includes the committee members' suggestions, was posted to the committee's internal website on April 26 of this year. At this time I'd invite any comments or questions from members in regard to the draft stakeholder list. Mr. Gotfried.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Chair. I think this is a great list that's been prepared here as a draft list. We do have a few additions. I think we discussed earlier the opportunity that obviously someone like the Alberta Chambers of Commerce can act on behalf of a broader group, but we do have five submissions that we would like to add to the list. I can provide these in writing to the clerk. One is the fire chief of the town of High River, one is the fire chief of the town of Turner Valley, and one is the fire chief of the town of Okotoks. I believe my colleague also has a couple of additions. I can send these directly to the clerk for consideration for addition. Certainly, I think that at this point in time we'd welcome any other additions from the other members as well in consideration of this request.

Thank you.

The Chair: Excellent. Just because you alluded to it, I'll move to Mr. Taylor.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you. Yeah, I had a couple of other names, well, specifically three other names that I would like to include. Those would be Jon Koroluk, the Edgerton fire chief; Cliff Bethune, who just recently retired – he'd been a fire chief for many, many years – and Clair Prior, a now retired fire chief from Irma.

The Chair: Excellent. Just for the benefit of the committee clerk, if you could provide that in an e-mail to him.

Mr. Taylor: Absolutely.

The Chair: Excellent. Any other questions or comments? Mr. van Dijken.

Mr. van Dijken: Yeah. I just have one question with regard to the list. This section includes the Alberta Chambers of Commerce. It has a number of the chambers of commerce listed there, but it does not necessarily identify – mind you, we do have the Alberta Chambers of Commerce identified in other listings. As Member Littlewood had suggested, the Alberta Chambers of Commerce would be a good voice for all of them if we need to add them, but I see they are on the other list.

The Chair: Yeah. Then they would just consolidate the list once they're all finished.

Mr. van Dijken: Okay.

The Chair: Excellent. Any other members have any questions or comments? Dr. Starke.

Dr. Starke: Yeah, just a couple, Chair. I think the list is very comprehensive. I would comment, though, that I do think there is to a certain extent some duplication on the list. We have, you know, a number of organizations that are very much parallel. I'm not sure if there is a process that we'd go through whereby we could let them know that perhaps they could pool their submissions into sort of a joint submission rather than getting seven or eight that might say substantively a lot of the same things.

The other comment I will make – and I'll provide this to the committee clerk in writing – is that someone that I think could provide a great deal of perspective is a gentleman by the name of Orest Popil. He is the fire services chair and oversees all of the volunteer fire departments in Vermilion River county, so he would certainly have perspective there.

The other one that I would suggest – again, I'll submit it in writing – is the fire school at Lakeland College in Vermilion. They have a connection with volunteer fire departments not just in Alberta but through their training services actually right around the world, so they could provide perhaps some additional insight into this.

The Chair: Excellent. Any other questions or comments? Dr. Massolin.

Dr. Massolin: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just to respond directly to Dr. Starke's question about the joint submission, of course, it's up to the committee if you want to approach it that way, but I suppose that the letter that the chair sends out on behalf of the committee to the stakeholders could include a line or two stating that, you know, if the stakeholder wishes to submit a joint submission with other stakeholders, they could opt to do that.

Thank you.

The Chair: Excellent. Any further questions? Mr. Dach.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Along the same lines as Dr. Starke's suggestion, I think I do recall Mr. Anderson suggesting that stakeholders plus individual members of the stakeholder groups could be invited, so we might have language around that in the invitation which would offer that opportunity. As we talk about public consultation and the need for it or not in the future, I think it might be wise, if we're crafting language to invite certain stakeholders, that we offer them the opportunity to invite individual members of the stakeholder groups rather than – I don't know if it's necessary to go wide to the whole public in consultation on this matter. I think individuals could be captured by a special line or two in the invitation to stakeholder groups that individual members of the stakeholder group could be invited if they were so inclined.

The Chair: Excellent. With that being said, if there aren't any additional questions or comments – oh, sorry.

Mr. Gotfried: I would just concur with Member Dach. We've got some pretty good umbrella organizations here, and it'll save us some time and some money if we let them fan that out and then allow them either to collate submissions from their members or, as the member said, allow them to submit, particularly in the written portion. I think that if we get to oral submissions, we'd probably rather that that be collated, but at the written submission stage I think that that would be a great suggestion. So thank you for that.

The Chair: I just want to make sure that before we work with the committee to draft what the intent of the committee is here – what I'm hearing from committee members is to obviously reach out to these members and also to have a form in which other submissions can be provided, if I'm correct, but to do it in a way that can allow individual members to reach out to these organizations and individuals within the stakeholders. Ultimately, we'd just have the letter specifying that, and then obviously it's the prerogative of individual committee members if they want to refer people to this as well.

Mr. Dach.

Mr. Dach: Yeah. What I was thinking was just that given the probability, in my assumption anyways, that we're probably not going to be inviting the wide public to consult on this, if there were individual members of a stakeholder group who wished to bring forward a submission, they could do so within the context of that stakeholder's submission but as an individual as well. It's not to open up the whole invitation process to the general public but just to make sure that individuals within a stakeholder group who had special interest in making a submission could do so or felt that they were invited to do so kind of alongside of or in tandem with that stakeholder group.

The Chair: Okay. Any other questions or comments? Mr. van Dijken.

6:10

Mr. van Dijken: Yeah. Going along with that, I do believe that it's important to be able to allow the public to have written consultation or the ability to provide written feedback to the committee. Along with what Dr. Starke had brought up earlier, the concerns that might be out there that we might not get feedback from enough employers or enough volunteers or those who would like to be volunteers, it would be helpful to hear from individuals as much as it is helpful to hear from associations. We can get a good sense of what people are thinking out there if we allow them to give short submissions in writing.

The Chair: Excellent. Mr. Dach.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Chairman. I'd be willing to consider the will of the committee on this issue, but I wonder if others in the committee might want to comment as to my sentiment that I don't really know if this issue requires a rather extensive public consultation. We're talking thousands of dollars and so forth. Rather, I think we'd capture interested parties and the breadth of the whole issue by inviting those on the stakeholder list as well as individual members of the stakeholder groups without going to the expense – there's a whole other kettle of fish involved inviting the wider public.

The Chair: Excellent. I'm going to rein us in a little bit because the next item for discussion is discussion on public consultations and draft communication plans.

I think the will that I'm generally getting from committee members is that we understand who we want to have on the stakeholder list for written submissions unless there is any additional feedback that people want to put for stakeholders that we're submitting written requests for information to. Is there any additional feedback in relation to that?

Then we'll move on to the next item of the agenda if we have a motion to move. MLA Littlewood.

Mrs. Littlewood: I just would like to make the motion to approve the draft list with the additions that have been fielded if there are any that weren't captured in the draft list.

The Chair: Okay. I have a draft motion that Parliamentary Counsel has written for me. Let me know if this meets your intent, MLA Littlewood. It would be moved by you that

the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future approve the draft list of prospective stakeholders with respect to the review of Bill 201, Employment Standards (Firefighter Leave) Amendment Act, 2018, with the following additions: additions that were proposed in the May 3, 2018, meeting of the standing committee.

Mrs. Littlewood: Yes.

The Chair: Okay. We now have the motion on the floor. Are there any other comments? Mr. Gotfried.

Mr. Gotfried: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. In principle, I mean, the stakeholder list, I think, as it is quite broad. I think that as long as we are flexible, as was suggested by MLA Dach, and that stakeholders underneath the purview of those lists are accepted as well, it broadens that reach.

I do have some concerns, as raised by MLA van Dijken, that we may have some volunteer firefighters that would like to do this, and I'm not sure that they would necessarily be captured in this list. If they are, then that would be fine. We also may have some employers, businesses who are not a member of their local chamber of commerce and who also would like to say something. I'm not sure if in public consultation we can say to someone that if you don't belong to an association or if you don't belong to a local chamber, you're excluded from this consultation. That would be my only concern on that.

I think I would like to ensure that we, at least in the written portion of this – I think that if we follow past practices, we will distill that list down if we move to oral presentations and try and get the umbrella groups there to come and speak on behalf of their broader membership. But I don't think we can exclude those individual businesses and those individuals who may want to have a say in this. This is about consulting the public, so I would be concerned if we exclude them. That's my only comment. If we're not excluding them, then fine. But if we are, then I have some concerns that we're limiting this, and there'll be some Albertans that say: "I am actually involved with this. I should have a say. I'm going to be affected. Why don't I get an opportunity?"

Thank you.

The Chair: We can open up that discussion further in the next phase here as well.

Any other comments or questions about the motion on the floor?

Seeing and hearing none, I will call the question. All those in favour of the motion as proposed by MLA Littlewood, say aye. All those opposed?

That motion is carried.

Mrs. Littlewood: I would like to also propose a motion that would ask for the written submissions from our stakeholders to have a deadline of June 6.

The Chair: All right. So the proposed motion, moved by MLA Littlewood, would be that

the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future invite written submissions from stakeholders, with a deadline of June 6.

This obviously implies a deadline to submit submissions to the committee by that time.

MLA Gotfried.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Again, I think the tight timelines I'm actually in favour of, but I think we also need to find

out – and maybe this is a question we can ask. We also have a draft communications plan in hand here. If we were to say June 6, that's, give or take, a month from today. But if it takes us two weeks to get this out, that means we're down to a couple of weeks from that deadline date. I'd like to know what is a realistic plan, whether we go for the cost or no-cost initiatives here, how long it would take us to roll this out, as part of this conversation if we could.

The Chair: Like, how long to get the letter issued to stakeholders?

Mr. Gotfried: How long to the stakeholders list as well, yeah, in terms of that that's coming from the clerk's office. How quickly – I mean, is it going to take us a week to get those out or 10 days to get those out, or can we turn those around on Tuesday?

The Chair: Mr. Roth.

Mr. Roth: Thanks, Mr. Chair. So just in terms of the stakeholders portion?

Mr. Gotfried: Just the stakeholders portion.

Mr. Roth: Yeah. It's pretty straightforward to put the letter together and get the e-mails and that necessary to get that out to the stakeholder groups, so I would say that the turnaround would be within the week, if not before. Even less, possibly.

Mr. Gotfried: With that, then, I would absolutely support this.

The Chair: Any other questions or comments about the motion on the floor?

Seeing and hearing none, I will call the question on the motion as proposed by MLA Littlewood. All those in favour, please say aye. All those opposed, please say no.

That motion is carried.

We'll now move on to the draft communications plan and public consultation. Hon. members, the Legislative Assembly communications office has prepared, at the direction of the committee, a draft communications plan should the committee wish to seek public input as part of the review of Bill 201, Employment Standards (Firefighter Leave) Amendment Act, 2018. This draft communications plan was posted on the committee's internal website May 2. Ms Rhonda Sorensen and Ms Shannon Parke from the Legislative Assembly communications office are here to answer any questions from the committee on the draft communications plan.

Now I'll open this up for discussions on the floor by members about what the committee wishes to seek when it comes to written submissions from the public as part of the review of Bill 201. Member Carson.

Mr. Carson: Thank you very much, Chair, and thank you to our LAO staff as well as research services here. I'll do my best to be quick with my questions. I'm just wondering. I'm hoping to get some information around costs associated with this communications plan. I think the number was around \$59,225. I mean, that's quite a bit of money. Looking at my bill, which was a while back, alone the radio campaign was \$8,000 for that one compared to this plan of \$20,000. That previous bill, the fair trading amendment act, was a little bit broader in terms of trying to get consumer information and their thoughts. This seems like it's a little more specific. I guess, first of all, why is there such a difference? That would be my first question to research services.

Ms Sorensen: If I may, Mr. Chair, when we put together this plan, we did so with the assumption that you would want to look at a

broad audience. We were looking at provincial saturation, particularly into the rural areas. We based this very closely on the plan that was done for the time bill last year and took the cost of that simply because it was saturating the entire province. Their cost had come in at \$17,000 for the radio ads whereas we put an estimate of \$20,000. We would need, actually, a direction from the committee if they wanted to undergo radio advertising at all, and then we would have to approach the radio networks to see what the recommendations would be.

6:20

Mr. Carson: Okay. I do have a few more questions, but I think I would like to hear from some other members on the committee. It sounded like there was some acceptance of maybe looking at less of a public consultation budget. Maybe if somebody on the opposition side has some comments on that.

Mr. Gotfried: Some comments. You know what? This is a great plan. Thank you to the LAO communications team for bringing this forward. But, you know, we live in some tight fiscal and frugal times here. The no-cost initiatives plan, I suspect, given through the stakeholders list and social media, which we know has a pretty strong reach and can be circulated in these local communities: media relations, stakeholder targets, committee websites . . . [An electronic device sounded]

The Chair: Go on.

Mr. Gotfried: Yeah. Maybe there's a hockey game on that's being interrupted.

I mean, I guess that, from my perspective, if we can do this at the lowest possible cost and still get a broad reach – and let's not forget that we have 87 members that can circulate this out – that would be my suggestion, that we take this as the lowest cost initiative and do it in as timely a fashion as we possibly can.

Dr. Starke: Yeah. I would concur. I think this bill has a very focused and somewhat narrow group of people that are going to be specifically interested in it. I mean, we need a scalpel, not a spatula here. You know, I think that if we're very focused and we specifically reach out to the people on the stakeholders list – I guess I have a hard time imagining a scenario where there are a lot of people who weren't on the stakeholders list that would have strong feelings on this piece of legislation. I think that if we can effectively reach out to them and augment it with the no-cost initiatives, it's \$60,000 we can save the government.

The Chair: So, ideally, from what I'm hearing from the committee, it is to accept any additional submissions that come in but not seek any advertisement in the process? Excellent.

Ms Sorensen: Can I just make a comment, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Yeah.

Ms Sorensen: I just wanted to clarify, if I could, whether we're looking at still doing the no-cost initiative, so still essentially advertising publicly but at no cost to the committee. Okay. None of the cost initiatives?

Dr. Starke: That would be my recommendation.

Ms Sorensen: Okay.

Mr. Gotfried: Yeah. I think we've got some pretty inexpensive reach. We will be spending money because your time is going to be

highly valuable to achieve this, but I think we can do that, and I think I would recommend that.

The Chair: Any additional questions or comments?

All right. With that being said, I need someone to move a motion.

Mr. Gotfried: Before we move ahead with that, I'm just looking back on this. There are a couple of things on here, the Alberta Fire Chiefs Association website and various others. Maybe, in consideration of this, we can affix a small budget to our communications team so that if they see that there's an opportunity to do something – it's \$225 for the Alberta Fire Chiefs Association website – then we can allow them some latitude to do some small spends, to leverage the no-cost initiatives. That would just be my suggestion in this motion if we possibly can.

The Chair: Yeah. We'd need to approve just a budget for that and give them clear direction to do it.

Do you wish to comment?

Ms Sorensen: Well, certainly, Mr. Chair, we tried to just provide kind of like a menu of everything that we could do, and we're absolutely open to whatever direction the committee wishes to give. We'll happily implement any of the strategies you want us to.

The Chair: Yeah. So, at the end of the day, we have to make sure that we provide them with specific direction. If we wanted to do online ads, we'd have to provide them with that direction.

Sorry. Mr. Gotfried, which website were you wanting to seek for that?

Mr. Gotfried: Well, in here is the Alberta Fire Chiefs Association website, in the paid portion, which is \$225.

The Chair: Oh. Okay.

Mr. Gotfried: I mean, I guess maybe we could make a motion to approve up to a \$1,000 spend to leverage the no-cost initiatives for ensuring that we reach . . .

The Chair: Yeah. If you put a specific item in, that will work out as well.

Mr. Gotfried: I could suggest a dollar amount to give them some latitude. Are we able to do that?

The Chair: If you give them the specific website, it'll give them the latitude. Like, if you're very specific to what you want, they'll . . .

Mr. Gotfried: There's only one listed on here. There may be others that they come across as we work through the stakeholder list. I'm thinking that \$1,000 would give them some latitude to pick the four most important ones at \$225 each and be able to leverage that no-cost initiative. I think that if we're going to do this, we give them a little bit of latitude for leverage.

The Chair: Dr. Massolin.

Dr. Massolin: Yeah. I was just going to say that as I look at the Alberta Chambers of Commerce website, there's something similar. There's a rotating banner. We could perhaps investigate what kind of cost is associated with that. I mean, the key is that we don't know what the costs are at this point, so, you know, we need the direction from the committee as to what the limits are.

Thank you.

The Chair: Member Carson.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Chair. If the member is willing to put forward a motion for a \$1,000 budget, I'm happy to support that.

The Chair: Mr. Gotfried, I have a proposed motion here. It would be moved by Mr. Gotfried that

the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future approve the draft communications plan prepared by Legislative Assembly Office communications in relation to the committee's review of Bill 201, Employment Standards (Firefighter Leave) Amendment Act, 2018, as revised, with a budget of \$1,000.

Does that meet your intent? Perfect.

Are there any additional comments or questions?

Connolly: This will include a similar deadline of June 6, 2018?

The Chair: There is no submission date right now. I'm not sure. Does the communications plan outline a deadline or length of time?

Ms Sorensen: No, Mr. Chair. We would concede to whatever direction we were given by the committee.

The Chair: This would just be for the communications plan.

Ms Sorensen: I think, if I'm understanding Mr. Connolly, Mr. Chair, if I may, he's just asking that whatever initiatives we do undertake would follow that June 6 submission deadline.

The Chair: Then if you had an additional motion that's soliciting the feedback, that would have the deadline outlined in it, and that would need to be an additional motion following the communications plan one.

Mr. Gotfried: We can add this in.

Connolly: Well, we can both read a motion afterwards.

The Chair: Okay. Any other questions or comments in relation to the motion?

Seeing and hearing none, I'll call the question on the motion as proposed by Mr. Gotfried. All those in favour, say aye. All those opposed, say no.

That motion is carried.

Just as we wrap up this final detail, I just need the consent of the committee to continue past 6:30. Seeing no opposition, I will continue.

As alluded to by Member Connolly, if we're soliciting submissions, we need a motion to be brought forward. You can also outline what ideal deadline you would like for that as well on public submissions.

Connolly: I would assume that we would keep it kind of together and do June 6, 2018, as well.

The Chair: Do you want to propose a motion?

Connolly: Yeah. I'll propose a motion that the submission deadline is June 6, 2018.

The Chair: A draft motion we have is moved by Member Connolly that

the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future solicit written submissions from the public in regard to its review of Bill 201, Employment Standards (Firefighter Leave) Amendment Act, 2018, to be received no later than June 6, 2018.

I'll open up that motion for discussion.

Seeing and hearing none, I'll call the question on the motion as proposed by Member Connolly. All those in favour, please say aye. All those opposed, please say no.

That motion is carried.

6:30

Excellent. All right. The final thing that we want to make sure is that the advertisements proposals will be brought forward, on what they'll look like and the scope of them, too, because the motion is vague, specifically on which websites we're doing. It has been very traditional in the previous committees that the chair and the deputy chair approve these after they're circulated to the committee.

With that being said, before we can move forward with that, we'd need a motion on the floor.

Mr. Gotfried: So moved.

The Chair: The draft one we have is moved by Mr. Gotfried that the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future authorize the chair and deputy chair to approve the advertisements on behalf of the committee in its review of Bill 201, Employment Standards (Firefighter Leave) Amendment Act, 2018, ensuring that these advertisements highlight that any submissions received may be made public by the committee.

I'll open that up for discussions.

Seeing and hearing none, I'll call the question on the motion moved by Mr. Gotfried. All those in favour, say aye. All those opposed, say no.

That motion is carried.

Any other business that members wish to discuss?

Seeing and hearing none, the next meeting will be called after polling committee members following submissions received.

With that, I need a motion to adjourn.

Dr. Starke: Chair, no. Actually, I was trying to get your attention with regard to the date of next meeting.

The Chair: Oh, I'm sorry.

Dr. Starke: Chair, I'm going to put in a request. I sent an e-mail to the committee clerk that these meetings be held sometime between 1:30 on Monday and 4:30 on Thursday and not outside of those parameters. I would suggest that there's an option on both Tuesday and Wednesday in the supper hour, from 6:15 to 7:15, for the committee to meet. These meetings that are asked or polled to be happening either on the Thursday night or the Friday, you know, make it difficult for us to participate in person, which is always the more effective way to participate in committee meetings. For those of us who are travelling back to our constituencies, some to southern Alberta or to far northern Alberta, Thursday we like to get on the road.

As it is, today's meeting is, you know, fairly tight to when we were adjourned anyway. For most of us, we've got stuff booked on Fridays, and especially during session we've got stuff booked pretty much the whole day. So I would certainly ask the committee chair to consider calling these meetings for, like I say, either Tuesday or Wednesday from 6:15 till 7:15, which works quite well, or Monday, for that matter. We're here, and we're going to be doing evening sessions for the foreseeable future, so that would seem to be a window of time where a lot of work could get done.

The Chair: For this meeting, the rescheduling of it, I recognize that we were probably likely not going to be able to fill in a gap of an hour and 15 minutes. That was why I allowed for ample time for this one. I'll obviously take those considerations into account as we move forward on the next draft ones here, too. This one was in haste, too, because we were rescheduling after the Legislative Assembly voted to move forward on night sittings, too.

Are there any other questions or comments?

Dr. Starke: A motion to adjourn.

The Chair: Moved by Dr. Starke that we adjourn the meeting. All those in favour, please say aye. All those opposed, please say no. Excellent.

The meeting is now adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 6:34 p.m.]

