



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
Stakeholder Presentations

Thursday, September 6, 2018
9 a.m.

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Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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

Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (UCP)*
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)
Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (NDP)
McPherson, Karen M., Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill (AP)
Payne, Brandy, Calgary-Acadia (NDP)**
Piquette, Colin, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (NDP)
Schneider, David A., Little Bow (UCP)
Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP)***
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (UCP)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UCP)****

* substitution for David Schneider

** substitution for Jonathon Carson

*** substitution for Trevor Horne

**** substitution for Richard Gotfried

Bill 201 Sponsor

Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (UCP)

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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

Peter Krich, President, Alberta Fire Chiefs Association

Al Kemmere, President, Rural Municipalities of Alberta

Drayton Bussiere, Chief, Lacombe County Fire Service

Henry Thomson, Deputy Chief, Training and Operations, St. Paul Fire Department

9 a.m.

Thursday, September 6, 2018

[Mr. Sucha in the chair]

The Chair: Good morning. I'd like to welcome everyone here to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future. Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge that we are on the traditional territory of the Treaty 6 people.

My name is Graham Sucha, and I'm the MLA for Calgary-Shaw and the chair of this committee. I would like all members who are joining us at the table to introduce themselves for the record, and then we'll be joined by those on the phone. I'll start with the member on my right.

Mr. van Dijken: Good morning. Glenn van Dijken, deputy chair and MLA for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. Yao: Tany Yao, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

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

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

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

Ms Sweet: Good morning. Heather Sweet, MLA for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Payne: Good morning. Brandy Payne, MLA for Calgary-Acadia.

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

Mr. Coolahan: Good morning. Craig Coolahan, MLA for Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Dach: Good morning. Lorne Dach, Edmonton-McClung.

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

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

Ms Peck: Good morning. I'm Elizabeth Peck, acting research officer.

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

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

The Chair: All right. We'll hear from those members on the phone.

Connolly: Michael Connolly, MLA for Calgary-Hawkwood.

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

The Chair: Excellent.

For the record I would also note the following substitutes: Ms Payne for Member Carson, Mr. Yao for Mr. Gotfried, Mr. W. Anderson for Mr. Schneider, and Ms Sweet for Mr. Horne.

Before we begin the business at hand, a few operational items. Please note that the microphones are operated by *Hansard*. The committee proceedings are 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.

Moving on to the next item of business, the agenda, would a member like to move a motion to approve today's agenda? Moved by Member Dach that the agenda for the September 6, 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. Members on the phone? Excellent. That motion is carried.

Approval of the minutes from previous meetings. We have the minutes from our last meeting, June 22, 2018. Are there any errors or omissions to note? There will be one change that I will be adding to the minutes, which involves Ms Peck. In the minutes she should be listed as acting research officer. Are there any objections to that amendment? Seeing and hearing none, can I have a member move the minutes? Moved by Member Fitzpatrick that the minutes for the June 22, 2018, meeting of the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future be adopted as revised. All those in favour, please say aye. All those opposed, please say no. On the phones? Excellent.

Mr. Piquette, if you'd like to introduce yourself for the record.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Colin Piquette, MLA for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater. Good morning.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

All right. We'll move on to the review of Bill 201, Employment Standards (Firefighter Leave) Amendment Act, 2018. Hon. members, going on to oral presentations, on June 22, 2018, the committee decided to hear oral presentations in regard to its review of Bill 201. All of the persons and organizations that the committee decided to invite were contacted by the committee clerk. For today's oral presentations all participants have been invited to make a 10-minute presentation as part of the review of Bill 201. After the presentations are completed, I'll open up the floor to questions from committee members.

At this point I will welcome our guests. Please introduce yourself for the record, starting with Mr. Thomson.

Mr. Thomson: I'm Henry Thomson, deputy chief with the St. Paul fire department.

Mr. Bussiere: Good morning. I'm Drayton Bussiere, fire chief for Lacombe county fire service and chair of the AFCA Recruitment and Retention Committee.

Mr. Kemmere: Good morning. I'm Al Kemmere. I'm a councillor in Mountain View county and the president of Rural Municipalities of Alberta, RMA.

Mr. Krich: Peter Krich. I'm the fire chief with the city of Camrose and president of the Alberta Fire Chiefs Association.

The Chair: Excellent.

I will begin with Mr. Krich. If you'd like to start with your presentation.

Mr. Krich: You bet. No problem. First of all, thank you very much for the opportunity to be here today to continue on with the discussion in relationship to Bill 201. There's been a lot of talk around the province, in the fire service specifically, in regard to this, and I'm sure you've heard a lot from the province as well. As an

organization, as the fire chiefs are, we are a group that gets together to discuss issues and concerns that affect us all in the province, and that's all fire services, right from the volunteers to the career departments. Again, thank you for that opportunity to be here today.

In regard to where we're going with this, I'd like to just give a little bit of history on myself. I'm in my 38th year in the fire service. I started out as a volunteer firefighter. I spent 11 years as a volunteer firefighter with the city of Camrose and progressed up into a full-time position and have been the fire chief for the city of Camrose now for the past 18 years. My whole career has been in Camrose as a firefighter. My department is a composite department. I have four full-time staff, which are basically administrative staff, and then I run 40 volunteer paid on-call firefighters. So I truly understand what it means to be a volunteer firefighter, coming right from the grassroots up. I just wanted to get that out in understanding where I'm coming from and from where I speak and also from where I'm representing the Alberta Fire Chiefs Association and our board and the decision that we've made not to look at accepting Bill 201 as it is.

We understand that the concept of Bill 201 is looking after the volunteers and trying to protect the volunteers, and we all believe the volunteers are very important to our organizations and to the fire service in our province. It's always good that we do good things, and government has done a lot of good things for our province over the years in regard to the tax credits and supporting that aspect.

But going back in a little history of what's happening with the recruiting and retention of volunteer firefighters, it's always been a challenge. It was about 10 years ago that it was addressed to our organization as a huge issue to be addressed. Back in 2009 our organization did an actual feasibility study just to figure out: what are the issues with recruiting and retaining volunteer firefighters in our province?

It was interesting because one of the barriers that did come up – there were a number of barriers that came up – was the lack of support from the employers. This is where this comes into play with Bill 201, that we're impacting the employers or putting legislation in front of our employers which, in turn, is just going to impact the whole program that we developed a number of years ago. When we looked at the barriers, the barriers were in a number of areas: the aspects of lack of support from the employers, lack of support from the family, availability of the people in the community. There were a number of things there, but the biggest answer that came out of the whole conversation back then was that people truly didn't understand who volunteer firefighters were in our communities – who they truly were – what they are, and what they do. That was the big message.

We went into a whole campaign. For the last 10 years we've been working on a campaign of educating our province and citizens in the province and our communities in our province on: who are truly volunteer firefighters? I believe today that when firefighters on a fire truck pull up to your emergency when you've called 911, you believe those guys to be professionals, which they are, but you don't realize that this is not their real job, that this is not what they do for a living. This is what they do to help their communities. What happens is that when these guys go away from their work to do these jobs, they are trained to do the job. They are performing their jobs, but it's not their real job. Their real job is their employment.

We've always said, in my organization anyhow, when we talk about you as a firefighter and a volunteer firefighter: what comes first? Your family, then your job, and then the fire service. That's how you build a fire service in your community. The question was that we need to educate people on what truly was a volunteer firefighter, so we came up with a campaign of identifying. A lot of

you might have seen the logo, the messaging that came out, and if you haven't, that messaging is identifying a volunteer firefighter. We started out with split image photography, identifying that firefighters are more than just firefighters, that they are employees in their communities. So the message was that they're not just a firefighter. They are an employee in their communities, or they could be a businessman in their community. They could own that business.

9:10

So the big message that we were trying to get out was on trying to help people understand that people in your community work in your community. You, too, might see yourself in one of these pictures in your community, and that, too, would help recruit and retain a volunteer firefighter.

The challenge was when we got this message out there, the whole concept of: how do we get over these barriers, barrier 1 being lack of support from the employers? Well, the biggest hurdle that we found was that if we communicate and work in our communities as a partner, the volunteer fire service is an organization in our communities that relies on support from the community. That support is those employers, and that's what we needed to create.

There are a lot of communities in our province that actually do have good recruiting programs and good volunteer fire services, including my own. I've had a volunteer fire service forever, for 111, 112 years now, and that's a long time. It's been in our community that way, and it's been sustainable – why? – because we have a good recruiting and retention program and a working relationship in our community. Our community supports us. Our business community supports us.

We also understand that some businesses can't let employees who are firefighters go. We understand that. That's because that's their primary job. That's their primary focus. We also know that people can get let go if we have a good working relationship with our employers. That's what we're trying to push across right here, that in order to build a fire service in our communities, you have to have good working relationships with people in your community, that being, number one, your employers. So we make sure that that communication line is open in that aspect.

When we put legislation forth and we put that type of comment or that type of process forward, it puts in the danger of our employers saying: we don't want anything to do with firefighters in your community if we have to do certain things and follow certain rules because legislation says. It's very easy not to hire a volunteer firefighter. That's going to damage the fire service in our province. We will not get volunteers if employers find that. We have a lot of self-employed, a lot of employers that employ firefighters in our fire departments. Now, you've got more than one that could be impacted here, but if we have a relationship built and an understanding built, you can get those people to really work for your community.

That's our message from the fire service and the fire chiefs' message, that this bill will do more damage to the long-term relationship building in our communities with the volunteer fire service than it will to support it. Employers in our community are the backbone of our fire service. If we put legislation on employers, it will harm and damage the potential for recruiting and retaining those volunteers if we continue to do that.

There are a lot of things that can be done, there's a lot of support that can be done for the volunteer fire service, but I do encourage that, if anything, you can look at the support and the mechanisms of: how do we support at a government level or a municipality level an employer that employs a volunteer firefighter? That's what we do in our community. You do the appreciation for the employer.

You have a barbecue for the employer. You have celebrations of your employers. You create a relationship of appreciation for them hiring an individual in our community, a volunteer firefighter. That's what sustains that individual to be a member. That's what sustains the volunteer fire service.

So from a fire chief's point of view and from our organization, we can't support this bill in that fashion because of what damage it has and what the potentials are for the fire service in our province.

Thank you.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you very much.

We'll now move to Mr. Kemmere. You have 10 minutes.

Mr. Kemmere: Okay. Well, thank you. Thank you for taking the time to hear from us today. I am, as introduced, president of the Rural Municipalities of Alberta, so I represent the 69 counties and MDs that are in Alberta on many different aspects, this being one. But a little bit of history also, I think, is important. I've sat on the Olds-Mountain View county police advisory committee for 14 years, so we've gotten to work through that whole part in my time there as far as the role of volunteers and to get a good understanding of the role of volunteers.

I come as a former employer. We ran a dairy farm of about a hundred cows and ran a beef operation. Two of my employees at one time or another were volunteers in the Bowden fire department. We did have an incident one time in the middle of milking where there was a call-out, and you have to make sure that you have the abilities to adjust to that because the cows, once they're in the milking parlour, just don't wait the same way as other things. I just wanted to share that as an item that I'll refer to a little bit later on. But the key is that we rely on the volunteer fire departments and the volunteer firefighters to support the service that we need and to strengthen our communities.

The intent of Bill 201, I think, is a good intent when you look at it from a very high level, where it is identifying situations where we can try and strengthen our volunteer fire departments. But it also is creating some concerns, some concerns that Chief Krich just identified, when it comes to the employer's perspective on this, and we need to make sure that we are pragmatic in our approach on this.

One of the items that we are bringing forward is some of the terminology that is included in the bill. Terms like "occasional unpaid leave" or "assist in fire," as drafted, are a little open to interpretation. If you interpret it one way, the response can be as little as a training event during work hours. Training or equipment maintenance could be items that right now, without a good, clear definition, could fall under that umbrella. Yet what we need to have clear is that the aspect of assisting in fire services needs to be clarified so it is actually that when you are an employee on employee time, you are responding to an emergency fire situation, not the regular training pieces that come typically in your more casual time and not when your employer is expecting you to be there. We need to make sure it is clear that when an employee leaves their employment to respond to a situation, it is in response to an emergency event, not a training event. So I guess some clarity in that interpretation would be valuable.

The other item that is a concern: "without good cause, prevent a person from acting as a part-time firefighter." As we have employers who are operating small businesses, we also need to make sure that that does not affect the viability of that operation, because when you start affecting the viability of a business, you start losing that partnership, and you start losing that support in your community for the volunteer fire services. So I think that with the intent of this being fine, we have to make sure that we create a partnership between both the employers and the fire services that are being

provided, those volunteers being such a key piece of that. Without the employers' support, you cannot really create that partnership, and you can never force a partnership.

What we are looking at is the ability in the legislation to have an employer sit down with the employee who is a volunteer firefighter and come up with a contingency plan. Rather than have a hard line on how they need to be able to respond and there being no ifs, ands, or buts about it, sit down with the employer and the employee or employees, as can be the case, and come up with a contingency plan as to: on this day this is who would be able to respond. Others may have to step back because the business still needs to operate. I think that would be imperative in this, the ability to build that relationship.

The second part is that there may need to be a maximum amount of time that an employee can leave. I live right on highway 2, and the bells go off often because of responding to highway 2 incidents more often than fire incidents, but we rely on our fire departments to provide that service. We may need some kind of structure to protect that employer from long durations or multiple durations of absence by that employee.

Altogether, again, it's a partnership and a relationship that we need to build in this. I know we have strong support in allowing an employee to attend, but also a lot of the financial support that comes to our volunteer services comes from those same employers, and that is even bigger than just the firefighters. That is all of the volunteer services that are there. When you create an environment that is less than appealing for an employer, there's a ripple-down effect in this. That's the rationale for a good, strong partnership. Make sure that what we do in this strengthens the role of volunteerism and, at the same time, allows good viability in a small business. Large businesses can handle this somewhat differently, but for small businesses this can make or break them if they get repeated incidents where their employees have to be absent without a good structure around it.

Thank you.

9:20

The Chair: All right.

We'll move on to Mr. Bussiere.

Mr. Bussiere: Thank you. To start off, I'd just like to thank you as a committee for the opportunity for this consultation. I think that this is a really important step for what we're trying to do. My presentation will likely be a little bit shorter so that I don't run the risk of just echoing what Chief Krich said.

Conversations that I have with volunteer firefighters are generally around building those relationships, so we talk about building relationships with employers as well as having honest and open discussions with your families before becoming a volunteer firefighter.

A little bit about the Lacombe county fire service. We are made up of seven stations, and we have approximately 165 volunteers on our roster right now. That is essentially 165 employers that are allowing their employees to not only leave during work hours on occasion but also to show up late or take the time to go home and sleep because they've been on a fire call through the night and need to be able to function at their job in the morning. So each and every one of those employees needs to build that relationship with their employer and have those honest and open discussions about what living the life of a volunteer firefighter will look like and how that affects their day-to-day employment.

I think that the spirit of Bill 201 is on the right path, but I don't support it the way it is written right now, and really that's based on the fact that we need these relationships to be strong. I think that in having legislation the way it's worded now, it runs the risk of

volunteer firefighters trying to get forceful with their employers, and I think that everybody around the table right now knows that that's not going to be a good way to create a relationship. Then we run the risk of damaging partnerships with the employers.

As has been previously mentioned, we rely on these businesses in our communities for financial support occasionally as well when we're doing fundraising, so not only are these businesses supporting the fire service through employing our members, but they also support us financially when we need them. So we need those relationships to be very strong.

Chief Krich mentioned the Answer the Call campaign. That was initially developed in the province of Alberta and has since been broadened nationally now, so we're seeing a real growth in the momentum of that program. We're excited as the Alberta fire service that that's getting so strong, and we hope that we can continue to build on that.

I want to just talk briefly, I guess, about the support that the fire service in Alberta gets from the province of Alberta, which is greatly appreciated. I think that if we are going in the direction of legislation that involves the fire service in Alberta, we really need to look at a provincial fire services act or a provincial fire prevention act or something of the sort. We are one of two provinces in the country of Canada that does not have a provincial fire service act right now, and I think that rather than legislating specific issues as they come up, we would be better served to have an overarching guidance legislation provincially.

One thing that I'd like to add – and it's interesting that I take this stance, because I have spent the majority of my career as a volunteer firefighter and have only been at the chief officer level full-time for just about three years now, so it's very near and dear to my heart, the volunteerism piece. I've also been personally on an incident with a volunteer firefighter who lost his job because he didn't go to work because we were on a call. The interesting piece about that is that when we really dug into it afterward, the real root cause of him being terminated was the lack of communication to his employer, both in the past and during the day of the incident. Having been an employee as a volunteer firefighter as well as an employer of volunteer firefighters, it's very obvious that that communication has to happen and that those relationships need to be built and need to be strong.

Personally, as the fire chief of the Lacombe county fire service as well as through conversations with numerous members in my service I have decided not to support Bill 201 as it's written. Like I mentioned, I think that we would be better served with an overarching fire services act of some kind in the province of Alberta.

I want to close just by again thanking you guys for taking the time to go through this consultation process and really making sure that we're serving the needs of both the province of Alberta and the employers and employees within it.

Thank you.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you very much.

We'll now move on to Mr. Thomson.

Mr. Thomson: Good morning, members of the standing committee. My presentation is going to echo a lot of what has been said today. My name is Henry Thomson. I'm the deputy chief in charge of training and operations with the St. Paul fire department. My role takes me out into the hamlet areas and other areas of the county of St. Paul. I've been the deputy chief of the St. Paul fire department since 2014. However, I've only been a full-time deputy chief for about 17 days now. The St. Paul fire department is staffed by two full-time positions and 37 volunteers. Until, as I mentioned,

about a month ago it was one full-time position and 38 volunteers. The volunteers in our department are not paid by the hour or a yearly salary; they simply receive a small honorarium annually.

I have personally been a volunteer firefighter for over 23 years, which is basically all of my adult life. In that time I've worked with over 80 volunteers. Obviously, these volunteers and myself had to earn a living outside of the fire service. The occupations are very diverse, as was mentioned. Some are self-employed; some are employed in the private sector. Others are employed in the public sector, whether through the municipality or a school board. I, personally, was employed as a mechanic for a car dealership. I was later promoted to shop foreman, which basically meant that while being a volunteer firefighter, I was also responsible for the productivity and the customer satisfaction needs of that business, which, obviously, I had to take very seriously.

Just prior to taking my position as deputy chief, I was a high school mechanics instructor, meaning that I was responsible for the well-being of my students for six hours a day for about 200 days of the year, not something that a person can just shrug off and run out on when you're dealing with youth in that way.

I believe that this legislation will make the relationship between employers and a volunteer fire service adversarial. It has been my experience that employers in a given community or municipality have a vested interest in that community. Employers are generally supportive of the work that the volunteer fire service does. However, it cannot be overlooked that employers need to have adequate staff to provide products and services, and therefore it must be understood that there are times when they may not be able to have staff absent.

In a small community just outside of St. Paul, one of our satellite departments, there's a business that employs six volunteer firefighters. That is basically almost a third of the fire department in that community. They've had an excellent relationship, but I think we could all agree that for that business – again, about a third of their staff – if they were required to lose a third of their staff at any given time, that could put a strain on the relationship between the community and the volunteer service and that business. I think they've done a commendable job, this particular business, in supporting the fire service. And, surprisingly enough, no legislation was required because, as I mentioned before, they have a vested interest in that community.

This is just one example, but I believe that having this legislation in place may strain the relationships between employers and the volunteer fire service.

In May 2016 a call was put out for available firefighters to help fight the Horse River fire. We all remember that. The St. Paul fire department deployed four firefighters and a surplus unit for seven days, and then after those seven days another shift of four firefighters was sent. Before selecting who would be deployed, there were important questions that needed to be answered. First off, could the St. Paul fire department afford to deploy firefighters while still maintaining enough staff available to provide a level of service? Secondly, as Mr. Krich mentioned, are their families okay with this? Those are the three relationships. Number one, you look after your family; number two, you look after your job; and number three, then comes the fire service. Of course, just as importantly, have these members informed their employers about the deployment? At that time the length of the deployment was not set.

9:30

Personally, I was unable to deploy to the Horse River fire because after having a conversation with my employer, we determined a suitable substitute instructor could not be found who could adequately deliver the curriculum, and that would have actually put

some students at risk of not achieving their high school diploma. My employer, however, was very co-operative. When our fire chief did deploy to the Horse River fire, my employer provided me with an instructional assistant in my classroom so that I was able to respond immediately to any calls in our local area.

Again, it's about building relationships, having important conversations with employees and employers to make sure that everybody knows what their role may be. I think a collaborative effort with open lines of communication between the volunteer fire service, the volunteers, and the employers is a much more effective means of addressing volunteer fire department staffing issues. Rather than this type of legislation, I personally think an educational program explaining the important role that firefighters play within the communities that they live and work in would be much more effective.

Now, Mr. Krich alluded to the Alberta Volunteer Firefighters website in that program on recruitment and retention. One major supporter of that is TransCanada. TransCanada is a major employer within the province of Alberta. I think having their name on that program bodes well in sort of putting pressure on other employers to support the volunteer fire service in ways that they can. That's one thing we could do. We can encourage other large employers in the province along with the small employers within smaller communities to get onboard with this program and have those open lines of communication.

Another thing that came to my mind was perhaps a wall of fame. I think this business that I mentioned that employs six firefighters, basically one-third to one-quarter of an entire fire department, deserves some recognition somewhere along the line. Now, I'm sure to get out there to shake their hands every chance I get, the owners of this business, and thank them for their support within their community, but if the province wants to get involved, maybe we can make a wall of fame, put these businesses on there, get their names recognized. Perhaps some sort of a business tax credit for companies or businesses that do support the volunteer fire service and do allow their employees to leave during work hours might be another way, maybe more of a carrot approach as opposed to the stick approach.

Legislation like Bill 201 will be detrimental to the recruitment of volunteer firefighters. If the legislation were to pass, I can see employers not hiring people who are volunteer firefighters for fear of the human resources issues that could arise as a result of the legislation. As Mr. Krich also mentioned, if employers become reluctant to hire volunteer firefighters, the recruitment of volunteer firefighters in the fire service will become that much more difficult.

Now, I certainly appreciate the province identifying that there are problems in the area of volunteer firefighter and employer relationships, but I do not think that adversarial legislation will help the problem and, in fact, may make it worse. I think we need to continue with a collaborative approach between the fire service, the municipality, the employers, and the employees.

As I've been doing my research on this – I've read what I could on the bill and gathered as much information – I was unable to find the event or the series of events that led up to believing that this legislation was necessary, and I'm hoping that at some point today I can have that question answered. I will be happy to answer any questions, my experience, to the members of the committee at any time.

Thank you.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you very much, Mr. Thomson.

We'll now open it up for questions for our presenters. I'll start with some members on the floor. I'll try to cycle in to those who are on the phone, but if I'm missing any opportunities, feel free to send

the committee clerk an e-mail to get on the list. I'll start with MLA Fitzpatrick.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have a question, and if it's all right with you, I'd like to pose it to each of the presenters. Would that be all right with you, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Yeah.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Okay. I'm wondering how widespread the problem that this bill looks to address actually is prior to Bill 201 being introduced by the Member for Highwood. How prevalent would you say the issue of losing their paid employment is for volunteer firefighters, and how often do you hear from volunteer firefighters regarding difficulties with employers when it comes to leaving work for the volunteer firefighting position? Either one of you can start, but I'd like you all to answer.

Mr. Thomson: I can take that one first. It's something that is trained into our firefighters. It hasn't been a problem within our fire service, but I could see it becoming a problem. One of the things I see is that we'll take on in the fire department a young fellow of 20, 21 years old, willing to give all for the community and enjoying the adrenaline rush, and it's an education process for our volunteers to make sure that they understand that they're communicating properly with their employers on their role and whether or not or at what times they can leave work. If it was left up to these young fellas, they would be on the fire truck at every opportunity they had because sometimes they don't see that family comes first followed by job followed by fire service. Sometimes their personal priorities are mixed up, but we're very careful as the leadership within our department to make sure that we're educating these new recruits on the order that things need to take place.

Right now there's an understanding, and these young members understand this, but with the advent of this legislation, that could get tossed back into perhaps our faces to a certain extent as leaders in the department, saying: well, we can leave any time we want because there's an emergency.

Hopefully that kind of answers your question.

Mr. Bussiere: A very similar situation for me. I did briefly mention that in my career in the city of Lacombe and the county of Lacombe I know of one member that actually did lose their job while they were on an incident. Like I mentioned, though, the root cause of that problem was not the fact that he was on the incident; it was really just the lack of communication with his employer. Other than that, for the majority of the members in my service, their employers have been very willing to let them do the job of volunteer firefighter, and that is why I promote so heavily having that conversation early and being open and honest about what those requirements will be.

Within Lacombe county I have stations that do about 50 calls a year, and I also have one that does about 350 calls a year. Those conversations need to be open and honest about what that commitment looks like and the challenges that will bring with it. I do have many members who cannot respond during their day-to-day, but the majority of those are actually because they work outside of the response district. A barrier for us in Lacombe county is a lack of local employment, not employers that are unwilling to allow their members to leave.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Kemmere: From my aspect, I was actually quite surprised to see what was in the bill because I didn't realize that it was an issue

that required legislative change. You know, when I started reading through it, I understood that it may be something that takes place, but having been through the solving of the item already, I thought that there's lots of flexibility where that employer can sit down with the employee, who then can sit down with the chief and organize when you're available and when you're not. A business in town that had the same thing, where they had multiple volunteers, they sat down and organized themselves so that you had a bit of an idea as to who within this time period would be the ones that are responding so the wrenches could still get twisted, equipment could still get repaired, and they could still have support. But it didn't mean that there would be a wide open, hundred per cent response from that business. I thought the solutions were already available. I didn't realize that it was to the magnitude that would create a bill.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Krich: As the leader of the provincial fire service, again: how is the impact from a provincial body, and how is this bill going to impact the fire service in our province? I have to tell you right now, from the conversations from the province and from the fire service, that it's a huge impact, as you've heard.

9:40

I think what we're doing is we're creating legislation on one side of an issue, where we're trying to regulate an employer and we do nothing for the volunteer because there is no regulation, again, for the volunteer. There's nothing there except for what the municipality is providing, so when we start forcing one side of it, there are going to be a lot of conversations. Understanding that 80 per cent of the population of the fire service in our province is volunteers – you heard big numbers of volunteers that are provided in one area; this is right across our province – they all have employers. It's a huge impact when we look at that aspect.

I think the key is that the reaction that's happening and why this is where it's at today is that we're dealing with some isolated incidents. We've heard one here today and a couple that have been brought forth because of why it's here today. When we talk about the magnitude of fire services, the volunteers are out there. We have good relationships, and I think that's the most important key to this whole element: build the relationship and not just focus on these isolated, small incidents that are happening.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, if I may, I have one more question.

The Chair: Okay. Please proceed.

Ms Fitzpatrick: The bill is a private member's bill that was proposed by the Member for Highwood. What feedback did you provide to the Member for Highwood during his consultation? Again, if each of you could respond to that.

Mr. Thomson: Quite frankly, I was made aware of this bill – and I probably should study the things that are affecting the fire service a bit more, although previous to this I was a volunteer. I found out about it first at the Alberta Fire Chiefs Association convention this past May, and I personally wasn't aware of the process of communicating on a private member's bill. However, when there was an opportunity to send in letters or e-mails, I did take advantage of that, and that's what led me here today. That was probably some ignorance of the process on my part that I didn't do anything prior to that.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you.

Mr. Bussiere: Similar answer for me. Actually, I was not aware of the private member's bill until it was tabled, so my consultation and expression of opinion started during the consultation process after the bill was tabled.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you.

Mr. Kemmere: I think I'm going to have to say ditto to most of that. Once we saw that the bill was tabled, we did send a letter with our opinion on it in through the consultation process, and that's, I believe, probably why we're here today.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Krich: Interesting, because when I first heard about the whole issue with the bill, it was because of my position as the provincial president of our organization. I sit on a national advisory council for the country, which is a representation of every province and territory, and we meet on a regular basis as well. It was actually the president of the Manitoba Association of Fire Chiefs that brought to my attention that there was a bill in the House regarding this, and we weren't even aware of it. From a fire chief's point of view in our organization, the message didn't get back into our organization. The discussions were around individual groups or individual fire service members within our province, which you have heard a lot about as well. Once we got wind of the bill, then we started making our messages clear.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Dr. Starke.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Chair, and thank you very much to the four individuals that spoke to us.

I served on Lloydminster city council in the '80s, and our community at that time was 17,000. It's now roughly double that size, and we still largely have a volunteer fire department, and people are surprised to hear that. I know that there are some changes that are in the works there. You know, it's interesting about the study, Peter, that you mentioned in 2009 because I don't think that people of Alberta as a whole recognize the contribution that volunteers make to the fire protection services in this province, just how much of the province is covered by volunteers, not by paid, full-time firefighters.

If you want that brought home, you just need to attend the ceremony that we were at earlier this year. I know that MLA van Dijken was there and MLA Littlewood was there, and it's a little too bad that we didn't have more of our colleagues there because I think it's a recognition of the contribution that is made co-operatively between municipalities, between the volunteer firefighters and their families – I think, Peter, that you correctly pointed out that that's a really critical component to this – as well as the employers.

You know, I personally think that this is about achieving some sort of proper balance between the rights and the obligations of the employee to be a volunteer and to serve and to go out on calls when they're called upon, but very clearly employers need to be able to run their businesses. I know many times I asked myself when I was running our business in Lloydminster what I would do if I had somebody who came to me as an employee and said: I've just volunteered for the fire department. There are a lot of situations, Al. We're milking all the time in our business. I like to say that there are not very many things at a veterinary clinic that you can just drop and walk away from. If I had an employee that told me, "Well, I'm going to need to be able to go to emergency calls and that sort of

thing,” I would really have a problem working that out with that employee. Would I want to support that employee? Yes. Absolutely. Would I want to support our volunteer fire department? Yes. Absolutely. Certainly, we did everything we could in our municipality.

A few other questions I have arising out of Bill 201. I guess, first of all, as we look at volunteer fire services across the province, I see that we have some that are doing exceedingly well as far as the recruitment and retention, and I note that amongst their members they have a lot of young members. There's certainly the potential that we could have some very long-standing members in the works. Some have only been part of the fire service for a few years. But I also note that there are some services that are struggling to attract members. There are also some services where the vast majority of the members have 20-plus years of service, and I don't see a lot of young members. I'm just wondering: Peter, can you comment on what is the tipping point between the services that seem to have a very good recruitment program and those that don't, and how would Bill 201 impact that?

Mr. Krich: Well, as I had mentioned in the beginning of my presentation, the whole aspect of our fire service is looking at how we can support the volunteer fire service in our province in recruiting and retaining volunteer firefighters, and that created that Answer the Call package and the program. The biggest impact is that fire departments that are actually doing a good job in their communities have implemented all the recommendations that we put forth and are working towards building those recommendations of, one, public awareness – let them know who's who in the community, who they are as volunteers, what they do, where they work, all those kinds of communications – creating relationships and events so that it's not just a firefighter department but it's a family fire department so that the family now is participating, and where the business community is involved, as we're alluding to here. Successful fire departments are surviving because they've built into a program that recognizes all those barriers that created those problems in the beginning.

I know that the challenge to get people involved is how we communicate and how we message that, right? If people truly understand – and that's why I go back to: if you could see yourself in this picture. I can ask everybody in the room here: is anybody here a volunteer firefighter? I'll ask this every time I do this presentation. “Is someone a volunteer firefighter? Excellent. Good job. Why? Because he wants to be a part of his community. Why aren't the rest of you?” My question – and I ask that – is: “Do you not see yourself in this picture? Anybody in your community can be a volunteer firefighter. With the right dedication, commitment, training, and education, you too can be a volunteer.”

When we talk about the demands of being a volunteer, it's not that there aren't people there. We just haven't reached out to the right people to get them to understand who we are as a service, what we provide as a service, and what we need. The thought is always that it's the 18-year-old macho firefighter. That's not who you're looking for in your community. In these small communities we'll take everybody and anybody. Everybody and anybody will help it to survive and the fire service to survive. That creates the partnerships with the businesspeople, the families, your community, and the fire services.

Those relationships build if you have a sustainable, viable volunteer fire service. Like you said, in Lloyd: still a volunteer service. In the city of Camrose: still a volunteer service. We're at 20,000 people, still running volunteers. Excellent relationships. That's why we are strong. Those that are struggling: we need to get to those communities that need the help. That's what we do as an

organization. That's what we need, help and support from government to help, help, help. That's all these little departments are looking for.

9:50

Dr. Starke: So, Peter, those communities that are struggling: does Bill 201 help them or hinder them?

Mr. Krich: Hinders them, only because that's one of those barriers where we're creating a separation between the employer and the volunteer service world now. So it will hinder them in the long run because now you're putting pressure on them.

Dr. Starke: A second question that I had – and I think this relates to the volunteer fire workforce, if you want to use that term. Is there some ratio or calculation in terms of, you know, the number of firefighters that is an ideal number for a given number of fire calls and the number of call-outs? I won't say fire calls, because Al pointed out that there are an increasing number of call-outs that are related to medical emergencies and car accidents, that sort of thing. Is there a magic number in terms of the redundancy that you need or the number of additional individuals that you need within a fire service, recognizing that at any given call-out you won't get 100 per cent of your members because 100 per cent of your members aren't going to be available? Is there a number?

Mr. Krich: Well, when you talk about numbers, there is a number that you need to sustain an operation, right? In order to be able to provide a service, you have to have that. The interesting thing – and it comes back down to this question – is that we do not have any rules or regulations, actually legislated regulations, because we have no fire regulations. So every community is on their own in deciding. We don't have to have a fire service. Nobody has to have a fire service. Then you decide what you want for a fire service. Nobody tells you. There are no rules.

Our chiefs organization is working to build that and give you some guidelines so we know what kind of levels of service you need to provide and then what kind of training those people need to have. That will give you the numbers that you need to require. So a small community will know soon, once we finish our program, that they will need X number of people in order to sustain a fire service or if they can't sustain that. Again, it comes back to that question, that there are a lot of people in our communities that we're not reaching out to so that you can get those numbers. Yes, there are numbers that need to be there to provide a service safely and efficiently.

Mr. Bussiere: If I may also add to that, like Chief Krich mentioned, there's not a legislated number or a clear-cut number, but as an example, one of the stations in Lacombe county fire service has 36 members currently on their roster. Their ideal number is 44, and they have that many so that they can average 12 per response. So roughly four times the number of members you need to have when you get a call is kind of a safe bet, in my opinion, for how many members you need in your department.

Mr. Kemmere: In the non fire department position and from talking in the community – it's not just my community but many – the changing dynamics of what the service that the fire services are providing do create challenges also. The employers that I've talked to over the years have no issue with responding to fires. They have no issues with responding to life-or-death accidents on the highways. But where the employers start to struggle in their support at times is when they are being called out to do the ambulance lift assists or when they're being called out to do those responses. The response from the firefighter is: I've got to go do my response.

There's no doubt about it. But when that employee comes back and says, "Yeah, we had to help lift a guy my size into an ambulance because they didn't have the capacity to do that without the fire department there," that puts pressure on recruitment from an employer's support of recruitment approach. I just needed to add that.

You know, even in my county, being around Olds, when I look at the responses we have, only 40 per cent of our responses are fire, and 34 or 35 per cent of our responses are to highway 2. Then there are all the other highways and all the other stuff. But it's changed. In my 14 years being on council, those numbers have completely changed, and it creates a lot of stress on these people and puts extra stress on the volunteerism because you're being called out more unexpectedly.

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: We'll go to members on the phone. I've got Member McPherson.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thanks, everyone, for coming in today, all of the people who presented. I really appreciate it. It's been a really great conversation. I actually grew up in a really small town of about 300 people, and we relied on having a volunteer firefighting service. We were at least half an hour from the next biggest city, and I know that it was our neighbours who were such an asset. They were really well trained and very dedicated and really committed to being a contribution to the community. So I just want to acknowledge all of you for that kind of commitment to your communities. It's recognized and appreciated, for sure.

What I'm hearing during the presentations are concerns about what the implications of this particular bill could mean for the relationships and the partnerships that have developed with employers through the long time that many employers have been in communities and also because of the initiatives of the firefighting service in Alberta to strengthen those relationships and to attract more volunteer firefighters. Two of the things that I heard were some ideas to strengthen those relationships, some sort of official recognition of employers and maybe a tax credit for employers who have volunteer firefighters on their payroll. That brought me to a couple of different questions. One of them is: in the absence right now of provincial fire legislation, what would this aspect of provincial firefighting or a fire safety act look like, and how could the current environment be improved? I'm open to any answers to that.

Thank you.

The Chair: I'll open that to Mr. Krich to begin.

Mr. Krich: Sure. Yeah. Thank you, again, for those kind comments in regard to our volunteer fire service world. It's much and greatly appreciated. As we mentioned a number of times, the absence of a provincial fire act to give us guidance and direction and focus on what we need to do to protect our communities in our province has always been a challenge. I think that's the challenge that we still face, and we are still working towards trying to build that act that will help give us, as I alluded to earlier, an opportunity for our municipalities to identify: what do we need to provide for a fire service in our communities, what level of service can we provide, and what type of education is needed to be in that? Those are the key elements that we're trying to push across in an act that will help our municipalities and help our firefighters overall.

Again, the whole relationship building: we can't emphasize it enough. It's important that the volunteer fire services communicate with their communities. It's the people in the community. I know

you'd mentioned that there were 300 in your community, that you relied on your fire service. That's traditional Alberta fire service. Well, that's traditional right across small-town Canada, all fire services that are operated by small departments that are trying to do the best for their communities.

I can't emphasize enough, again, the aspect of the building of relationships between the fire service, the municipality, and the business community to sustain volunteerism to that level to provide protection. All we're trying to do from a provincial act is give us that overarching body to give us some guidelines to help us make those decisions accurately.

The Chair: Are there any other members wishing to comment? Mr. Dach.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate your attendance, gentlemen, and the comments that you've made so far. I remember one Christmas Day in Thorhild, where I used to live in the old post office building next door to the county office. The county office caught fire, so it was all hands on deck Christmas Day. Everybody in Thorhild was there to save the county office. Of course, it was all volunteer fire departments, and they did manage to save the day. But it was a memorable occasion in town and something we all recall because, of course, my family members were members of the volunteer fire department there.

I recently also was able to avail myself of an opportunity to do the fire ops 101 course here in Edmonton. I've been to the training centre and, ultimately, in full gear with oxygen mask on, on the second floor of the training centre building on hands and knees with smoke and flames, realized more than I ever did how valuable our volunteers as well as our paid fire responders are. It was something I'll never forget. Every time I hear the sirens now, it's with a much higher degree of knowledge than I had before as to what individuals who are serving us to protect us in emergency situations are facing any moment of their working or volunteer day.

10:00

With that said, I wanted to go back to some of the written submissions that we've received stating that calls during typical working hours are often the most challenging to respond to. In a written submission it said that Bill 201 would create more effective fire services by increasing the number of firefighters who are free to respond to daytime calls. Would you agree with this assessment of Bill 201, and if so, could you provide some insight into the availability of volunteer and part-time firefighters during typical weekday working hours?

Mr. Thomson: I think that within weeks of this bill being enacted, that statement would be true. That would certainly free up some of our people who can't respond during the day because of employment commitments. However, I think, in looking big picture and down the road, it wouldn't necessarily have to be within our community but just somewhere where businesses were having some sort of trouble with HR, human resources, with this situation. I believe, in speaking to some of the businesses in town, that they would hesitate to hire a volunteer firefighter, and looking long term, I think it would actually reduce our ability to produce effective manpower down the road.

Mr. Dach: Thank you.

Mr. Bussiere: Yeah. I would agree. I think that initially, while there's some attention being paid to the change, it might be helpful. I do think that long term, though, it would actually have the opposite effect. I don't believe that employers are not allowing their

employees to leave for fire calls for any other reason than that it could be detrimental to the operation of their business. Many of the businesses in the communities that my firefighters serve have very low numbers of employees, so one leaving means that there's quite a bit of stuff that's not going to get done for the few hours or the rest of the day or however long it is. I don't think it's a lack of support or a lack of appreciation for what they're doing. It's really that, you know, at the end of the day the volunteer firefighters and their employers need to make money to support their families, and I don't think that we can ask them to put that at risk.

Mr. Kemmere: I'll just echo that. I think it would be a short-term response that you would see, but it wouldn't be a long-term solution.

Mr. Krich: I'd like to change it just slightly on the aspect of: would the bill support daytime response? No, again because it's all built on relationships. Just because there's legislation that says that you're going to let the firefighter go or that the firefighter can be available during the day, that ain't going to happen. That employer is still going to keep him if he needs him. Sure, he might get slapped or he might get something done, but it's not going to change things. It's all about relationships.

We all know that daytime response is our challenge in the volunteer fire service because they're all working somewhere. Again, it's who you build and how you build your team in your community that will give you those players that you need for the daytime. That's where you'll see a lot of the transitions that happen throughout a fire service or a community's fire service providers. They will change slightly on the daytime response by having availability of certain individuals. You can have people that do shift work in your community that can be doing the daytime response for you. The nighttimes, weekends are usually pretty good because most people are at home, but now it becomes a family issue and not an employer issue, right? So you have to build those relationships.

So I don't think the bill will change anything.

Mr. Kemmere: Could I add, Lorne?

Mr. Dach: Sure.

Mr. Kemmere: There are two strings of volunteers here. You've got the volunteer firefighter, which is who we're talking about, but the business is also a volunteer. They are volunteering their employees' time away, too, and we can never forget that. There is no compensation. They are volunteering productivity. They are volunteering their own employees being away from the business, which affects the other employees who are having to carry this load when they are gone. So that's a volunteerism that happens within that company, too.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, gentlemen. I have heard repeated themes about building relationships and maintaining that relationship and hoping that that relationship will resolve isolated incidents as they occur.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. W. Anderson.

Mr. W. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Gentlemen, I want to say thank you so much for taking time this morning to come out and give us this excellent feedback on what we thought would have been a good bill. You're sincere in your comments, and it's much appreciated.

I'm going to be brief in my questions to Chief Krich. You mentioned your campaign to educate. That sounded really well thought out. When did this campaign start, and was it successful?

Mr. Krich: Yes, the campaign was a huge success. This started back, as I said, in 2009, when at first we did the environmental scan to find out what was going on in our province, and then we built on the aspect of the educational program that I've been talking about here. Again, it's that awareness campaign, and how successful it has been is in how well you can market it, how well you can get the message out to the communities, and how well the departments and the communities participate. They're all players. We've had huge, huge results, you know, from our province with respect to utilizing our Answer the Call program of making firefighting part of your life in your communities, by this campaign of understanding what a firefighter is and that you might be there.

Again, because it's grown so well over the last eight, nine years, it's actually grown to the point that it's now being recognized, as Chief Thomson said, as a national program. This was introduced by Alberta. It was built by Alberta for Alberta's fire service. Alberta's fire service jumped onboard: it's the educational component; let's get it built. It's ongoing. Drayton is now the chair of that committee. I was the chair of that committee through this whole process before I became president, so it's something that's near and dear to my heart. It's important that we have a program out there, and it is good.

It's right now being widely spread in British Columbia and Saskatchewan, and it's slowly moving across eastern Canada as we speak. So it's a huge impact program.

Mr. W. Anderson: Thank you, Chief. You know, it sounds like congratulations are in order for the success of the program, but here's the question I have: how did you measure the success? Do you have any statistics on that? Do you have any sort of numbers you could share?

Mr. Krich: Those are some of those unanswered questions. That's, again, the statistics. Again, it comes back to: even from a provincial point of view, with no act, no regulation, no guidance for the fire service, we don't truly understand what our fire service looks like in our province. Even our fire commissioner's office doesn't realize what our – again, it came down to: well, how many volunteer firefighters do we have in our province? Approximately 10,000?

Well, we're working on trying to build those numbers and find out where those numbers come from. Who makes that? It's an ever-changing number, too, because in the fire service volunteers come and volunteers go, and every department changes. So it's a constant number of changes. We're trying to manage that to the point of saying: okay; what are the numbers today? And that's what we're working on, that whole process, right now. What are the numbers today, and what will they look like in the future? Are they going up, are they going down, or are they staying the way they are? What do the demographics look like?

Mr. W. Anderson: So since this program started in 2009, there have been no measurable statistics provided for the success of this program?

Mr. Krich: No.

Mr. W. Anderson: Okay.

Mr. Krich: Yeah. Just an interaction with our chiefs and through our organization on what's working well, and we pass that on to other organizations.

Mr. W. Anderson: Just one last question: have any of you gentlemen ever owned and operated a business?

Mr. Thomson: Yes.

Mr. W. Anderson: One? Okay.
Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much.
Mr. Piquette.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Can everyone hear me okay?

The Chair: We can hear you.

Mr. Piquette: Okay. Excellent. I'd also like to speak for my colleagues in the NDP caucus, just to let the gentlemen know how much we appreciate the sacrifices that you and your members and other first responders make. We deeply appreciate that and thank you for doing that.

Also, as a rural resident, you know, I depend directly on volunteers such as yourselves, and as a former insurance agent I think – you're talking about the importance of volunteer firefighters and what they mean to the local community. Economic life would even be difficult because if you're in an unprotected zone, you might have a hard time getting insurance. If you're having a hard time getting insurance, how do you get loans? I think that volunteer firefighters really underpin the local economy. Your importance can't be overstated, so the health of your recruitment efforts are obviously of great importance to all of us.

10:10

Now, I just have a couple of quick questions, and these are for Chief Krich. I know you've given us a very good overview, you know, like, a big picture of how you feel employers and volunteer firefighters are approaching this issue. There was some comment; I think it was Mr. Thomson who was talking about ways of recognizing and encouraging employers for releasing their volunteer firefighters. I think he mentioned one that was quite interesting. It was, like, a wall of fame type of concept. I'm just wondering. In your position as president of the Fire Chiefs Association you obviously contact employers across the province. How do you think this type of effort would be accepted, and are there any other kinds of tools and means that you could see to encourage greater buy-in by employers and, of course, the volunteer firefighters as well?

The Chair: Mr. Krich.

Mr. Krich: Sure. Again, thank you for your comments in regard to what we do as a service. That relationship we're building with employers is, again, the critical element that we're talking about here today. There are a number of ways of appreciating employers and recognizing employers. I had alluded to what we do, a barbecue once a year. You bring all the employers out, and you say thank you, meet and greet, and appreciate them for that. Even our campaign has got the approach of putting up decals within those businesses in your communities, that identify that you employ a volunteer firefighter, and we've had that discussion around our province. If a firefighter walks into a different community and sees that they employ a firefighter in that community, they have better odds of getting that person to come into their business because there's a connection to the fire service. So the employer is appreciated in his community as well as outside. They are being recognized for supporting the fire service in our province. There are many ways of doing it.

From a provincial point of view and from a municipality point of view, we've always discussed that whole issue of tax credits or reductions in business licence fees or whatever. If they're supporting a service in our community, how can we not support them with some kind of reduction in either a business licence, an annual business licence fee, or a tax reduction fee for the employer? Again, that's that recognition that we're looking for to help build relationships with our fire service.

Mr. Yao: Mr. Krich, I was wondering if you could clarify an earlier comment that you made. You talked about that you guys require more legislation. You need to understand that you're talking to a room full of legislators. The fire service, from my understanding, runs under the NFPA, the National Fire Protection Association, standards. Is it fair to say that most fire departments try – try – to follow those standards, recognizing that not everyone can man four-man trucks and things like that and have certain other abilities? Can you just clarify what kind of legislation you would want to see, please?

Mr. Krich: Sure. Again, it's the topic of legislation. We've had numerous conversations with government, different levels of government, in relationship to the fire service in our province, helping gain support for legislation. What are we actually looking for? What we're looking for are some guidelines, some guidance to support our fire service within our municipalities. What do we need? What is the requirement there? One, you've got to identify the risks in your communities. You've got to identify: what are the needs to mitigate those risks?

In the last meeting I had with government, again, it was that point that everybody has an act. The police have an act. Alberta Health Services has an act. Emergency management has an act. They all have acts to follow and guides to follow. The fire service is a blank piece of paper. We don't have one. There's nothing there for us. We have to make it up. We have to pretend.

Yes, the United States based NFPA, the National Fire Protection Association, has a document on standards. That's a guideline that we use in our fire service for training, for education, for response, for all those kinds of things. But they're just guidelines, and it's not ours. It's somebody else's. We need a provincially directed process that will help our fire service. So as a fire service and as a provincial Fire Chiefs Association we're working on that and trying to build core competency programs right now to identify what levels of service are needed at certain community levels and what those training requirements are. If we can get that bumped up into an act as a guide, that gives us that support.

Mr. Yao: Just to follow up, just to clarify that, you don't believe that the NFPA is a proper standard that Alberta should be following in these regards? It does clarify a lot of these issues. Then we have, like, the insurance industry, which obviously affects your industry. Without the insurance industry there might not be fire departments around, quite honestly. Are you implying that the standards that fire services are currently following may not be adequate? With these standards it also does provide the flexibility within the various communities to adapt to the nuances of each community. Are you suggesting otherwise, that we need to raise certain standards of this province?

Mr. Krich: No. Again, the NFPA standards are the guide. That's our fire service world guide to give us direction on what we need to do and how we need to do things. Are we trying to look at something higher than that? No. If anything, we're trying to build something smaller for the small-town, small-operation volunteer fire department that only does grass fires and are only doing three

or four or five grass fires. NFPA standards are related to grass fires, but they also relate to a whole pile of other stuff. Where the large municipalities deal with a lot more, their standards are going to go into a different category. It becomes that level of service. What level of service am I going to provide? I'm just going to be a grass fire fighting team. This is the standard – and we're going to meet the standard – but we're building those guidelines based on those standards, so we're not changing anything in the regulations of standards based on the work that's required.

Mr. Yao: Thank you.

The Chair: MLA Littlewood.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you very much, Chair. Mr. Kemmere, I just have a few questions for you if that's all right. Thanks. With the Rural Municipalities association, I'm just wondering. I mean, obviously, you've gone back to your membership and you've gone back to talk about this issue. What kind of feedback did you get from your municipality members?

Mr. Kemmere: Well, I will clarify that we did connect with our board when we saw the request. The letter came out after a response from our board. I won't say that we actively knocked on all doors and got their position. Our board is made up of a variety of board members. I believe we sent a notification out through our contact newsletter and solicited their input back, you know, trying to get their opinions. But, primarily, our position paper that we put out on this came from a discussion with our board, which includes representation right across the province, and we actually have a board member who is an active fire chief on our RMA board. That would be the level of consultation that we used.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you very much. It doesn't surprise me that one of your members on your board is one of those that runs a volunteer fire service.

It was mentioned earlier, you know, that not everyone knows that most of the people that are firefighters in Alberta are volunteers. Of course, for a lot of us that are in rural areas, we do know that because we get invited to a lot of the firefighter functions, whether it's raising money by flipping pancakes or those recognition ceremonies, that are really important to applauding the efforts and the months and years of service that keep those members feeling appreciated and part of the community.

Of course, that sort of symbiotic relationship is very important. Obviously, without the membership, the volunteers, you wouldn't have people to assist in structure fires or grass fires or to answer the call when there are highway collisions. Of course, that makes up a lot of the very tragic work that volunteer firefighters undertake on our behalf. It could be one of us, unfortunately, in one of those circumstances, so I very much appreciate the work that is done by just average men and women that do extraordinary things.

10:20

With the discussion on the concern about putting an extra regulatory burden on employers and talking about how, you know, instead of doing that, you empower the businesses as well as empower the volunteers, who, of course, are also the businesses that are volunteering that time, Mr. Kemmere, do you have some ideas on how to empower businesses in that way, whether it's better communication or shared best practices? If you have some thoughts on that.

Mr. Kemmere: Yeah. I'm going to just take one step further back, because I, much like you, am a legislator, at the municipal level,

and there's been many a time where we've had single incidents or one or two incidents that have had people come to us and say: "We need a bylaw for this. We need a policy for this." Out of reaction we have attempted to put one together, only to realize that it is not a common issue; it is a one-of or two-of issue. So we have to step back. Often we will still move forward and write a policy and then years later say: what did we accomplish by that? At times less than we thought we did. So I just want to throw caution as far as writing legislation that deals with a single or a handful of incidents when we have a tremendous amount of volunteerism taking place throughout.

More to "how do we build a relationship?" I think that's part of the role of the municipality working with the fire department to find ways to bring our businesses into the understanding of what the local plan is, to understand the service levels, because that is key in all this. In conjunction with their service providers, be it the fire department or other volunteerisms, the municipality sets the service levels – that is key to this – but then having the employers understand those service levels and then the whys to those service levels and to share maybe a little bit more of the data.

I sit on a police advisory committee. We see the data, and it stops there. Maybe that's part of the role that the municipality has to pick up. Let's recognize the employers. Let's get the information to them so that they can understand, when their employees are venturing out, that this is the reason, and this is what we're seeing from a response point of view. I think that in partnership with our departments we can carry that together and better engage our employers, and let's recognize them somehow as a secondary to it.

But, at the same time, let's make sure that when we move forward in response to incidents of concern, we understand the whole background of the incident, and let's not create legislation just to deal with a one- or two-type incident. If we ever create legislation, let's create it on a holistic point of view. I as a municipal councillor still want to have as much local decision-making between me and my fire department rather than it being a full, overarching, dictatorial act that's going to create fewer positives than intended.

Mrs. Littlewood: Okay. Thank you very much for those suggestions. I really appreciate that. You know, it is important to have some sort of plan in place when we do need to call a larger number of people to disasters. In the case of something like the Fort McMurray fires I know that out of Fort Saskatchewan, even though it's a part-time service right now, we sent five people up to help with those efforts, and small municipalities across the province would have also stepped up.

I would definitely be interested in hearing more ideas from yourself and municipalities and, of course, the Fire Chiefs Association on how to make sure that there is some sort of shared understanding of what that looks like. So thank you very much for your input and for coming today.

The Chair: MLA Coolahan.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Chair. I'll start with Chief Bussiere. Thanks for everyone's presentation. I'll start with you, but anybody can chime in if they'd like. I just want to read from your submission. It says:

It is my opinion that employers and employees would be better served to maintain open communication about the potential for work absences and the other issues that arise from being a member of a volunteer fire service as opposed to being forced in to these relationships by legislation.

With that said, have you heard directly from employers or firefighters regarding this bill, and if so, what have you heard?

Mr. Bussiere: Yeah. One of the things that I thought was very important before sending in my submission was exactly that, to talk to some of my members as far as what they thought the effect would be as well as to some employers in our local communities. I think that that seemed to be the general theme.

The members on my service that are most successful at being able to respond during daytime hours or work hours – they're not all daytime work hours – really have strong, open relationships with their employers about what that looks like. They have very good verbal arrangements in terms of making up time or any number of different creative solutions that are out there. I think that the feeling, I guess, of being forced to let them leave kind of has two faces. One of those is the employer looking at it and going: okay; well, if I don't have a choice anymore but we're in the middle of something that's very important, how is that going to affect my business? Like we've talked about today, the number of calls that seem less emergent are also increasing, so if somebody is stopping a pretty critical operation to run out to what simply was a cooking incident and not actually an emergency, it is going to leave a sour taste in the employer's mouth.

The other issue that I see is that we have many members that are not able to leave during their work hours and don't necessarily agree with that decision but have to follow that because they are employees and they have a job to do and a family to support, ultimately. What I think we run the risk of doing here also is having those members go to their employers and say: hey, I know you told me I wasn't allowed, but – guess what? – here's this employee standard that says that I am, so I'm going to start carrying my pager and I'm going to leave when I feel like it. To me, that's not a good relationship between an employer and an employee. I think we're better served to have them sit down and say: "This is what this could look like or will look like. How are we going to deal with that together?"

I would also kind of go back to Member Starke's comments about if an employee came to him and said: "I just volunteered. Can I go on calls?" My preference for new members – and I always ask them this when we discuss if they're going to join the fire department or not – is to ask: "Have you had this conversation with your employer? Do that first, and say to your employer that you're interested in joining the volunteer fire department, ask if that is something he would support, and that here's what that might look like. Have that conversation with your family as well prior to." Those are the types of things that really help that piece.

Mr. Coolahan: Actually, that's a great segue into what I wanted to ask next. I want to follow along the lines of what Dr. Starke was saying as well. Communication, you're saying, is the foundation, the foundation between the relationship of employer and being a volunteer firefighter. When you're making a decision on a call-out, do you know who has that good relationship with employers? Like, do you go down a list and say, "Good relationship; call them first?"

Mr. Bussiere: No. I have a couple of different systems within the Lacombe county fire service. I have one station, as I mentioned, that responds to between 300 and 350 calls a year. They run an on-call crew system. They have four crews that take seven-day shifts. They're on call for seven days at a time, 24 hours a day. Basically, those that are not allowed to respond during daytime or during normal work hours get a cover from one of the members that can.

Mr. Coolahan: What do you mean "not allowed to respond"? They're not permitted by the . . .

Mr. Bussiere: Yes. They either work out of the response district, or their employer doesn't allow them to leave.

Mr. Coolahan: Okay.

Mr. Bussiere: They have a system in place to handle that and basically to maintain a minimum number of members that can respond at all times for those seven days. That's how that crew system works. In that case it's very obvious who has the good relationships and who doesn't, because there are some members that are pretty much constantly on call because they're covering those that can't respond. In the smaller departments, that do fewer calls, it's basically just, if they're able to have their radio or pager on them, they carry it, and when they can, they come. It's a lot more up in the air as far as who's coming and who's not. We use mobile paging apps and things like that that allow the officers on call to know if people are coming or not. It's less set than the other.

Mr. Coolahan: Okay.

Mr. Bussiere: Hopefully, that answers your question.

Mr. Coolahan: Yeah. That's good. Thank you.

Thank you, Chair.

10:30

The Chair: MLA Piquette.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I've got questions for Deputy Chief Thomson. My first question. Now, you did mention in your written submission, you know, your long-term involvement as a volunteer firefighter. It's 23 years that you've been involved as a firefighter, and you've worked with 80 other volunteers during this time, so I think that you'd be uniquely positioned to answer the question. Could you share with us kind of maybe what you've heard directly from your colleagues regarding Bill 201, not your position as deputy fire chief but kind of what some of your members have had to share with you on how they feel about this bill?

Mr. Thomson: We did have some casual conversations within our fire hall regarding Bill 201. Again, these are volunteer firefighters. They're not necessarily involved in politics and policy-making. They just like helping out their community. A lot of them weren't aware of the bill until I did bring it to their attention. As I said, there are various types of ways that guys are employed, and the answers that I took most seriously were from the members in our department that are self-employed. They certainly have a desire to help their community, and they want to give back, but they're oftentimes one-man companies or they're managing a handful of people, and if they leave, that's a lot of money out of their pocket.

They're sort of very torn on this type of legislation, because they want to see the fire service succeed. You know, they want to make sure that a response can be made, but they themselves will agree that they don't make every page-out. Our department runs on a system similar to the smaller halls that Mr. Bussiere had mentioned. Basically, a page goes out to 39 people, and at some times of the day we get 39, and at other times of the day we get 12 or 14 or whatever the case may be. Once a truck is full, they're gone.

So in hearing from some of the guys that are employed by local businesses, some who are allowed to go, some who are not allowed to go, depending on the situation, sure, they would like this type of legislation, but again they don't necessarily want to pick a fight with their employer. As one guy mentioned, especially in the last downturn, over the last few years, especially in 2014-2015, when guys were getting laid off, you know, you can't lay off a person for being a volunteer firefighter and leaving work during the day, if this legislation was enacted, but you certainly could be the first one laid off for lack of work if you were the guy who wasn't at work when

you were required. The guys who aren't allowed by their employers to leave typically like the idea of the bill until they start drilling down and analyzing it, and then they realize – you know what? – that this probably isn't going to solve their situation, especially the self-employed guys. They're not really in favour of it.

That's what I've got for you.

Mr. Piquette: Just so I'm totally clear, the opinion that you seem to be getting is that – I guess that maybe it's a refrain we've been hearing, you know – although this bill may be well intentioned, it might actually have the contrary impact in the way it affects relationships and doesn't really solve the problem and might make it even a bit worse. Would that be kind of fair?

Mr. Thomson: Right. On the surface I believe the intention of this bill is very good. I mean, it's definitely a support for our fire service and everything else, but once you start looking at the pros and cons and how it may play out going forward, I do believe it would be detrimental.

The Chair: Chief Krich.

Mr. Krich: Yeah. I'd just like to add a comment to that in relationship to what members have said. It was interesting because I found out that one of my members actually replied to that submission, and he was in support of it, again only because that was an opportunity: I can get out of work and be a firefighter. It's what firefighters do. Firefighters join the fire service to be a firefighter and fight fires, whatever the job. That's their drive. They forget everything else that's attached to it. After my discussion with him after the fact – it's basically what I've been discussing here today – he realized the consequences of what could happen to his employment, his job, his career if he enforced something that might not work well for him in the long run.

The Chair: Any additional questions? Mr. Bussiere.

Mr. Bussiere: Yeah. If I may, I wanted to kind of go back to Member Yao's questions about the NFPA and our desire as chiefs for legislation. One of the issues that I see with the NFPA standards is that they are very, very explicit in all their standards that they're not mandatory, and they write in all of them that the authority having jurisdiction can make the decisions whether those standards are followed or not. So it creates a bit of an issue with the NFPA standards when we are saying to a municipal council that we need funding to train to an NFPA level in order to provide a service when the rebuttal is: well, you don't have to train to NFPA; you can train to something else or develop your own or do those things. So one of the directions where a provincial act would help is on those things.

In the B.C. model for their fire department – it's called the Fire Department Act in B.C. – what they've done there is to say: as a municipality you decide what services you want to provide, but if you're going to provide those services, here is the minimum standard of training for your members that you must accomplish if you plan to provide that service. So they're not dictating to the municipality what services they're going to provide, but they're saying that if you say that you're going to do interior firefighting, these NFPA standards become mandatory for your fire department. Then it allows the fire department to say: "Okay. Now the authority having jurisdiction has said to us that we are going to adopt this NFPA standard." There are so many NFPA standards that are very, very important to the fire service, but none of them are mandatory in Canada unless they're mentioned in the Alberta fire code, which is limited, in my opinion.

Hopefully, that clears that up a bit in terms of why the act adds importance to the NFPA standards.

Mr. Yao: I concur with what you're saying. I understand that the system works decently well right now, but I understand for the same reasons why you might demonstrate concerns for some legislation regarding one particular issue like firefighter leave and stuff like that. You might find that a lot of legislation that would be imposed on you could impair a lot of groups, as you understand. Again, there are a lot of nuances that we're talking about, right? Minimum manning of four people on a truck, as an example: is that feasible in many communities? Maybe not necessarily, right? The fire service is one of those groups that can adapt to any situation, and I like that flexibility in there for our standards that are, you know, fair to try to attain, but we recognize that we just have to get by with what we've got sometimes. I haven't seen any major failures in our fire service here in Alberta, unless you guys disagree. Anyways, that's a discussion for another time. Just be worried about what legislation you would ask for. That's all.

Thank you so much.

The Chair: Chief Krich.

Mr. Krich: Yeah, so that I can get the last say. We know legislation has always been one of those hot topics for our service and for our province and for the Fire Chiefs Association. What we're trying to do is get some overarching support from government to support the fire services in our province. We are supported by municipal government, by our service that we provide for our municipalities. We have no overarching body, a higher level, looking after the fire service in our province. We do a fantastic job. Yes, we do it because we know what we want to do. That's the relationship we'll build when we try to build an act from a provincial level. It will be with support from us in making those decisions on what that act looks like. To continue doing what we're doing but looking for the support at a higher level: that's what we're after.

10:40

The Chair: Excellent. Mr. van Dijken.

Mr. van Dijken: Good. Thank you, Chair, and thank you all for coming today and participating with us and helping us to get a good sense of where your members and the people deeply involved in this firefighting aspect are. Part of our community, of being Alberta, is that everybody has a role to play, and your service is very much appreciated.

Bill 201 has definitely allowed us to have a conversation, and I believe that for many of the people that approached me with regard to Bill 201, some were supportive, some not supportive. You know, I had a mother come to me, and her son was a volunteer firefighter. She felt that, well, Bill 201 will alleviate some of the stress that that individual has on whether or not he's able to keep his job. But I also had fire chiefs – a retired fire chief, an acting fire chief who's not acting right now – approach me with the same kind of concerns which you're displaying or helping us to understand today, that legislation is maybe the strong arm of the law and will hinder relationships from being healthy.

You know, we heard from you on the campaign to educate, and I hope that that's a campaign that continues on. I'd like to hear that that's a campaign that will continue on and is always there to help the individual jurisdictions that are having a little bit of difficulty filling the ranks of their volunteer fire department. One of the fire chiefs alluded to me that the pandemic of losing volunteers in the fire service must be addressed. Do you see that that campaign to educate is going to alleviate some of what he classified as a

pandemic? I don't believe it's a pandemic in all jurisdictions, but is that the tool to help alleviate that? Also, with regard to your comments on overarching legislation, does that have a part to play in helping to alleviate that stress?

Mr. Krich: Yeah. In regard to the Answer the Call program, that we've been working on, yes, it will continue. That has been a direction from our association. This is an ongoing program. It will never end because the issues are still ongoing. Will this program help those departments in how we can help those departments recruit and retain those firefighters? Yes.

The question of a pandemic loss of volunteer firefighters: again, we hear a lot of those conversations on losing firefighters. But that's all part of that communication and education of the demographics of today versus the days of old. Today's volunteers: traditionally you get five years out of a volunteer. It doesn't matter where you are in the volunteer world. If you get five years out of a volunteer, you're doing good. The fire service has a lot of other commitments that are needed from a volunteer in dedication and time and training and education. Five years: if it doesn't seem to be a worthwhile cause, they're gone. That's the challenge that we have.

Some of those issues are in that campaign as well, dealing with the demographics of the new volunteer that we're seeing today versus the old. That's why you see such a change or such a very diverse demographic fire service, where you'll have some old guys in the service and you'll have these young guys in the service. It seems like the young guys – I've never hired so many guys in one rotation ever as in the last few years. My guys are long-term guys that stick around. They've been there because they like it. My new guys coming in: they come in, they come in for a while, and then they're gone. Why? I have no idea. It's the way of today. They just want to try different things. That's all part of that campaign.

Back to the legislation, will overarching legislation help in the long run? Yes, it will because it will give guidance, it will give some direction, and it will give some support on what municipalities need to think about, what they need to consider to provide the service, and on how that service is being provided.

The Chair: Any other questions?

Seeing none, I want to thank you all very much for joining us today. You're free to stay and watch the rest of the committee proceedings, but there's no obligation following that. If you also want to provide us with any additional feedback, please forward it to the committee clerk, who reached out to you earlier last month, before September 14 if possible.

Hon. members, we're moving on to the next item of business, research services. The committee has received both oral and written submissions as part of its review of Bill 201. At the committee's June 22, 2018, meeting a summary of written submissions in regard to the review was provided by research services. I would now like to open the floor to discussion as to whether the committee would like to update the submission summary to include information from today's oral presentations. MLA Dach.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Chair. In keeping with our practice of having committee members be apprised of submissions to the committee first and having first opportunity in-house, usually in draft form, you know, on our internal website, I'm just wondering if that wouldn't be the right way to do it, to first have in draft form these oral comments added to our internal committee website and then at a subsequent meeting approve them to be released publicly.

The Chair: Mr. Roth.

Mr. Roth: Thanks, Mr. Chair. This would just be for the written submission document, so it's typically not released publicly. The written submissions that were received as per the committee's direction were put on the public website, but this would just be adding to the submission summary document, that was provided to members already.

The Chair: Dr. Massolin.

Dr. Massolin: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just to supplement that, it's simply summarizing what the committee just heard now in the oral submissions and adding that to the written submissions document.

Mr. Dach: Yeah. I just wanted to make sure we didn't enter into a significant departure from typical practice, where the committee has the opportunity to view on the internal website the submissions that are made. Are we departing from that in so doing? If the committee doesn't feel they have a concern with it, then I'm not overly concerned myself, but I thought we should at least take note that it may be a departure from our typical practice of having submissions made to the internal committee website before being publicly exposed.

Dr. Massolin: Well, I think, you know, again – maybe I'm misunderstanding – that the submissions we're talking about are the oral submissions that were just made here. They're public as of the proceedings today and will be public as of the publication of *Hansard*. I think there is supplemental sort of written material that will be made available to the committee via the internal website in keeping with committee practice.

Thank you.

The Chair: Excellent. If we'd like to add the oral presentations to the submissions document, I'll just need a motion from the committee. We have one drafted here. Mr. Yao. Moved by Mr. Yao that

the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future direct research services to update the summary of submissions document prepared for the committee as part of its review of Bill 201, Employment Standards (Firefighter Leave) Amendment Act, 2018, to include the oral presentations made at the committee's September 6, 2018, meeting.

With that motion moved by Mr. Yao, I'll open that up to the floor. Are there any members on the phone that wish to ask any questions or make any comments? All right.

Seeing and hearing none, then I will call the question on the motion. All those in favour, please say aye. All those opposed, please say no. For the members on the phone? Excellent. That motion is carried.

Hon. members, a number of individuals who received invitations to make an oral presentation in regard to Bill 201, Employment Standards (Firefighter Leave) Amendment Act, 2018, have made additional comments relating to the bill in their responses to the committee. Because these are not new submissions to the committee, I would like to test the will of the committee as to whether these additional comments should be appended to the submissions already received from these individuals. Are there any objections to those being added to the additional submissions? No? Okay. All right. The committee clerk will then append these comments to the submissions received and will inform the committee when they are uploaded to the committee's internal website for members to review.

10:50

Hon. members, as the committee has now received written and oral presentations as well as research regarding the bill's review,

the next phase of our review will typically be the beginning of deliberations and making recommendations as to whether the bill should proceed or not. Do any members have any questions about this process? It's very similar to what we've dealt with with the Daylight Saving Time Act of last year. The process will be very similar.

With that being said, I'll move on to the next items of business. Do any committee members have any other business that they wish to raise at this time?

Seeing and hearing none, the date of the next meeting ideally will be called once I poll the room and we receive the additional submissions and summaries.

Mr. Dach: I just wanted to suggest that any meeting date on deliberations not be set until after the additional written submissions have been posted for review.

The Chair: Okay. Do any members have any objections or comments to that?

Seeing none, I'll make sure we poll the room after those have been posted and an opportunity has been given to review.

That being said, would a member like to move a motion to adjourn? Moved by Mr. Taylor that the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future adjourn. All those in favour, please say aye. All those opposed, please say no. Those members on the phone? That motion is carried. The meeting is now adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 10:52 a.m.]

