



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, November 8, 2017

Day 51

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

Third Session

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Bilous, Hon. Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
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Connolly, Michael R.D., Calgary-Hawkwood (NDP)
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Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (Ind)
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Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (NDP)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UCP)
Vacant, Calgary-Lougheed

Party standings:

New Democratic: 54 United Conservative: 26 Alberta Party: 2 Alberta Liberal: 1 Progressive Conservative: 1 Independent: 2 Vacant: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, November 8, 2017

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly grade 6 and grade 9 students from Legal school along with their teachers Mr. Blair Wood and Mr. Jason Paik and parents Mrs. Trina Jones and Mrs. Nicole Gough in attendance with them today. I believe they have been having a pleasant time enjoying learning more about the Legislature, and I would ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the descendants of Mr. Alex Decoteau and Mr. Walter Sinclair. Perhaps they could rise as I say their names: Izola Mottershead, great-great-niece of Mr. Decoteau; Stanley Mottershead, husband of Izola; Brad Marshall, great-great-nephew of Mr. Decoteau and who is a government of Alberta employee in the Department of Environment and Parks; and also Mr. Walter Sinclair.

Alex Decoteau was famous for many things, mainly his talent in middle- and long-distance running. He was a Canadian Olympian, the first indigenous police officer in Canada, and a trench runner at the Battle of Passchendaele. He perished on October 30, 1917, over 100 years ago today.

Mr. Sinclair is a member of the Aboriginal Veterans Society of Alberta and served in the Royal Canadian Signal Corps. He has been stationed in Shilo, Manitoba, Soest and Lahr in Germany, and finally CFB Cold Lake.

Thank you to the Decoteau family for attending today's centennial of the Battle of Passchendaele and to Mr. Sinclair for your services. On a personal note, my grandfather fought at Passchendaele, and both my father and I have served in the naval reserves. I'd like to ask the House to give them a traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome and thank you.

The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. First, it's my pleasure to introduce Sithara Fernando and her guests Jennifer Carter and Kanchana Fernando, who are seated in the members' gallery. I met Sithara in her community of Fort McMurray on a recent visit. She is a very strong mental health advocate and a wildlife biologist. She was unable to bring her rescue owl Hedwig here today, but we hear he's doing well, and we send him our best. I ask that the three guests please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

My second introduction today, Mr. Speaker, is recognizing a group who are also in the members' gallery, and those are folks from the Canadian Lung Association of Alberta & NWT. They are seated, again, in the members' gallery. Today is lung health day. I hope my colleagues were able to take part in the display downstairs,

and I encourage Albertans to join me in recognizing lung health month this November and to offer their support to people in our province living with respiratory illnesses. I ask Leigh Allard, president and CEO of the lung association of Alberta, as well as the members who are here today to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Associate Minister of Health.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly representatives of the Alberta Society of Radiologists. Today is the International Day of Radiology. Radiologists are at the front end of a patient care cycle and are integral, collaborative partners within the health care team. Today they hosted an information session highlighting women's health and wellness. I now invite Dr. Robert Davies and other representatives from the society to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks and minister responsible for climate change.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 24 members of Team Lethbridge. If I could please ask you to stand as I read your names: Amanda Berg of the Allied Arts Council; Paula Burns, Sandra Dufresne, Kerry Doyle, and Kenny Corscadden from Lethbridge College; Angela Cornforth, Kristen Demone, and Wes Carroll from the Canadian Home Builders' Association, Lethbridge region; Patricia Epp and Trevor Lewington from the Lethbridge economic development authority; Shaun Ward, Lethbridge Sport Council; Kim Gallucci, Lethbridge Lodging Association; Bob Girard, Lethbridge Senior Citizens Organization; Cheryl Gilmore, superintendent of Lethbridge school district No. 51; Andrea Hlady, Lethbridge Family Services; Donna Hunt and Doug James, who are school trustees with Lethbridge school district No. 51; Sacha Johnson from the Lethbridge Lodging Association; Kristie Kruger from Lethbridge & District Association of Realtors; Bev Lanz from Lethbridge exhibition; Suzanne Lint from the Allied Arts Council; Erin Low from the Lethbridge Construction Association; Mike Mahon from the University of Lethbridge; Cathy Maxwell, Lethbridge & District Association of Realtors. I'd ask now that they please receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly the second half of the phenomenon that is Team Lethbridge. I will speak further about the team in my statement later today. Now I ask my guests to rise as I call their names and to remain standing to receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly: Mayor Chris Spearman, Ryan Miller, Sandra Mintz, Rob Miyashiro, Nathan Neudorf, Erasmus Okine, Danny Ponjavic, Karla Pyrch, Keith Sumner, Jessica Robinson, Jenn Schmidt-Rempel, Chris Smeaton, Bridget Mearns, Jeff Carlson, Blaine Hyggen, Bill Spenceley, Shilpa Stocker, Ken Tratch, Richard Westlund, Nikolaus Wyslouluz – I hope I said it correctly – and Sonny Zgurski. Please, our traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Ms Luff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my parents, Marg and Barrie Luff, who are here visiting from Vancouver Island. They are folks who were stalwart community volunteers for their entire lives. If you played a sport in the Cowichan valley in the '90s, probably one of them coached you, including the Minister of Municipal Affairs, who isn't here today. [interjections] Oh, I apologize. They have been incredibly supportive throughout my life; always told me I could do anything that I wanted to. I don't think that this was what they expected when they said that. They are here visiting today despite the fact that the grandkids are at home in Calgary, so if you could please give them the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

1:40

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly representatives of the regiments and battalions and squadrons who participated in the Battle of Passchendaele 100 years ago. Please rise as I say your name: Colonel Eppo van Weelderden of 41 Canadian Brigade Group, the King's Own Calgary Regiment, South Alberta Light Horse Regiment, Loyal Edmonton Regiment, 20th Field Artillery Regiment, 41 Signal Regiment, 41 Service Battalion, and 1 Military Police Squadron. Thank you for your service, and please accept the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: Hon. member, you may have missed the inside story, but you forgot to mention Alberta's regiment, which is South Alberta Light Horse. We claim the province.

The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you an old friend of mine – this didn't start the way that I'd hoped – not that she's old but that she's been a friend of mine for a really long time. Allison Tatham and I had the pleasure of being in high school together, but more important than that is that she is a very strong advocate for Mothers Against Drunk Driving. A couple of years ago, unfortunately, Allison lost her father to a vehicle accident by a drunk driver, and this year she is the spokesperson for the red ribbon campaign, which is taking place this week. I know that she is also here this afternoon with her first-born son. I know that her father would have loved to have been able to be here to experience the joy of a grandchild, but that was so, so horribly taken by a drunk driver. I'd like to introduce Allison and encourage everyone to wear their red ribbons this week.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Carbon Levy and Seniors' Expenses

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have been frustrated. I have been frustrated with this government's reckless, ideological policies and the detrimental toll that these policies continue to take on the lives of my constituents. This government claims that they care and that they want to make life better for everyday Albertans, but time and time again they put their socialist ideology ahead of common-sense policy. Albertans are facing the toughest economic climate that they have in decades. Hundreds of thousands of

Albertans are out of a job. Industry is fleeing the province, and this government continues to spend hard-earned tax dollars buying social licence from Ottawa with a carbon tax. It's unforgivable.

I recently sat down to chat with an elderly constituent in my riding, and what she had to say absolutely broke my heart. Edith has been a pillar in the Airdrie community for years. She paid taxes, raised her family, and helped to turn Airdrie into the thriving city that it is today. Like most seniors, she is on a modest fixed income, so she received the maximum carbon tax rebate. That rebate is a tiny drop in an empty bucket.

Mr. Speaker, Edith's favourite tradition is taking her grandchildren on a special outing on their birthdays. She's been doing it since they could walk and looks forward to it all year. Edith told me how her natural gas bill has gone up by 75 per cent, how her groceries are more expensive, and in fact she cannot even afford fresh produce any more. Then she told me that all of these unexpected expenses and her inability to earn any additional money meant that she can no longer take her grandchildren on their special birthday outing.

My heart broke as I watched her eyes well up when she said that she felt like she was failing her grandkids by not being able to provide for them like she had in the past. It was in that moment that I decided that I wasn't going to be frustrated anymore. I was more determined than ever because I know that it is not Edith who has failed here, Mr. Speaker; it is that NDP government.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Battle of Passchendaele Day

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On October 26, 1917, the Canadian Expeditionary Force entered into the Third Battle of Ypres in France, also known as the Battle of Passchendaele. Canada joined in the fight to relieve ANZAC troops who had been fighting at Passchendaele for three long months. Conditions were horrifying. Rain and shellfire, waterlogged craters, and knee-deep mud surrounded our soldiers. The battlefield was so destructive that it swallowed everything, including vehicles, horses, and men. Despite these conditions our soldiers captured the ridge on November 10. Nine soldiers won the Victoria Cross, and five regiments and battalions in Alberta would earn battle honours for Passchendaele. But the cost was great. Sixteen thousand soldiers were wounded or killed.

Today I along with the hon. Minister of Culture and Tourism were proud to declare November 10, 2017, Battle of Passchendaele day here in the province of Alberta. It is important that we honour the victory of Passchendaele and forever remember the sacrifices of the Canadian Corps upon the battlefield, sacrifices made by Albertans such as Private Alex Decoteau. He was a trench runner at the battle and lost his life on October 30 for his country. Today we have family members of Private Decoteau here in the House, and to them I say thank you for continuing to honour his legacy.

Today is also Aboriginal Veterans Day, and as the government of Alberta's liaison to the Canadian Armed Forces I would like to take the time to thank all indigenous members of the Canadian Armed Forces for the dedication and sacrifice made to protect our boundaries both at home and abroad.

As we honour members both past and present this week with Veterans' Week, it has been an honour to spend time with veterans and to hear their stories. To those who are no longer with us, to the veterans across this nation, to current members, both regular force and reserve, and to families who support our forces: thank you. Let us not forget.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Afghan War Monument Unveiling in Grande Prairie

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A few weeks ago I was honoured to attend the unveiling of a war monument in my community of Grande Prairie. A war monument, you may ask? That's unusual in this era. While it might be unusual, perhaps it shouldn't be. The monument that I'm speaking of honours the 158 Canadian soldiers killed in Afghanistan. I fear we sometimes forget about the sacrifice of the 40,000 men and women who served on that mission from 2001 to 2014.

It surprised me how much the local memorial brought the magnitude of their sacrifice in Afghanistan home to our lives in Alberta. It was brought home in another way, too, because four of the soldiers who lost their lives were from Grande Prairie. Plaques denoting their sacrifice mark the four corners of the impressive seven-foot-high granite monument. The soldiers' family members and their military families attended that day.

Their presence provided a sombre reminder that we need to honour those who participated in the Afghanistan mission. As we take part in Remembrance Day services this weekend, we can pay tribute to the veterans of Afghanistan as we pay tribute to the veterans of World War I and II and the Korean War.

During the moving ceremony I felt pride that our community had taken the initiative to create the monument, and it would not have happened without the passion of Renee Charbonneau. One dignitary who visited other memorials in Canada called ours one of the best he's seen. I believe everyone felt a special pride in the moment the monument was unveiled, and we now have a permanent reminder of all the veterans of the Afghanistan mission. We will remember them.

Thank you.

LGBTQ2S Students

Cortes-Vargas: Mr. Speaker, leadership is about standing up for what is right. Here is what I know. Coming out takes an act of bravery. Outing LGBTQ2S is wrong. We must do better.

I look for inspiration in role models like a young woman in Sherwood Park. Recently she got up, took the mike, and spoke in a school speech competition. She talked about being a young gay woman, the discrimination she has faced, and the struggles still faced by the LGBTQ2S students. This takes courage, to speak in front of all of your peers and bring up the difficulties that come just from being who you are. It was a pleasure to meet with her, her very supportive mom, her girlfriend, and even her girlfriend's mom. I know that they are proud of her. She was bold in coming out in such a public sphere. It was her choice, and it should always be her choice.

1:50

This is just one of the many positive stories in our communities, a story of what coming out should and can be when a young person isn't pushed out of the closet. Along with my colleagues in this Chamber and Albertans across the province I strive to pave a path for stories like this as being the case for everyone who wants to come out. Jason Kenney and those that support his position on GSAs are going against what Albertans stand for. Albertans are vocal in their support for LGBTQ2S students.

Before I finish, for all of those Albertans who have reached out to me, know that I am proud to represent your voice in this Legislature. Thank you.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Federal Equalization Payment Negotiations

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, yesterday we called on the government to begin urgent preparations for the equalization renegotiation and to inform this House of its progress. Sadly, the NDP shot down our common-sense proposal. We know that the government has already taken two pieces of advice from us, intervening before the NEB on Burnaby's obstruction and travelling to B.C. to discuss pipelines. Despite their unwillingness to admit as much, we're glad to see them follow our lead. Perhaps they will do so quietly again. To the Premier: has the government begun planning for equalization renegotiation? Yes or no?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding the member opposite's delusions of grandeur with respect to who is following who on those other matters, what I will say is that we will not be following the lead of the UCP on the matter of equalization. Interestingly, one of their friends, the Fraser Institute, outlined what they called the GDP growth-rate rule, which was introduced by the Harper-Kenney government in 2009. Interestingly, it is that rule which is in fact disadvantaging Alberta today in relation to equalization. My question is: why won't they take credit for it?

Mr. Nixon: There was a time in this country when pipelines were not a contentious issue, where pipelines were built as a matter of course, where Alberta could get market access for our resources. Unfortunately, that's no longer the case as certain provincial and municipal politicians across Canada work to block the source of Alberta's wealth, the same wealth they're happy to receive in transfer payments. Albertans are tired of it, and they want this government to take action. Given this, will the government propose a revised equalization formula during next year's negotiations? Yes or no?

Ms Notley: Well, interestingly, Mr. Speaker, you know, as a result of the new rule brought in by the Harper-Kenney government, the province of Ontario will receive \$360 million more through equalization than they would have otherwise, and in fact the province of Quebec will receive \$215 million more through equalization than they would have otherwise because of the UCP and the Conservatives doing such a great job of standing up for Alberta. What I will do is ensure that the Conservatives and the UCP and their friends are nowhere close to the next round of negotiations.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I can't understand why this government won't take this matter seriously. Albertans do. This should not be a partisan issue. Alberta is under attack. Pipelines are being blocked. The federal government is rigging the deck against us here in Alberta, and this NDP government seems to be choosing to play nice with their Trudeau allies instead of standing up for the very Albertans that elected them. I ask again: will the NDP reconsider their motion and stand with us and stand with Albertans?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I've just indicated, what we will do is to continue to stand with Albertans, but we absolutely will not stand with the Conservatives and the Harper-Kenney record on this matter because it hurt Alberta. Why won't the members opposite stop playing politics on this issue and take responsibility for the fact that their plan is making it harder for Alberta?

The Speaker: Second main question.

Trans Mountain Pipeline Construction

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, last week the UCP suggested that the government should join Kinder Morgan's challenge to the NEB about Burnaby's pipeline obstruction. While the government was dismissive at the time, we are happy to see the NDP eventually take our common-sense advice. Again, we lead; they follow. Today we see that the NDP has rejected expedited hearings on this important matter. Can the Premier tell us what, if any, communication her government has had with the federal government or the NEB on the denial of expedited hearings?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, on the matter of talking about pipelines or intervening on the Kinder Morgan hearing, can I just introduce a new word into the Legislature, "hepeat," the definition of which is as follows: when a person, who might be a man, repeats what you say and takes credit for it. Just thought I'd throw that out there.

In any event, let me just say that the reason the matter has been delayed is because those guys over there, their friends in Saskatchewan asked for it to be delayed. We wanted it to not be delayed, but what can you do? Your friends are your friends. We will make every effort to stand up for Alberta when the matter is heard, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Nixon: While the Premier may think this is a joke, Albertans don't.

Kinder Morgan has warned that every month of delay costs approximately \$90 million. This sends a terrible message to job creators and investors. Trans Mountain received regulatory approval nearly a year ago, but little actual activity is taking place. The company acknowledges that. The Premier has done everything in her power to support her friend Justin Trudeau; unfortunately, to date Albertans have not seen any benefits from that. Has the Premier directly asked the Prime Minister to clear the regulatory red tape?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I am not going to ask the Prime Minister to engage in the kind of behaviour that would actually get the whole matter clogged up in the courts for decades to come, because that really would be a delay. Thankfully, we're in charge, and they are not. Nonetheless, our government took a very clear position to the NEB, asking that they not proceed to delay the NEB hearing. Notwithstanding that that wasn't successful, we have filed our own position. We will be standing up to support Kinder Morgan's application with respect to the Burnaby issue because we know that this pipeline is good for all Canadians, and we will not back down from that position.

Mr. Nixon: It's good to see: taking our advice again.

Mr. Speaker, the time for action is now. We know that the Trudeau Liberals have no problem meddling in the NEB process and interfering with Alberta's constitutional rights to manage our own resources. After all, it was them changing the rules in the middle of the game that killed Energy East and the jobs that would have come with it and, worse yet, the dream of energy independence in our country. Can the Premier tell us specifically the last time she raised delays of Trans Mountain with the Prime Minister? A specific date, please.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, in fact, we are constantly working with the federal government to make sure, within legal parameters, that

we are able to work together to move forward on that important project. The reason we are doing that is because we are working together, and the reason we are working together is because through the leadership of our government we did what was necessary to ensure that we had that partnership with the federal government. As a result, we will get the pipeline built. I know that the members opposite don't want to see that happen, but it will happen.

The Speaker: Third main question.

Pipeline Approval and Construction

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, this NDP government likes to tout its supposed success in receiving paper regulatory approval for the Trans Mountain pipeline, paper approval from Justin Trudeau, and I'll leave it up to Albertans as to what they think that paper is worth. They've been spiking the football in this House for nearly a year now. All members of this House hope that that pipeline is built, but that path seems to be getting more perilous by the day. Can the Premier confirm how many barrels of oil the Trans Mountain expansion has shipped to date?

2:00

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the member opposite might want to confer with people who are in the business of building pipelines because, in fact, typically once it's approved, it doesn't actually start shipping until it's built. In fact, construction has begun on a number of different elements along the line. I know the members opposite wish that weren't true, but it is. The pipeline will be built. Alberta's energy industry will grow and be even stronger as a result of that, and it will be because of the work that this government has done.

Mr. Nixon: So zero barrels, Mr. Speaker.

Let's correct the record. Four major pipeline projects were completed while the Hon. Jason Kenney was in the federal Conservative government. One, Keystone: 435,000 barrels per day. Two, the Alberta Clipper: 450,000 barrels per day. Three, line 9 reversal: 300,000 barrels per day. Four, anchor loop expansion: 40,000 barrels per day. That's 1.25 million barrels a day of extra capacity for western Canadian oil. To the Premier: how much actual capacity has been added, actual pipelines pumping actual oil, under your watch?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that under Jason Kenney's watch, under the conservative party of Alberta's watch not one pipeline got built to tidewater. We are very close to breaking that landlock. We are very close to making that incredible step forward that our energy industry has been working very hard on. We've done it through diplomacy. We have done it through partnership. We have not done it through grandstanding and through misusing the facts. When it is built, as I've said before, the members opposite are invited to the party.

Mr. Nixon: Bizarrely, the NDP claim that the Conservative government didn't support pipelines. Let's examine the record. One, Trans Mountain was in the NEB approval process when the federal government changed. Two, the Energy East amended application was only filed after the Trudeau Liberals took office. Three, the one pipeline to the coast that actually came before the Harper government for approval was Northern Gateway, and it was approved. It was the Premier's friend Justin Trudeau that killed that pipeline without a peep from your government. Will the Premier acknowledge these facts: that she has zero pipelines, zero barrels of oil under her watch, and that she needs to do something about it?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The fact of the matter is that the Gateway pipeline was killed by the courts because the Conservatives did not follow the rules. It is those kinds of bully tactics that ensure that we don't make progress on this important type of infrastructure. In fact, it is responsible for government to accommodate indigenous interests, to listen to communities, to respond to climate issues in order to ensure that when the decisions are made, they stand up. Yelling and bullying do not succeed. That's why Gateway is not built, and that's why we are adopting a different approach, one that will succeed for all Canadians.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Energy Industry Emission Reduction Initiatives

Mr. Clark: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Climate change: it is real, it is human caused, and it is something we can and must address. Alberta has so much to offer in helping the world innovate our way out of this problem. Some would have us believe the only option is to produce less oil, but yesterday I talked about the work already under way in Alberta to decarbonize oil sands oil. To the Premier: do you agree that Alberta's contribution to tackling climate change shouldn't come from reducing production but should come from increasing production of lower carbon oil?

Ms Notley: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I do agree with that. That, indeed, is something that I've said in numerous, numerous speeches in a whole bunch of different places. That's exactly what our climate leadership plan is focused on doing, taking the carbon out of the oil, reducing the emissions while potentially, for sure, increasing the actual production. That's what our plan is modelled on. We've been talking about that for two and a half years, and I'm pleased that the member opposite is aware of that.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A California report showed that Alberta oil sands crude already has lower emissions than the Venezuelan and Nigerian heavy crudes it would displace. Alberta bitumen has three times lower carbon intensity than some Nigerian crude, and that was in 2015, before Alberta innovators started work on decarbonizing oil sands oil. Again to the Premier: why haven't Alberta innovations been the cornerstone of your case for pipelines, and on your upcoming tour will they be?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The fact of the matter is that it is this government that has invested in innovation, particularly in the oil sands. In September we put \$50 million through Emissions Reduction Alberta, which is recycling carbon revenues into an oil sands challenge. We had for that \$50 million \$1.6 billion worth of interest. The fact of the matter is that the energy industry in this province is ready to solve the problems of the future. It's too bad the Conservatives aren't.

Mr. Clark: Well, it's good news that I'm not part of the Conservatives, then, Mr. Speaker.

Alberta has the best environmental track record in the world when it comes to oil and gas development, and this should be something that we are shouting from the rooftops. With respect, while I agree that the economic argument is important, it also sounds like we only care about money. We're Albertans, Mr. Speaker. We also care about the environment. Again to the Premier:

when you go on your pipeline tour, will you emphasize these essential truths about the environmental benefits of pipelines in addition to making the economic case?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, again I would invite the member opposite to read some of the speeches that I've already given on the matter. This has always been a key part of the argument that we have made to people across the country: that, in fact, our energy industry is leading on this and that, in fact, our climate leadership plan will invest in the ability to reduce the amount of emissions per barrel and that the emissions cap is the fundamental cornerstone to that plan. Again, I invite the member opposite to look at what we've already been talking about. This is exactly the point we've been making.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Lethbridge South School Construction Project

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In March 2017 approval of funding was granted to Lethbridge school district No. 51 for the design stages of the south Lethbridge elementary school project. Given the work that I've already seen completed, this project will be ready for tender in early 2018 as projected. Can the Minister of Infrastructure confirm for me that this project will receive approval for its funding on the anticipated shovel-ready timeline of February-March 2018?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for the question. You know, one of the things we're always very excited about is school builds. Certainly, in this province we are excited when we have a capital plan that includes almost \$30 billion for building in this province, and schools are certainly among that. We are well aware of the importance of making sure that school designs are done well, and that's why the design funds for the south Lethbridge elementary school were approved in Budget 2017. The designs should be of course completed by the end of 2018, and we look forward to seeing those when they're done. I'm sure they will be fantastic.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: when will Lethbridge district No. 51 be receiving this formal confirmation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member. The formal confirmation will be given to the district once Budget 2018 has been approved. I understand that my colleague the Minister of Education has been in touch with the district to provide updates on the project. As I said, you know, we're very proud of the kind of investment we're doing in this province and delighted that we can have some folks from Lethbridge here as we talk about design/builds and how important Lethbridge is to all of us.

The Speaker: The second supplemental.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: will the minister be attending the sod-turning for this project? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. minister.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I will never pass up an opportunity to come to the lovely city of Lethbridge. I thank

the member for the invitation and certainly look forward to it when the day arrives.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

2:10 Remand Centre Mental Health Services

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, last week I questioned the Solicitor General on the ongoing issues of rural crime and drugs in our correctional facilities. The minister mentioned a pilot project to install body scanners to hopefully prevent the entry of contraband into remand centres. In the meantime counselling services for persons in remand are woefully inadequate. I spoke with one former prisoner who said that he'd spent weeks in both Calgary and Edmonton remand without ever seeing a counsellor. To the minister. We share your hope that body scanners are successful in keeping drugs out of correctional centres. What are you specifically doing to increase counselling services in those centres?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much. Given that we're touching on a mental health issue, I'd be happy to begin, and I'm sure that my colleague will have more to say in subsequent answers. When I toured the Edmonton remand recently, I was really proud to have an opportunity to meet with the extensive health care team that was in place, including counselling services as well as nurse practitioners, dental hygienists, a strong nursing team, and health care aides as well. I have to say that it was great to see the opportunities that are in play there. We know that often people who are incarcerated have other underlying social determinants of health, and to be able to address those, including mental health, is certainly a priority.

Dr. Starke: Well, Minister, you need more because the prisoner in question saw a counsellor once in four weeks.

Since those with unresolved mental health and addictions issues are eventually released into society and are at a high risk of reoffending and given that reducing rural crime must include a combination of increased enforcement, prompt prosecution, and robust prisoner rehabilitation, what counselling and drug rehabilitation services are offered to offenders who continue to have unresolved mental health and addictions issues after their release?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I imagine this House is well aware, certainly, campaign 2015 included a significant focus around mental health supports. That has been throughout the broader community. I understand and would be happy to follow up on concerns around transition from incarceration back to community, but certainly our goal is to ensure that all Albertans get the right care in the right place at the right time, and as close to home as possible is certainly that goal.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that criminal activity in my constituency is reaching epidemic proportions and given that this activity has caused people to feel unsafe both in their homes and in their communities and given that this government only pays lip service to the rehabilitation and counselling services that are critical to breaking the criminal cycle, to the minister. When it comes to rural crime, your government has failed both the perpetrator and the victim. Explain exactly how that is making life better for Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We couldn't agree more that ultimately, at the end of the day, the best way to address issues of crime in our society is to ensure that people have adequate income, to ensure that they have access to adequate mental health support. That's why we were so happy to see launched a navigator program for people transitioning out of incarceration facilities to help them hook up with the supports that they need. We absolutely know that there is more to do on this front, and we will be moving forward with additional mental health supports. But what certainly won't help with that are 20 per cent cuts in health care budgets.

Energy Industry Emissions Assessments

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, another day, another FOIP showing that the NDP is trying hard to hide information. Alberta Energy hired Jacobs Consultancy to review the oil-climate index, an investment tool that slammed Alberta's oil sands. The document that the UCP received had multiple cover-ups, but the document that private citizens received had no cover-ups. Can the Minister of Energy explain what you are trying to hide?

The Speaker: The Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, we're working every day to make life better for Albertans, and especially in our energy industry things, as I've said, are looking up. Jobs are up. Wages are up. Drilling is up. That's because of confidence in the sector. [interjections] If there's a specific question to a specific issue . . .

The Speaker: Hon. members, please allow the minister to answer the question so that I can hear it as well.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, given that the hidden contents of the Jacobs report contain information that scientifically debunks the oil-climate index and given that the hidden information showed the oil-climate index was riddled with mathematical conversion logic errors, can the Minister of Energy explain: why are you not defending the energy industry against this pseudoscience slander?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise on behalf of the Minister of Service Alberta. Certainly, while there's more work to do, as a government we have improved turnaround time for FOIP requests and proactively share more information with the public than ever before.

As to the specific contents of the question, we will endeavour to get back to you and update the House.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, given that the rapid technological changes in heavy oil production in Alberta have decreased the energy used and emissions and given that the oil-climate index ignored those facts and given that the Jacobs Consultancy warned Alberta Energy and other stakeholders not to use the oil-climate index, will the minister admit that Alberta's oil sands are greener and cleaner than the myth conveyed by the oil-climate index and tell us why you are trying to hide it?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. While I have not reviewed the document in question, there is no question that Alberta's climate leadership plan embraces the fact that the environment and the economy go hand in hand, and we can in fact grow the economy while reducing our emissions. That was the

central proposition of the climate leadership plan, supported by a number of different initiatives, including the oil sands emissions limit, that was broadly supported by industry. We are moving forward with those initiatives to ensure that we can grow the economy while at the same time reducing our emissions.

Thank you.

Provincial Debt

Mr. Barnes: This government has unjustifiably claimed that they are making life better for Albertans. A recent paper coauthored by Janice MacKinnon, a former NDP Finance minister, no less, calls that claim into question. It states: “A course correction is necessary. Otherwise, the burden from this government’s building up of debt will be unfairly shifted to the shoulders of future Albertans.” This government has already piled up \$45 billion in debt and is headed to \$90 billion. When will this minister admit that his plan is only hurting Albertans and stop piling unsustainable debt on the backs of young Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That report is limited in capturing what’s really happening in Alberta here today.

While I very much enjoy talking about Alberta’s economic recovery and the jobs that have been created, I was deeply troubled by the member opposite’s recent statements. This member thinks that there can be a good reason to out LGBTQ children. I can think of only one reason: when that child decides to come out.

Mr. Barnes: He’ll do anything to avoid this question.

Given that Alberta currently spends 1 and a half billion dollars each year on interest and given that that’s money taken from the wallets of hard-working Albertans and put into the pockets of Bay Street and given that \$1.5 billion could have built 75 schools or a full-size green line LRT or done 83,000 knee replacements – all of this from the party of the proletariat and Occupy Wall Street; it’s foolish and shameful – to the minister: why are you so committed to making the rich richer at the expense of regular Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, as I’ve said over and over, jobs are up in Alberta, drilling is up in Alberta, manufacturing is up, and real estate sales are up in Alberta.

But I continue to be troubled by the member’s extreme ideas. Not only does he refuse to protect LGBTQ kids, but now he says that legislation on gas and dash would be onerous. [interjections]

2:20

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, another paper, by the Macdonald-Laurier Institute, found that Alberta has the highest default probability even before this minister of this NDP government’s recklessly increasing spending. The paper also states that Alberta could be headed towards default in as soon as 30 years. Given that MacKinnon’s report warns that the NDP’s plan to balance is based on the assumption that oil prices will rebound – only a fool would make that wish – when will the minister admit that the NDP is what ails Alberta and take corrective action?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our economy is recovering, and our government is working towards making life

better for all Albertans. We’re focused on creating jobs in this province, protecting public services that Albertans rely on and health care and education. Our plan is working. Their plan would cut out 20 per cent from today’s budget. It would make it harder for Albertans, and we would all be worse off.

Restaurant Industry Support

Mr. Orr: Mr. Speaker, this government brags on its tourism website that it wants to diversify the economy and support culinary tourism. However, according to the Raise the Bar report issued yesterday by Restaurants Canada, Alberta’s reputation as a business-friendly place to run a bar or a licensed restaurant is actually slipping. The report indicates that since this government has taken the reins, in 2015, Alberta’s restaurant business friendliness has been downgraded. This government claims things are getting better when, in fact, they are getting worse. Why is this government misleading Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture and Tourism.

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We’re very proud of the fact that Alberta is an incredibly welcoming place, and every single tourist who comes to our province can look forward to the best service, to the best entertainment, to the best activities that they can find in this entire country. We’re very proud of our industry, and we’re going to continue working with our industry to ensure that every single one of our visitors has the best experience possible.

Thank you.

Mr. Orr: Given that one of the main reasons for the downgrade is this government’s increase in taxes such as the increased provincial liquor markup tax, carbon tax on food, utilities, natural gas, and everything else and given that confiscating surplus WCB employer contributions, if it’s not theft, amounts to another tax and given that the average restaurant makes a mere 3 per cent on operational revenues and that they’re mostly local-friendly businesses, will the government stop battering the food and beverage industry with this pile-on of increasing taxes?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Restaurant sales are up. Albertans spent \$771 million in restaurants in August, \$5 million more than the record set in June. We’re going to continue working with our tourism partners to ensure that every single person who comes to our province can enjoy all the amazing things that we have in this province to offer. I invite the members opposite to join in celebrating all the amazing work that’s being done in this province.

Thank you.

Mr. Orr: The restaurants don’t agree that you’re working with them given that the wages are the second-largest restaurant cost and the cancellation of the server wage, with a replacement of an aggressive one-year 14 per cent minimum wage escalation, is the other reason for Alberta restaurants’ downgrades. Given that the Restaurants Canada VP says, “For the government to hit businesses with these extra costs during a recession adds insult to injury,” will the government delay its job-reducing, bankrupting minimum wage increase?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour and democratic renewal.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On this side of the House we believe everyone who works a full-time job should be

able to feed their family when they come home at night and not have to stop at the food bank. I've heard from too many people in the last two years who've shared with me the struggles of having to work a full-time minimum wage job and still have troubles making ends meet. Jason Kenney and the Conservatives don't believe that raising the minimum wage will help people. Instead, they believe in tax cuts for their friends, cutting the tax rate on the richest. Our government believes that every honest, hard-working Albertan should be able to earn and make a living wage.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Investment in Alberta

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents have expressed a lot of excitement over Calgary's recent bid for Amazon's second headquarters. News recently broke that Amazon is breaking ground on a new distribution centre near Calgary, with 750 much-needed full-time jobs. To the Minister of Economic Development and Trade: we have Amazon's distribution centre, but what action has this government taken to attract even more businesses like Amazon and the jobs they bring to Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Well, we actually believe that Alberta is a pretty good place to do business, and so do a lot of other folks. Even though the folks on the other side of the aisle would have us believe it's not, the businesses say otherwise. Alberta has no provincial sales tax, no payroll tax, no health care premiums, and some of the lowest gasoline and diesel taxes in Canada. Folks are actually listening. They like it. So to help attract more businesses to expand in our province, the Minister of Economic Development and Trade has created a branch in his department called Invest Alberta. It is a one-stop government connection to doing business in our province.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

First supplemental.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This Amazon distribution centre represents a significant investment for my region. Is this investment part of a broader trend of business investment in the Calgary area?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, in fact, it is. Folks are listening. They look at Alberta, and they really like what they see. The Invest Alberta branch has quarterbacked the expansion of Amazon, RocketSpace, and Swoop in Calgary, Champion Petfoods and Pinnacle in Parkland county, Google in Edmonton, and Cavendish Farms in Lethbridge. I think they're actually pretty happy about that. There are many more expansions to come. In addition to these, we've implemented our small-business tax cut. More than 29,000 new companies have incorporated in this province. That says everything.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: can you comment on any lesser known investments or projects that have perhaps been overshadowed by Amazon or Cavendish Farms or other projects that are helping to grow Alberta's tech sector?

Ms Jansen: Well, Mr. Speaker, as we mentioned, of course, in addition to Amazon, RocketSpace, and Swoop, we've got companies coming in and saying: this is the place to invest in this province. You know, as you mentioned, the Amazon project is pretty amazing: 600,000 square feet, this facility, expected to be done next fall; 150 people are actually going to be working on it and 750 people working in it when the project is done. We are on the world map. People are noticing Alberta. They're coming here. They want to invest and do business with us.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Justice System Delays

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every day more criminal cases are being thrown out of our courts because of this government's triaging policy. The senior Crown prosecutor, who shed light on hundreds of halted prosecutions, criticized the practice as, quote: the political mentality of putting your finger in a dike to hold the water back. Unquote. Minister, how many prosecutions have been stayed since the introduction of triaging?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the member is very much aware, all jurisdictions have been struggling with the Jordan decision as a result of historic court backlogs that have built up over years. That's why our government has taken the step to implement the triage policy to try to find efficiencies to ensure that we are using courts for serious things and not for mental health conditions. In addition, we've also added additional resources to ensure that we have additional Crown prosecutors, additional court clerks. We've maintained funding to front-line police officers, something the opposition would have cut.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that triaging has created another problem in that it's hard for police who have spent time and effort investigating crimes to then watch criminals walk free and given that Alberta's practice of triaging cases can create a lack of faith in the justice system for police officers, Minister, when are you going to provide me and Albertans with the information I requested in Public Accounts outlining the criteria for staying charges?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the hon. member across the way is absolutely wrong. No one is more supportive of moving to a more advanced justice system than our police partners. They are fans of restorative justice. They are fans of ensuring that we have mental health supports. They are fans of all of the things we are doing to try and improve the justice system and move it forward for a new century so that we can spend an appropriate amount of money and that money is going to ensure that the safety of Albertans is increased rather than simply going to churning people through the system over and over again.

2:30

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, thank you. Given that even judges are wondering why Alberta is so far behind other jurisdictions in addressing the Jordan decision and given that this NDP government is famous for its unintended consequences and that triaging is

driving a wedge between police and Crown prosecutors, to the same minister: are you aware that your triaging policy has turned police and prosecutors into unintentional adversaries?

Ms Ganley: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member could not be further from the truth. In fact, we've managed to convene police officers, the defence bar, judges, Crown prosecutors, all under one rubric, and you know what? They are very hopeful about the changes we are making to move forward to ensure that we have a modern justice system, a justice system that focuses on those things which are dangerous to Albertans and not simply on churning people with mental health problems through the system over and over again.

The Speaker: The Member for Fort McMurray-Conklin.

Home Insurance Policies

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, thank you. In the last four years Alberta has suffered its two worst natural disasters ever. One common thread in both the High River flood and the Fort McMurray fire is, in fact, that Albertans found themselves dealing with a confusing mess when it came to home insurance, next-door neighbours being treated very differently by different insurance companies because of different policies. Will this government change the Insurance Act to provide for standard language on home policies in the same way we have standard language on auto policies for all Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government committed to standing with the people of the Fort McMurray region after this disaster, and that's what we continue to do. Consumers are encouraged to review their policy coverage with their insurance representative to confirm their coverage and understand how it responds. The government of Alberta, through the office of the superintendent of insurance, has provided important insurance complaint resolution information online and to Albertans contacting the superintendent's office. As of the end of June of this year 85 per cent of the 25,000 residential insurance claims from the Fort McMurray forest fire had been settled, with \$1.3 billion paid out. We will continue to stand with the people of Fort McMurray as they ...

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Jean: The minister simply doesn't understand the question.

You see, across the street from where my house burned down was a fourplex that was saved by the amazing work of our firefighters. However, each of the four homeowners was treated very differently by their insurers. One had their unit demolished while another was allowed to move in after a minor cleaning. The third received a buyout and proceeded to sell their home as is, and the fourth was offered a full, down-to-the-studs remediation from the rooftop to the basement, including replacement of insulation and drywall. Given that they all had insurance and they had much different experiences, doesn't the minister agree that the time has come for standardized home policies here in Alberta for Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that some Fort McMurray families are still struggling, and we're working hard to continue supporting them. The government of Alberta, again, through the office of the superintendent of insurance, has encouraged the Insurance Bureau of Canada to actively promote and provide information to Albertans about resolving insurance complaints as

well as to maintain statistics on how well insurants are doing on settling claims. We'll continue to stand with the people of Fort McMurray as they recover, and we'll do what needs to be done to ensure that Alberta is as resilient as possible in the face of natural disasters.

Mr. Jean: This works in the auto insurance sector here in Alberta, and it should work in home insurance. My constituency office in Fort McMurray has spent the last year and a half hearing from Albertans who feel they have not been treated fairly by their insurers. They see their neighbours getting full coverage while they are denied on technicalities or put through the wringer as part of an insurance negotiation process. Given that not every fire victim has the resources for a prolonged dispute with an insurer who has unlimited resources, will the minister sit down with insurers and mandate a standard home policy so that Albertans clearly know what they're purchasing when it comes time to buy home insurance in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The road ahead for Fort McMurray is a long one, and our work continues. We've announced funding for \$7 million in tax relief for residents whose homes were affected by the wildfire. We announced \$1 million to support a program that accelerates training for plumbing apprentices; \$5 million towards a study of alternate access routes to the community; \$148.7 million in disaster recovery funding to help the municipality with the cost of the fire. We ensured that there are no obstacles to restrict rebuilding in waterways so the municipality can move forward with consultation. Over 50,000 evacuated households got \$99 million in disaster relief benefits. Right across the board we promised to stand ...

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Fisheries Management

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past April the Official Opposition released its 12-point fish plan. Inspired originally by the minister's disastrous aeration program, it covered multiple opportunities to enhance our fisheries and increase fishing opportunities for Alberta anglers. This plan was created by taking common-sense ideas from anglers and fishery experts instead of using the NDP government's failed approach to fisheries management. Minister, can you tell Albertan anglers what your government is doing to both improve our fisheries and increase opportunities for anglers other than, of course, making sure that fish don't die of oxygen deprivation during this winter?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, the member is quite right that there were some initiatives undertaken by the Alberta Conservation Association that did not succeed. Environment and Parks has fixed that problem, and those fish stocks have recovered. Our government is also taking swift action to protect our fish population from whirling disease – we've invested \$9.3 million to prevent the further spread of that disease in Alberta waters – which, of course, has the potential to wipe out our trout populations. That is a very serious matter, and that's why we took action.

Mr. Loewen: Given that our 12-point fish plan covers issues like harvest management of species that are presently not being

managed and predation control that is not being done and stocking opportunities that are not being taken advantage of and given that the expanded use of slot limits could provide increased angling opportunities that this government is failing to take advantage of, Minister, can you please tell Albertans why these concepts are not being fully implemented to restore our fisheries back to sustainable levels so Albertans can continue to enjoy this renewable resource?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the opinions expressed by the members opposite about Alberta's front-line workers, our wildlife biologists, our fisheries experts are just that, opinions. I hold different opinions. I hold the folks who work for Environment and Parks every day and who protect the environment in this province in higher esteem than the Conservatives across the way, who, by the way, with their devastating cuts to the civil service, would be relieving them of a job anyway, and we wouldn't have anyone to look out for our fishery.

Mr. Loewen: Given that I was clearly talking about this NDP government and that minister and given that the 12-point fish plan covers environmental issues like reclamation and the use of weirs and their maintenance to further protect our water sources and the use of stocking, which the government has failed to use to its full potential, and given that I attended a packed town hall near St. Paul where multiple issues regarding this government's failed fishery management strategy were discussed, can the minister tell us here today: what new initiatives have you instituted to receive meaningful input from stakeholders and anglers on fisheries management beyond online surveys?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the fisheries and wildlife regulations are updated annually, and they are done so as a result of consultation with a number of different groups, and they are guided by science. I know that that's something that's tough for the folks across the way to understand, but the fact of the matter is that we make these decisions based on the best evidence. The other piece of evidence that we have in place is that when you protect the headwaters, as we have done in southwest Alberta, you start to recover your fish populations. That's why we made the decisions we did around the Castle parks, and that's why we've restored environmental monitoring within the department.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

AISH and CPP Disability Benefits

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, I have constituents in Chestermere-Rocky View who, upon receiving cost-of-living increases on their CPP disability benefit, have had it clawed back by the AISH program. These people with disabilities have the federal government increase this benefit to help keep them going and then have the provincial government take it away to keep them in poverty. Can the Minister of Community and Social Services explain why the NDP government is running a social program that perpetuates poverty, dependence by clawing back income instead of lifting up a person?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. The way the AISH program works is that it makes sure

that individual income from all sources doesn't fall below \$1,588. Any other source of income that is there to provide income support to that individual is deducted from the AISH program. Having said that, the AISH program also provides other benefits, and we have taken a number of steps that benefit people who are receiving AISH as well. I will talk about that in my next answer.

2:40

The Speaker: Thank you.

First supplemental.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, given that AISH defines "severe handicap" as an adult Albertan with a permanent disability that impairs their ability to earn a living and given that the medical criteria for that disability are likely to remain permanent, limiting the ability to earn a living, and that AISH considers whether training, rehabilitation, medical treatment will help you to work enough to earn a living, why does the Minister of Community and Social Services want to perpetuate cruelty, poverty, and dependency by clawing back income from the federal CPP, income my constituent actually earned already when they could work, by reducing his AISH payments?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What we have done is that we have taken steps to fix AISH. The AISH action plan is available on the Community and Social Services' website. We have added \$70 million to provide support for people who are receiving AISH. What will be really cruel is if you claw it back by 20 per cent and strip 13,000 people from that benefit. That would be really cruel, and that's what we will not let happen on our watch.

Mrs. Aheer: You know what, Mr. Speaker? What's really interesting is that this minister has the power to actually already do this. Given that there are no advocates for AISH clients except MLAs when problems arise with the AISH program and given that AISH also prevents clients from seeking adequate and fair due process during the appeals and that the clients are accountable for all and any errors that the AISH person may make, can the minister explain: if all things are equal, why are AISH administrators more equal than others? You can fix it in one moment.

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, AISH is an important program that provides support to 55,000 Albertans. On our watch we have increased funding to make sure that people are receiving those important supports, and we have put together an AISH action plan. That is there to make the AISH process better, efficient and to make public reporting better. What will not work for people with disabilities will be a 20 per cent cut that that side is promoting, that that side stands for.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in 30 seconds we'll continue with Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Government Policies

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hope. Hope is not a plan, and hope does not pay the bills. I recognize that. However, hope is what Albertans have right now.

They have hope that we will soon have a government which will respect all people of all backgrounds.

They have hope that every day we move closer to a government which respects the hard work it takes for people to earn a dollar before taxing that dollar away from them.

They have hope that we are moving closer to a government which respects the dignity of work and recognizes the pride, the dignity that give an Albertan who's employed purpose every day.

They have hope that Alberta is moving towards electing a government which can be a key player in Canada without being a doormat for those who would like to see nothing better than Alberta suffer. Alberta has never been afraid to contribute our fair share and then a little bit more to the world. Albertans work hard every day and give back to those around us. However, that kindness cannot be confused with weakness.

There is hope that soon we will have a government which recognizes our place in the world and fights tooth and nail to improve that standing while selling Alberta to the world. Our international relationships, Mr. Speaker, need to be nurtured and supported. Sectors like energy, agriculture, and forestry produce far more than Albertans could ever consume themselves. We hope to sell these industries to the world to ensure that our producers get prices that enable them to grow their businesses while providing much-needed jobs to deserving Albertans.

Our tourism sector must be supported in selling our world-class beauty to the world and inviting them here to enjoy it.

Most of all, Albertans have hope that we will soon have a Premier who will proudly stand up for our province, for our people, for our history, and for our future on the national and international stage.

Until the next general election enables the realization of those dreams, Mr. Speaker, hope is what Albertans have right now.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Team Lethbridge

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will begin by saying yet again that I love Lethbridge, and I hope that when you come to visit, you're going to love it, too. I think today is Lethbridge day in the Leg.

Lethbridge is full of wonderful, forward-thinking people who want to share what they know about the city and area. Some of these people formed a coalition representing 19 different organizations in our city and called themselves Team Lethbridge. I first spoke about Team Lethbridge two years ago. They continue to grow and have just welcomed the city of Lethbridge and Lethbridge Indigenous Sharing Network reconciliation implementation plan and will incorporate this into the work they do.

Team Lethbridge works tirelessly to offer support to the government of Alberta in building solutions for the future and in showcasing how our city can contribute to provincial priorities. The city and the province benefit through these interactions. Team Lethbridge consists of representatives from cultural organizations, economic development groups, tourism associations, local government, school divisions, and postsecondary and seniors' organizations.

Team Lethbridge are here for the next couple of days to meet with ministers and MLAs to exchange information and discuss how they can contribute to the province's success. If you meet with Team Lethbridge, they'll be happy to tell you about the diversified economy, the rich arts and cultural heritage, the strong public sector, the great leadership, and the strong industries around Lethbridge.

Thank you, Team Lethbridge, for everything that you do to make our city, our region, and our province better. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Notices of Motions

Ms Luff: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to give oral notice of a bill to be introduced tomorrow, that being Bill 209, the Radon Awareness and Testing Act.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance.

Bill 27

Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2017

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce first reading of Bill 27, the Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2017.

In 2015 we said that we would strengthen Alberta's Conflicts of Interest Act and expand it to the senior staff of our province's agencies, boards, and commissions. With Bill 27 we are fulfilling this commitment, ensuring that public agencies are more accountable, are protecting Albertans' tax dollars, and are being governed transparently. Public agencies are a significant part of Alberta's public sector and account for half of the government's total yearly budget. Quite rightly, then, Albertans have the same high expectations of their public agencies that they have of government and expect all to be held to a high ethical standard.

Our public agencies provide valuable services that make life better for Albertans, such as higher education, protecting vulnerable people, and delivering quality health services. Bill 27 is part of numerous key changes that have already taken place for provincial government agencies, boards, and commissions, including the ongoing review of all agencies, boards, and commissions; the executive compensation reform we've brought in; enhanced compensation transparency; improved online board application processes; and greater transparency and diversity on Alberta's public agency boards.

Mr. Speaker, thank you very much.

[Motion carried; Bill 27 read a first time]

2:50 Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first two are in reference to a commitment I made when we were closing debate on Bill 203. The first tabling is a briefing document that I provided for the Pacific NorthWest Economic Region in Victoria a couple of days ago.

The second one is the presentation that I provided to the Pacific NorthWest Economic Region. For those who are unfamiliar, it includes all of the Pacific Northwest provinces and states. I want to thank my assistant, Katy Snut, who helped me with the preparation of that document.

The third is an update that we received from PNWER, specifically from Alaska. The document here is entitled Alaska Governor Announces a Plan for the State to Meet Paris Accord Climate Goals on Its Own.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to table five copies of a document containing five pages of quotations from letters I received supporting GSAs. If anybody in this Chamber doubts that GSAs save lives and help schools and communities flourish, all they have to do is listen to these youth and the people who support them. To quote briefly from one of the letters from a teacher in Calgary, she said: "It is paramount that no one out members of a safe space. Coming out is the story of that specific individual. There is a time and place that is appropriate for them to tell their friends and family."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings. The first two tablings are in reference to the speech that I gave yesterday on Bill 24. One of them is a speech from Lindsay Peace, who spoke at the press conference of the minister about what it's like to be the mother of a young person who came out as transgendered.

The other tabling is in reference to Dr. Tony Campolo, a leading evangelical pastor and theologian, about his view around LGBTQ and gay marriages.

The third tabling that I have is the October 2017 labour force survey by Statistics Canada. The survey shows that things are looking up in Alberta. It shows that 12,000 net new jobs were created in Alberta, and we are second in job growth in this country.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table five copies of ATB Financial's Alberta Economic Outlook, August 2017. In the report it shows that housing starts are up in Alberta, jobs are up in Alberta, GDP growth is up in Alberta. The report also says, "Nearly 35,000 net new jobs have been added over the last 12-months." It forecasts Alberta's GDP to grow by 3.2 per cent this year.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you. I get to table five copies of the StatsCan labour force survey documenting the number of full-time jobs created in Alberta. It shows that things are looking up in Alberta. It shows that since the depths of the recession Alberta created 72,000 full-time jobs, Mr. Speaker, and the 12,000 jobs referenced were in the last month alone.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies of the report I referred to in QP, the Jacobs Consultancy report, commissioned by Alberta Energy, about the oil-climate index review. Five of them are clean copies; five of them are redacted.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I referred in question period to Restaurants Canada's report entitled Raise the Bar, a Report Card on Provincial Liquor Policies for Bars and Restaurants, 2017. It does in fact show that they have downgraded Alberta's business-friendly climate in the last two years.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Premier I rise to table a report, which she referred to in question period today, by the Fraser Institute entitled Should Equalization Keep On Growing in an Era of Converging Fiscal Capacity? The report focuses on a rule change brought in by the Harper-Kenney government in 2009. This rule change ensures that equalization keeps growing every year in perpetuity and results in an extra \$1.3 billion for Ontario over two years while Alberta gets nothing.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have the appropriate number of copies of a tabling from the Privy Council Office of Her Majesty's Privy Council of Canada confirming that members of the Privy Council carry the title "Honourable" for life – there was some confusion from the members opposite as to Mr. Kenney's title – and confirming that on January 4, 2007, he did in fact become a member of the Privy Council and is therefore the Hon. Jason Kenney.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

The Speaker: Hon. members, I deferred a decision yesterday on a point of order. I would like to address that now.

The Member for Calgary-Elbow raised a point of order during Oral Question Period following the Premier's response to his first supplementary question. I did not hear the point of order called at the time, and therefore I deferred my ruling on it.

As to the facts of the matter, the Member for Calgary-Elbow asked a question about the use of pipelines to transport oil. In reply the hon. Premier responded: "Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member opposite for the mansplaining opportunity." The full exchange can be found on page 1779 of *Alberta Hansard* for yesterday, November 7, 2017.

In their arguments concerning this point of order, both the Member for Calgary-Elbow and the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster referenced *Beauchesne's* sixth edition. You can find those comments on pages 1787 and 1788 of yesterday's issue of *Alberta Hansard*.

Paragraph 486(3) of *Beauchesne's* references a list of words that have been judged to be unparliamentary and to have caused disorder in the House. I would point out that paragraph 486(2) of *Beauchesne's* states: "An expression which is deemed to be unparliamentary today does not necessarily have to be deemed unparliamentary next week."

As I and my predecessors who have occupied this chair have indicated on a number of occasions, the use of a list of prohibited, unparliamentary terms is no longer the practice of this Assembly. Rather, it is the context in which a particular word is used that should be considered in determining whether a term is unparliamentary or not. A word that is parliamentary in one particular context may be considered unparliamentary on another day in a different context.

As an example, I refer members to the comments I made on the issue on April 11, 2017, when I ruled that the context always comes into play. When considering this matter, see page 607 of *Alberta Hansard* for that day. [interjections] Hon. members, could you listen?

Speaker Zwozdesky on a similar matter on October 28, 2013, indicated that "the words uttered one day in a particular context may or may not be parliamentary. They may or may not be unparliamentary." These remarks may be found on page 2498 of *Alberta Hansard* for that day.

Additionally, on March 16, 2017, I ruled on the use of the term at issue when it was expressed by the Minister of Energy during question period. At that time I ruled that the use of the term was not unparliamentary, and therefore there was no point of order. However, I did strongly caution the hon. minister to be cautious with the words that are used in this Assembly when they are apt to cause disorder and to avoid the use of such terms. You may read my remarks on page 353 of *Alberta Hansard* for that day.

3:00

Likewise, in this instance, in this particular context I cannot find that there is a point of order. I would, however, caution all members about characterizing language in their responses such as saying “mansplain.”

I also caution members on the tone of their questions. Like our society has changed, so has this House. Tone can be as disrespectful as are certain singular words.

I want to assure members that if there is sexist or otherwise offensive language, the chair will intervene. Having said that, I find that in general members do not resort to sexist or otherwise offensive terms. Members likely share the pride about having a number of women elected in this Assembly that more closely represents the percentage of women in Alberta and also the diversity that is represented in the Assembly.

Statement by the Speaker

Interrupting a Member

The Speaker: On another related matter, I would like to remind members to give respect to all members by not just allowing questions to be asked but also to be responded to without interruption. Earlier this week there was an inordinate amount of heckling directed towards the Minister of Infrastructure. I reviewed the incident, and while I did not intervene at the time, I certainly will intervene in the future if that kind of behaviour persists and is continued.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 24

An Act to Support Gay-Straight Alliances

[Adjourned debate November 7: Mr. Coolahan]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 24, an Act to Support Gay-Straight Alliances. You know, I have a bachelor of arts in professional communications. I worked in that field for about five years. As part of those studies, I took a particular interest in political communications, how ideas and policies are communicated, critiqued, presented, and, indeed, misrepresented. It's a fascinating study of human psychology, cognition, and behaviour.

On entering into the realm of politics, having studied that, I came in with my eyes wide open regarding the use of spin, framing, insinuation, all of the tools of the trade. Indeed, I don't take offence in general at criticisms of our government's policies on taxes, on climate change, or on labour legislation. Madam Speaker, those are fair game. I'm happy to shrug off hyperbole that suggests that I or

any of my colleagues hate Alberta or the energy industry or even everyday working Albertans. I can let that go. But where I draw the line is when that misrepresentation, even if it is simply intended to undermine our government or to advance another member's or party's political ambitions, threatens to undermine the safety of marginalized and stigmatized communities, particularly when that is aimed at vulnerable youth who are already the regular target of bullying, oppression, and shaming.

Now, in a press conference this week the Leader of the Official Opposition, in grasping for a justification to oppose this legislation, made the claim that some GSAs teach curriculum in political activism. He chose to double down on that position this morning through one of his social media mouthpieces and Twitter attack dogs, who tweeted a carefully selected and context-free snippet from a guide created by the Alberta Teachers' Association, GSAs and QSAs in Alberta Schools: A Guide for Teachers.

Now, I understand that there is a need at times to throw a bit of red meat to one's base. Sometimes it's sirloin. Sometimes it's roadkill that's been scraped off the back alley. On this particular issue, Madam Speaker, Albertans and indeed marginalized LGBTQ2 youth deserve to have their safety and protection discussed on the basis of honest facts. So let's take a look at what this guide actually says.

On page 30 this guide lists four types of GSAs and explains the sorts of opportunities that each provides for youth. It's important, Madam Speaker, that we look at the paragraph that prefaces these descriptions because it makes a very important statement, and that is: “Students should guide the purpose of the GSA or QSA and its activities.” That's the guiding principle, that students decide, not teachers, not principals, not a fictional moustache-twirling villain pushing a gay agenda. Students.

With that context in place, the guide lays out four main roles that GSAs can play. First of all, a GSA or QSA that exists for counselling and support. This particular type of GSA, Madam Speaker, is intended for schools where students feel they are in a bit of a hostile environment, where there may be very little school-based support for LGBTQ2 students, so it's focused largely on individual students, led by counsellors – again, trained counsellors – who are there to work with and help support these youth and provide them with a safe drop-in space.

The second type of GSA, Madam Speaker, are ones that are there to provide safe spaces. These are officially sanctioned student groups, which, thankfully, under Bill 10, that was passed in this Legislature, are now required to be upheld, and this legislation will ensure that all schools follow the letter of that law as well as its spirit. They may have a limited visible presence, because, again, they're not there for the purpose of advertising; they're there for the purpose of supporting students in need. They focus on individual support and social activities for their members. They include straight allies, and the focus is on helping LGBTQ2 students to feel normal and feel like they are supported and can simply fit in in their school environment.

The third type of GSA or QSA, Madam Speaker, are those that exist to raise visibility and awareness. Once again, as is the case with all of these situations, they are student led. They are focused on student safety and take an additional interest in human rights. They have a visible, school-wide presence. They're characterized by social, educational, and, yes, political activities. They initiate school-wide educational activities and programs such as guest speakers, assemblies, Pride Week activities, and they focus on building tolerance and understanding.

Madam Speaker, the words that have been seized on here are “political activities.” Now, let me remind this House that there has been no advancement of human rights in the history of our country

or any other in this world that did not involve political activity. These are not dirty words. They're not scary words. They're not nefarious. They are simply a reality. LGBTQ students and their allies actively working to raise the profile of those students and of their community and working to build visibility and awareness: yes, that is a political activity, but it is not one that anyone in this province needs to be afraid of unless they have for some reason some concern with the LGBTQ community being visible and accepted in this province.

Again, these are student-led groups. I remember back in high school the Amnesty International club. We shared space with them when I was on the school newspaper. They advocated for human rights around the world. That, Madam Speaker, was a political activity.

I myself as a young man, having grown up in the church and at that point very zealous in my faith, would regularly wear my Mylon & Broken Heart concert T-shirt, and on the back it was proudly emblazoned: love God; hate sin. To some extent, Madam Speaker, that was a political statement. I was not trying to bring any agenda to that school. I was, as a student, simply being visible about my beliefs and who I was at that time.

3:10

That is all these students are doing. Again, student led. This is not some secret agenda being smuggled in. This is not teachers attempting to influence students against their parents' wishes. These are students who are working to raise visibility and awareness and stand up for their own human rights.

Lastly, Madam Speaker, they mention QSAs or GSAs that are there to "effect educational and social change." This is simply taking the last example and taking it one step further. They're not now at this point just working to raise visibility. They're not just working to raise awareness. They are actually working to effect change. In this situation the GSA may be used to "build networks and coalitions with other school and community-based groups." They may "focus on school climate and organizational change through outreach." So they're looking, then, at trying to actually transform the school environment, not just make people aware of LGBTQ students but ensure that their school is an accepting and open place for those students. They also organize activities, so things like diversity days, opportunities for staff training, and, indeed, discussion of inclusive curriculum.

Now, again, Madam Speaker, this is being used to try to paint these as something they are not. Again, this is a student-led organization, where students may, if they have reached the point where they are comfortable enough in their identity, in being who they are, and in their school environment, be able to advocate for that school environment, even for its curriculum to be more inclusive of their presence.

Again, the Leader of the Official Opposition wishes to use this to try to paint GSAs as some sort of nefarious thing that parents need to be afraid of or that if for some reason parents aren't told about it, students are going to somehow be misled. Madam Speaker, I believe that students have the ability to engage in critical thinking skills to be able to engage in standing up for their own human rights and indeed in commenting on and offering thoughts on the curriculum by which they are taught. These are not things to be afraid of, and there is nothing in this bill that undermines parental authority in that respect.

I've often wondered, Madam Speaker, as I've heard some members of this House speak on their position on this bill and their concerns about this bill, how many individuals from the LGBTQ2 community they have actually spoken to about this bill and asked their opinions on it.

Madam Speaker, I'm very proud to have probably one of the largest communities of LGBTQ individuals in our city right here in my constituency, in Oliver, and just a couple of weeks ago I had the opportunity to join many of them at a Halloween night dance they had, a haunted hotel dance over at Denizen Hall, a great little venue here in my constituency, an event organized by Fruit Loop, a fantastic organization that holds social activities for the LGBTQ2 community and uses them to fund raise for important causes that support that community. Unfortunately, that organization has been besmirched by some in the community who have made accusations about the type of work they do, but I am proud to support them.

I attended that evening because they had been awarded a CIP, community initiatives program, cheque through the Canada 150 stream through the Minister of Culture and Tourism, and I deeply appreciate him putting forward that program. I went there that evening to present that cheque. I was brought up on stage in front of at least a couple of hundred members of the LGBTQ community, and indeed when I presented that cheque, I got a very loud cheer. But I'll tell you, Madam Speaker, that that cheer was nowhere near as loud as the cheer I heard when I told them about this bill.

This is a change. This is a step forward in this province that has been asked for by members of this community, individuals who know from their personal experience what it is like to be an LGBTQ student in our high schools across our province in all communities, who know what the experience is of struggling with one's own identity, of trying to understand who you are and, indeed, of how safe you feel at each stage of that journey. That is why they support this legislation. They recognize that the only person who should be making that decision, Madam Speaker, is the child themselves. The only person. They are the best judge of when they are safe. They are the best judge of who they wish to tell and when.

Indeed, as we've heard, I think the majority of students reach a place where they are comfortable talking to their parents, and indeed the majority of parents love and accept that child for who they are. That is a great thing, and I am so glad that we have come to that place in our society where that is the majority of the cases. But it is not all. It isn't all. I think back to my own youth, Madam Speaker. Growing up in a very strict fundamentalist evangelical home, there were many things that I had struggles with with my parents, you know, simple things like listening to Christian rock music or having a cross shaved in the back of my hair – a cross shaved in the back of my hair – back when the flat-top and fade were the big thing. Those were challenging times.

Madam Speaker, I love my parents. I love them dearly, and we have a wonderful relationship. We've had the chance to talk through a lot of these things, and we all grow and change. But I know there are things I would not have been comfortable sharing with my parents at that age, and I think I had reasonable and good judgment in myself to determine that. That does not say that my parents were bad people. Indeed, I hesitated to speak of this on the record because I do not want anybody to think that is the case.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Connolly: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The member was about to continue on a story that he was about to share. I would ask him to continue if he'd like.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you to the Member for Calgary-Hawkwood. I mention it only to say that for students in these positions, who are already so vulnerable, to be placed in a position, whether they reach out to a teacher or someone in their school, if they join that GSA or QSA to find the support they need, if they don't know one hundred

per cent for certain that that will be a secure space and that their privacy will not be breached, then that student remains in uncertainty, in anxiety, and, indeed, at risk.

This bill provides careful provisions that in an emergency situation school counsellors or teachers or anyone else involved in this process have the ability to contact a parent. At no point under this legislation would a student be at risk. This puts the needs, the concerns of the student first. In doing that, it does not in any way disrespect parents or contravene their authority. At any point in this process the students can choose to tell their parents. There is nothing in this bill that forbids this. There is nothing in this bill that insists a parent can never be told. It only insists that the choice to do so comes from the students themselves. That, Madam Speaker, is what my constituents have told me. That is what they have asked for, and that is the guarantee this legislation will provide so that GSAs and QSAs in this province can continue to do the good work they are intended to do; that is, to save lives and to build better lives for LGBTQ2 Albertans.

Thank you.

3:20

The Deputy Speaker: Any further questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to thank the Member for Edmonton-Centre for his speech. I do have a question for him as the representative for downtown Edmonton. I wonder if he has experience that he might be able to share with the Chamber in terms of homelessness and LGBTQ youth. We know that when students have their identity disclosed to their parents before they're ready, unfortunately, sometimes there are parent abandonment issues, which lead to youth homelessness. I just wonder if the Member for Edmonton-Centre, representing the constituency that he does, might be able to share some of his experiences and the stories from some of his constituents there.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you to the Member for Banff-Cochrane. Indeed, shortly after my election in 2015 I was approached by a group called SAFQEY. They exist for the purpose of dealing with the issue of homelessness with LGBTQ and, in particular, trans youth. In speaking with them and watching a documentary that they put together, which features the stories of trans youth in our province, that, unfortunately, was a common theme. A large percentage of youth that are homeless come from the LGBTQ community, and the majority of those students are homeless because when their parents found out, they could no longer feel that they had a safe home environment.

Madam Speaker, this bill, this legislation can help to change that by ensuring that those students would have a safe place where they can talk about these concerns; where they can talk to others who've navigated this process; where they can work with others who are working for the same goal, that being the human rights and acceptance of the LGBTQ community in our province; or that may be able to give them the confidence and the safety to perhaps then be able to broach that conversation with their parents with the needed support. They can feel confident in going to that GSA or QSA, knowing that nobody without their permission will share that information, also knowing that should they be in a situation where they are at risk, the school has the ability to ensure that all parties necessary can be involved to ensure they're protected and supported.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 24, An Act to Support Gay-Straight Alliances. Let me start by

saying that we all need to strive to do our very best in this House to be respectful of each other and set a tone so that outside of this House, when we're discussing highly charged topics like this, we set the tone for our constituents to be respectful to one another.

As the minister of environment said yesterday in question period, yelling at people is not an effective way to create change, and I would agree. To accuse parents who are concerned that they're being cut off from their child in such crucial formative years and the MLAs who represent those parents of being bigots is unjust. To accuse the government of trying to use children as a political tool when it's clear from the passion that this bill is intended to protect children is also not fair.

All of us in this Chamber, all of us who are parents or who represent parents, who have children and who represent children are here with the best intentions. We should give each other the benefit of the doubt on this particular score.

With that said, I will be voting in support of this bill.

As a parent myself I like to believe that my children can tell me anything and that they know I'll support them no matter what. Just to interject a little bit of my life and if my dad is watching now: Dad, I didn't tell you everything. But it's not like the member just mentioned. My dad was the most caring, loving, gentle, kind person. I never felt that if I was truly in crisis, I could not go to him. That's a wonderful blessing, but I know a lot of parents aren't there yet. For that matter, there are a lot of children that aren't there yet either. It's not always a question of violence or abuse or the lack of acceptance. Students and teenagers aren't always the best at having big conversations like this, and I know that there are a lot of parents out there that struggle with having this sort of talk with their children around sexual health and other important topics.

I think we need to do away with the notion that if your child doesn't tell you about joining a GSA, it's because you haven't made your home a welcoming one. We also need to acknowledge that no matter how accepting you are with your children, there's no guarantee that they would tell you about joining a GSA. I think that this is where parents have concerns, that they could be left out of such a huge part of their child's life no matter what they do. The online comments to the effect of "If your kid doesn't tell you, then you're the problem" aren't helping the situation. Kids are always going to keep secrets from their parents, and that's a part of growing up. Parents worry that the secrets their children are keeping could be dangerous for the child, and that's a part of being a parent.

The bottom line, though, is that this is one case where it could be more dangerous for the child to have their secrets revealed. This legislation will ensure that students have the sole judgment and the sole responsibility to tell who they want when they want. I think that's a good thing. What I'd like to see, though, is for GSAs to take a more active role in preparing and encouraging students to have those important discussions with their parents. Parents are important partners in teaching their children about respectful intimate relationships, promoting safe sexual practice, and setting reasonable boundaries for their children. For all those students who are avoiding having this talk because they're worried about this safety – it can be a hard conversation to have – we need to support them, full stop.

While GSAs are wonderful peer-to-peer support groups, we should be encouraging students to find the support within their family where it is safe to do so. We should also be giving those parents that just aren't there yet the benefit of the doubt, recognizing that for any parent the safety and well-being of their child is the most important thing in the world. I know that other members in this House – we talk about how we acted when we were younger. I thank God that He has given me the understanding to come a lot

further from where I was because it has made me a better man and a better human being.

We should make resources available to parents to enable them to ask their children about these subjects in a noninvasive, nonconfrontational way. So I will vote for this bill as another step to protecting vulnerable LGBTQ2S children, but I hope this is the start of another conversation, a conversation about how, now that we have protected children from dangerous family situations, we move to engage more parents to be an active part of their children's journey.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), the hon. Minister of Culture.

Miranda: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to take the opportunity to thank the member for his words and for his support of this bill. I have had the opportunity to discuss with the member at an event that we were both attending, Camp fYrefly. I saw how he was open to having discussion with young people who were perhaps needing to have support to talk to adults and to be in an environment that was very welcoming and loving. For my part, I have to say thank you very much for doing that because it is important to see that these kinds of issues can cross party lines. It's really about these kids and their safety.

It has not always been the case that my parents were open, and my parents were welcoming and loving. I know that not every child has that. It was only when I was ready to have those discussions that I was able to actually have them with my parents. My mother initially had a hard time, but she came around. I know that it is because of adults who are creating those spaces and allowing for those conversations to take place that we have children who feel safe enough to do so.

I thank the member for his support, and I invite everybody else to follow his example. Thank you.

3:30

The Deputy Speaker: Calgary-Hawkwood.

Connolly: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you very much to the member. What he was saying is very true. It's very personal coming out. When people decide to come out to a parent or decide not to come out to a parent, it's not necessarily because they think that the parent is bad or they don't have a very open relationship with their parent. A lot of the time it's just because the child isn't ready or the youth isn't ready or even the adult isn't ready. There are people who are still in the closet in their early 20s, 30s, 40s, and it can go all the way up even until they die, unfortunately, without coming out.

I really want to thank the member. We have to remember that this bill is to protect children. It's to protect their privacy, to protect their safety. Really, like the minister was saying, it's a nonpartisan issue. We should all be able to come together and say that we should protect our youth, we should protect their privacy, and we're going to stand together and make sure that the mistakes that have happened in the past do not continue to go forward.

I again want to thank the member for his very impassioned speech. I know he is very passionate about this issue and that he's worked very hard with himself, with his family, with legislation in this House, with LGBTQ issues, so I want to thank you again.

That's pretty much it. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Further questions or comments under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Ms Luff: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise in the House to speak to this bill, Bill 24. It's something that is important to me. It's important to many of my friends who are teachers. It's important to a lot of students that I used to teach. I'm just going to try to speak a little bit to what my experience around this issue is.

I do want to state first off that in speaking about this, I come from a position of privilege. You know, I'm a white, cis, middle-class woman, and really I've had the privilege of a great amount of education. This isn't something that I had to struggle with in my life, so I take it very seriously when I speak for others who have had to struggle with it in their life.

I grew up in a small town on Vancouver Island, Duncan. It seemed very far away from sort of any major cities at the time, and being gay wasn't something that we talked about. I don't remember anyone talking about it growing up. I don't remember any characters on television. I don't remember that it was an issue. It was sort of something that was swept under the rug and not talked about, and I imagine that if you were someone who was struggling with their sexuality at that time in that small town before the Internet was everywhere, you would have had a real struggle in terms of figuring out what your identity was and how you were going to get by.

My best friend growing up came out as gay when she was, I think, 30 or 31, after she'd been married and after she had kids. We spent hours playing together when I was a kid, and it wasn't something that she ever felt comfortable talking to me about at all until maybe she had left for university because the environment that we grew up in was just so stifling. Not on purpose, you know? It just wasn't something that people talked about.

When I think about what the opportunity would have been to have a GSA at our high school in Duncan in 1995, I think it would have made a huge difference to a lot of people, to a lot of people's lives. There were a lot of people I knew who had issues, who had depression or who had problems with alcoholism, because they didn't feel that they were able to talk about this. They didn't feel that there was anyone that they could go to talk to. So having a GSA in our high school would have been hugely beneficial, I think, for everybody, for everybody to understand that there are different options and different ways how to be, that you don't have to be a certain way to be recognized and to be valued in society.

You know, I contrast that experience with my experience now being a parent. I have small children. I have a five-year-old and I have a three-year-old, and I talk to them about these kinds of things. I talk to them about how sometimes men marry men and sometimes women marry women and that it's okay for my daughter to want to play with cars and that it's okay for my son to want to wear pink if that's what he wants to do. It always prides me when I hear him stand up and say something in public. If he's in public and someone says, "Oh, you can't have that; pink is not a boy's colour," he'll come out and say: "Of course it is. Pink is for everybody. Colours aren't for boys or girls. They're just for everyone."

It speaks to the fact that gender stereotypes are still such a huge factor in our society right now. There are ways that women are expected to behave, and there are ways that men are expected to behave, and I think it really limits what we can do and where we can go as a society when we have to fit into boxes that have been put on us for such a long time. GSAs are part of a movement to unbox people, if you will, to let people really, truly be who they are in any given circumstance.

What I'm hoping is that as my children grow up, this isn't something – like, it wasn't something I thought about as I grew up, but that was because no one talked about it. I want it to be something that my kids don't really have to think about as they grow up because everybody is talking about it and it just becomes part of our natural conversation about ways that people can be.

You know, I've been a teacher at a school. I taught grade 8, junior high. We didn't have a GSA at my school when I was there. But I have stayed in touch with a lot of my students on social media, and some of them have come out as trans, as gay in the intervening years. I am so proud of each and every one of them who took that on when they were ready and how they wanted to do it. I've seen them in pride parades, when we were marching in pride parades, and they're happy to be there. It's just generally really wonderful that they feel that they are safe to be able to do that.

That said, you have to make decisions every day as a teacher when it comes to when you're going to inform parents about something. While we didn't have a GSA at my school, there were times that I had to inform parents about mental health issues that children were having or, you know, learning disabilities and things like that. By and large, parents are usually supportive. Like has been said multiple times in this House, all parents want what's best for their kids.

Unfortunately, I've also seen situations where when you bring up an issue with a parent, they neglect to see it as a thing. I've talked to parents who didn't believe that it was possible for a teenager to have a mental health issue, and by actively ignoring it, it devalued that child's experience. I've seen where damage can happen when parents get notified of things before kids are ready. This piece of legislation, that really emphasizes that the decision lies only with the child and only when they're ready, is really important.

I talked to one of my friends who is a GSA sponsor at a school where she teaches, and she told me that one thing she's come to realize is how mysterious GSAs can be to people who aren't in them. So, you know, she wanted to tell everyone here a little bit about what people in her GSA do. She says that they like to eat. They like to have lunch and share snacks. They like music. They're not afraid to sing. They have a library of age-appropriate books, and they sometimes even read picture books. They discuss issues, and they take turns and ask questions and offer opinions. They post a flag of the month on their bulletin board, and they particularly love making buttons and handing out stickers. So you can see, really, that it's far from the sort of nefarious thing that is sometimes talked about in the media.

3:40

Let's face facts. Not every student who attends a GSA is at risk at home, but some are. Some LGBTQ kids come from homes that make aggressively homophobic comments and associate hideous shame with noncis identities. Some come from homes that would rather see them out on the street than accept them as who they are. Some come from homes that would beat them as a punishment or deterrent.

For myself as a teacher and many others who I've spoken to, if we were told that we had no choice but to potentially put a student in that position, I don't know what I would do. I don't think that you could ever tell a teacher that they had to put a child in danger. It's so counter to our every instinct, emotion, and training. These kids in our schools need a safe space. It's not something that's nice to have; it's something that they have to have. At a time in their lives when it's essential to the development of their identity, their self-esteem, and their mental health, it's crucial that schools accept, support, and protect their students. It's even more crucial to a kid who isn't getting this support at home.

Sometimes, you know, when kids are at home, they hear the terms "gay" or "fag" as a slur, and they're being told that who they are is an aberration or a waste of life. If that strikes you as a bit extreme, imagine how it strikes them. It strikes them down. Statistics for depression and suicide among LGBTQ youth far outpace those of cis and hetero youth. I'll say it again: every kid needs a safe space; not deserves, needs. GSAs provide that space.

On the surface much of a GSA is eating lunch, listening to music, and discussing relevant issues, including the decisions that we make here at the Legislature. Underneath, though, a GSA is about visibly showing and telling kids that you matter and you're okay like you are, that you're accepted and supported and valued, and that we as a society are invested and interested in keeping them safe. The gesture is simple, but it can be and has been life saving.

On a final note, no amount of attending a GSA can possibly erase the influence of the home. The student won't forget their parents' opinions or their family values, and no extracurricular club is going to usurp parenting or erase who a student is. We just ask that this one club be allowed to tell students that who they are is okay without having to endanger the child to do so.

Picture your ideal school. It's a place where true learning happens, where students are supported, accepted, and cared for. Now picture a student, a student growing up and navigating their world. They're starting to figure out who they are, and they're terrified. That student's school should have the right to support that student and keep him or her or them safe. Isn't it our government's job to do that same thing?

The crux of the argument with this for me is that a GSA is really no different than any other club. It's something that helps students feel secure and safe at school. So if you wouldn't call a parent to tell them that their kid has joined a chess club or that their kid has joined – I don't know – an environmental club, but you would call them to tell them that they're involved in a GSA, then what you're inherently saying is that there's something about being in a GSA that deserves notification. By saying that, you're saying it's different and you're saying that there's something wrong with it. That's the line for me. There's nothing wrong with being in a GSA. There is all sorts of proof that they support and keep kids safe, and kids are the ones who are asking for them. They're the ones who are making these decisions. I think we've more than heard that it's every individual's own decision as to when to come out.

I support this legislation because I've heard from teachers how important these are. I've heard that they wouldn't want to out kids, and I've heard from kids who don't want to be outed, who want to come out to their parents when they feel that it's in their best interest to do so. So I support this legislation, and I hope everybody else does the same.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Yes. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'd like to thank the Member for Calgary-East for her comments. I think she can offer even more of a unique perspective to the Legislature this afternoon because as a former teacher and as a parent, you know, she can see both perspectives on that. What we've heard from the opposition: one of the reasons that they don't support the legislation is because they want to put the teachers in the position to make the decision whether or not parents should be notified. The Member for Calgary-East as a former teacher: I just wonder if she might share with the Assembly if she would feel comfortable in the role of a teacher making that decision. Would she want to be put in the position of making a decision for a child, and how would it make her feel as a professional?

Ms Luff: Yeah. For sure. As I've outlined before, there are certain parts of being a teacher. As a teacher you have a required duty of care. If a student reveals to me something that means that they are in danger at home, I am required to report that to Children's Services. It's always one of the hardest decisions that a teacher can make when you have to make that call because it means that you're intervening in someone's life, but under my duty of care and under the law I'm required to.

There are lots of times, as I've outlined before, when a teacher has to make a call about when to call a parent: if a kid's behaviour is not good and they're acting up in class or if a kid hasn't done their assignment, if a kid has revealed something to me about their personal life that I think their parents should know about. There are a lot of issues where I would have had to have made a choice that I don't really want to make, you know? There are so many things you have to do every day as a teacher. You have to mark papers. You have to make sure every kid is learning. You have to make sure every kid is safe in your class. There are so many decisions that you have to make.

I don't want to be responsible for this one decision that can make a huge difference in a kid's life. The only person who should be making that decision is the kid themselves, especially when you don't know how a parent might react. I taught a lot of kids whose parents probably had, I would say, conservative views on LGBTQ issues, and kids growing up today in Calgary with access to the Internet had really different views from their parents. I want to leave it up to that kid to have that discussion with their parents. They're going to be way better at it than I am. Given that opportunity, no, I absolutely don't want that pressure put on me as a professional.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other questions or comments under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, any other speakers to the bill? The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am so honoured to be able to speak to Bill 24, and it is with deep respect and humility that I'd like to speak about some very, very important points that the Minister of Education made yesterday with respect to the bill and what it's actually about. Before I go into that, though, there's one thing that I would like to make very clear, that no government knows better than the community, the educators, the parents, and, most of all, the child. That's the most important thing that we have to understand here in government. Oversight in any aspect of that undermines the way that a child has the ability to be able to function, especially in such important situations as GSAs.

These are statements that the minister made yesterday, statements that I align with and that I believe are conducive to strengthening safe and caring spaces, GSAs, QSAs for our students, so I'd like to quote the minister. On amendment 2(d), which adds subsection (6), regarding informing parents and that it should be up to the student organization, that is a very, very good step forward, in my opinion, in advancing the safety and the rights of all students. I was happy to see that amendment, and I just wanted to say thank you for that.

Secondly,

[we all] make life better for Alberta students by ensuring that they can form a gay-straight alliance at their school without fear of being outed.

This was a statement by the minister. I completely agree.

Every single student in this province deserves a welcoming, caring, and safe place to learn.

That was the minister's statement. I completely agree.

3:50

It is not the school's place to dictate how children interact with parents, nor is it the government's. This is something that is up to the child, something that we can all agree on. Another statement that was made by the minister: he wanted to "clarify school authority roles and responsibilities around supporting welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe learning environments for student-led organizations, including gay-straight and queer-straight alliances." Again, clarity is good. I completely agree. "Section 45.1 places responsibilities on school authorities to create [these] welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe learning environments." I completely agree. The question of whether to notify a parent with respect to a GSA has already been clarified in that mandatory notification is not necessary. I completely agree.

Joining a GSA is, of course, student led, not government led. Student led. It is an antibullying group with real numbers behind the strength of having a GSA and how it enhances the school experience for those who have had access to one. There is so much research out there to show how important GSAs are. They're not a class. They are a place for kids to sit and talk, have a meal together, and learn about each other. GSAs reduce suicide rates amongst youth of all backgrounds and orientations. I completely agree. Students must be allowed to form gay-straight alliances. Again, I completely agree. Some students might feel safer and more comfortable talking about these issues with their peers. Again, the minister said this. I completely agree. No child should be outed. I completely agree. GSAs can "change a student's life," improving the "overall atmosphere of a school community to ensure that we're looking after everybody." I completely agree. Being safe and cared for is a basic human right. I completely agree.

One of the things that I resonated with most yesterday in the discussion was that the minister had mentioned one of the young men that was here during the introduction of the bill. I can't remember what his name was.

An Hon. Member: Ace Peace.

Mrs. Aheer: Yeah. I think so. Thank you.

This person said: how scary it must feel to be alone. I actually understand that. I think most of us do at some point in our lives. We can all relate to how that feels. The minister of environment gave one of the best speeches I've ever heard her do in the Legislature. One of the things that really spoke to me and hit the nail on the head was when she spoke about how when we were all in school – I'm a little older than her – exclusion was cool, right? To leave somebody out was cool. I don't think anybody ever had the intention of doing that, but if we can, you know, be participatory in something that ends that or at least works toward ending that, I completely agree.

I think about my children, some whom I have birthed and others who are my kids because I'm just fortunate to have them in my life. We have lots of discussions around this, and truly they are my measuring stick and truly represent the population of inclusive individuals, no matter their faith, culture, background, ability, or sexual orientation. My children expect me to make decisions that are based on fact and supported by my gut. I spoke with them about this along with one of my dearest friends, a true ally, Natasha Kornak. All of you are familiar with her. Natasha worked with and supported her GSA at school, and a very successful GSA actually, I might add. My oldest was also part of a GSA in school although I think it had a different name at the time. It is with their permission that I mention those facts. I actually didn't even know my son was in a GSA. I only learned about it recently because we happened to be having this discussion. The truth is that my children have been part of alliances their entire lives.

The only thing I can hope for is that – you know, we’re beyond blessed to have friends and family that are LGBTQ, other backgrounds, cultural backgrounds, and these people have enhanced my life in ways that I can’t even begin to explain. Hopefully – hopefully – I’ve enhanced theirs. I’ve travelled with these friends. Some of them are my kids’ teachers. I’ve cried and laughed with my family and friends. I would take a bullet to protect their rights, just to be clear. I also do not agree with everything that my friends say at any given time, and I consider people in this Legislature to be my friends.

The one thing is that once I’ve had a discussion with any of my friends – and it doesn’t matter what their background is – I don’t think any of them have ever felt that I was at odds with their rights or that of their children. I ask questions because, well, first of all, I’m inquisitive and I ask a lot of questions, but also it’s my responsibility to seek clarification. I would expect the same from you. So here are my questions.

Like I said, so much of this bill certainly resonates with me, so I’d like to ask some clarification around section 50.1(1). This section of the School Act states that parents must be notified of instructional time that focuses on topics related to “religion or human sexuality.” But GSAs are not instructional time – right? – as I understand it, so it’s a little confusing, as you can imagine. I’m not certain why that has to change, that section, or if I’m misinterpreting what’s happening in the bill. As I understand it, a GSA is a club. It is a group meeting. It’s an antibullying group. It does not require the legislation of 50.1(1). I’m not quite sure why this is a necessary change.

Youth that are over a certain age anyway – I mean, this is a voluntary group. Let’s be realistic, folks. If they’re over a certain age, they’re going to run this group as they see fit. No amount of parents, government, or any other intervention is going to stop a kid from talking about what they want to talk about, right? If it doesn’t fall under the rules of instructional time, why do we have to change that? I don’t understand.

The other thing is that if that’s going to be legislated, is it the government’s intent, then, to legislate what kids are allowed to talk about in GSAs and who they can bring to a GSA? That seems like a huge imposition on the rights of students who are in a voluntary group. They’re not there because they’re always vulnerable. It’s silly to assume that kids are just in a GSA because they’re vulnerable. Yes, there may be vulnerable students in there, but there are also kids there that are getting together because they want to start this group. They want to be together. Vulnerable situations that occur, like the member said earlier, are covered under other pieces of legislation completely different and separate from the GSA. One does not have to do with the other and should not be confused.

The question I have, then, is: do GSAs and QSAs even fall within this section of the School Act? Again, I need some serious clarification on this position. There may be a very good reason for doing this, but I’m truly confused. If the government can provide a hypothetical as to why this needs to be changed and how it enhances discussions on orientation, I would appreciate that.

The other thing – and maybe I’m asking the question, again, because I’m inquisitive, so please take this with the intention with which it’s being brought forward. With a GSA what are the qualifications of that person that’s overseeing the GSA? Has that teacher undergone sexual and gender diversity and inclusion training – right? – in order to lead that GSA? That’s very, very important because these are student-led groups, but they have to have a person to oversee this. I would want to make sure that a person that’s in a group where vulnerable situations may occur is qualified and capable to help move that person into whatever the next logical step would be there.

What are the protocols – actually, I think the member may have potentially answered this, but I’ll ask it anyway, and you can correct me if I’m wrong – for the kids who are showing signs of any sort of mental health needs that may present during discussions in a GSA, regardless of orientation, that have nothing directly to do with participating in the GSA? Are there teachers who recognize the need for help? Is there a specific directive as to: does the student go to counselling, do they contact a parent without notifying them about the GSA, or does the bill override that? I think I need to understand that as well. If the student has given permission to the educator to mediate, I’m assuming that that’s fine, but does the bill override that? Again, I would like to seek some clarification on that, and I think that in the broader spectrum of the bill that needs to be specific.

Another question that I have is: are parents considered allies and advocates at any point with respect to how the child feels? I mean, obviously, the child has to direct that, right? I’m just curious at what point a parent or a caregiver could become an ally or if that is dictated in the bill or if that’s just something that happens organically. Like, I don’t understand how government oversight is going to help with that situation.

4:00

How does the support, then, extend beyond the safety of the GSA? This is actually a really big one for me, having been involved in many GSAs. One of the things that has been very concerning for me is that the support is there at the GSA level at the school, which is fantastic, but outside of the GSA – I think that the other member had mentioned this with respect to incorporating families and other supports at some point, respecting the child’s choice at this point – what is happening to make sure that that support isn’t just for that half an hour or hour once a week for that child to be truly who they are? How are we continuing that process outside of school? What supports are available? How do we incorporate the other people and their families if that is what the child wants, or does the bill override that?

How does the support extend beyond the safety of the GSA, and will the supports, then, help the child to learn to cope if they are potentially thinking about bringing their parents into the discussion? As has been stated very eloquently in here and by everyone whom I’ve spoken to who has been a member of a GSA or who has come out on their own time, it doesn’t matter how much support you have. That is a deeply personal moment, and it comes with so much. So much. Is there the potential to bring parents into the discussion with the child’s permission? Are the GSA leaders part of that, or would that be considered going against the bill? This should be up to the kids, obviously, but we want to make sure that those kids and youth are supported outside of the GSA. Will it be clear in the GSA that if students would like to have discussions about sex, which, of course, they’re going to have anyway, there are specific things that are directed about that? Is there a need for parental consent? Does the bill override this? That’s section 50.1(1).

This is different from sexual orientation, obviously, but I think I should state it so that people are not misinformed by what I’m trying to say in here. No consent should be required from parents to have GSAs: we’ve already said that, and I’ll state it again to be clear. This is a completely different subject matter. My decision on how I will vote for this bill will be determined in some respects by these answers. I think that they are very logical questions, and I’m quite certain that the government will have very logical responses.

One of the things that I just want the government to consider is that we could end up going years backwards, forcing GSAs into the shadows and losing real advocacy on behalf of the youth. I think

that one of the things we need to think about when we're considering advocacy is that there are a lot of advocates in places where you don't expect it. I think that the prevalence of the ability for people to be able to see that is a real gift. Having been a teacher for over 23 years, and I'm . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Under 29(2)(a), the hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today under 29(2)(a). Of course, some of those questions will be answered in the course of this debate, but I did want to talk about some of the elements because I feel that the bill, if it was to pass in this Legislature, would not cause undue harm. None of the things that she has stated that she's worried about would be detrimental if this bill was to pass.

I do want to talk a little bit about parental involvement, something that is deeply important to me. I was an educational assistant before this, and I worked with parents all across the board, and I continue to work with parents as an MLA. The member's statement I made today was about me talking to not just the students but to their parents and talking about what their involvement looks like. A lot of that involvement isn't confined to a GSA. Not having to release the information of a student to a parent doesn't preclude their involvement. It means that the student can come out to their parents. As many kids that are involved in GSAs will tell you, their parents know that they're a part of it. How did they find out? Because they told them, because they needed to be driven to the meeting, because they were setting up for a bake sale, because they were setting up for whatever activity they're doing. Usually they'll share that with their parents.

So when I talk about this, I think of the many parents that I've sat down with that have driven their kids to countless GSA meetings, that know that their kids are going to these clubs. I think what is confusing to us and especially to the LGBTQ community, that I know the member opposite was with when she went to the pride brunch at Camp fYrefly, when she met with different LGBTQ students, when the opposition party said that it was unfair to not let them march in the Calgary Pride Parade – all of these things were things discussed, but the reason for it, Madam Speaker, comes down to the basis of this bill, which, yes, is protecting that no person can out a student because of their sexual orientation or gender identity because they're joining a GSA, and it clearly defines that.

It doesn't mean that if a student comes to talk to a parent, they're not involved. They absolutely can be, and so many cases have shown that they can be involved. There are so many places. The story I told today about the student: it ended up happening that the student that came out told her parents beforehand and then delivered this amazing speech in her class about what it's like being a gay young woman, and then after that, they met with different teachers and parents and different parents of other people because she wanted to talk about it. Nothing in this bill precludes that because what this bill is doing is making sure that it is clear that teachers aren't going to be picking up the phone and saying: "Your child has just joined a GSA. Did you know that?" No. That's unnecessary in the instance that no other club has this.

I think the distinction is this. As an educational assistant I always had this complex debate with myself as to: what do I do if a child asks me about my partner? Under specific laws put forward by the previous government, it precluded us from talking about sexual orientation and gender identity while every other person that is not queer can talk about their families, their kids, anything like that. When someone asks me that question, which could be, "What did you do on the weekend?" well, that would involve my girlfriend, so

I don't know if I can say that. It becomes very clear that it's a conversation that is frozen out in schools and that it is not okay to have.

I say this understanding why it exists, too. I have grown up with a very religious family. Being a Colombian-Canadian immigrant, we're Catholic. We've always looked at the teachings of the church in order to understand and interpret the way to interact with other people, but it's something that became very complicated to manage. I think this is the point, that we're reaching an impasse of understanding how to amalgamate, that they don't have to be at odds with each other. When I grew up and because of this whole context that we're talking about . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The time has expired for 29(2)(a).

Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Madam Speaker. In the last couple of days it's been interesting to watch the attention that this bill has garnered. While I was away on business, one of the first things that I saw, one of the first feeds that I saw was a tweet from my predecessor, the Member for Calgary-Shaw, Jeff Wilson, who said: "I hope that . . . members don't blindly follow their leader on Bill 24. Use your voice and your vote to strike a balance. Follow your gut and stand up for these kids."

I think, you know, that sometimes we get very polarized, and we don't acknowledge those people who came before us and show the appreciation for the advocacy that they had. Mr. Wilson was very good at advocating for people with disabilities, and he was very good at standing up for LGBTQ members of the community. I remember I was taken aback when I saw him in the Pride Parade early on in his tenure. While there are many things that I disagreed with that previous hon. member on, I do have a lot of respect for him taking a stance on this and taking a stance on this in the past. His record was very clear on Bill 10 when it first came into the House, when he supported Ms Blakeman on the bill that was proposed, and I really respect him for that.

4:10

I also want to thank the Member for Calgary-Hawkwood as I had a chance to see him make his passionate speech and speak to the issues on this. It's great to have a young individual who has grown up dealing with coming out and who is now in a leadership role and who really stands with the other members from the LGBTQ community who sit here as hon. members as well.

It was interesting. This last Pride Parade I proudly walked with my three kids. My son who's nine is starting to understand what it is to be gay and what it is to be part of the LGBTQ community, so he asked me why I was walking in the Pride Parade and why I was walking with them. I said that for a time our governments and the Legislative Assembly have done many great things, but unfortunately there is a lot of shame that does exist in this building. It's things like how the Legislative Assembly supported residential schools in the past and how in the past compulsory sterilization was also supported in this Chamber, and for a time – and, unfortunately, it wasn't that long ago – not supporting LGBTQ individuals was supported in this Chamber. As a Member of this Legislative Assembly it is important for us to recognize the faults of the previous members and our history – we all own that – and it's important for us to stand up for the rights of all Albertans, and that was why we marched in that Pride Parade at that time and will continue to support it.

I also wanted to make sure that my kids knew that this was something that we supported, so ever since my son Alex was two

years old, we would always go and watch the Pride Parade together. The one thing I've always said that's the biggest shame about being an MLA is that I don't get to watch the Pride Parade because I have to be in the Pride Parade. I always enjoyed watching the Pride Parade. Maybe that day will come. Who knows when it will be?

Nevertheless, I want to reflect on my parents. I remember when I was a kid and we just started to find out what someone being gay was. It was a very contentious time, and people were shamed for coming out. But my mom, who is very progressive, who is a woman who refused to change her name when she got married in the '70s, which was another bone of contention, said: "I do have gay friends, Graham, but I am not going to tell you who they are because it is not my business to out them. I also don't want you to treat them any differently. Until you're old enough, I want you to recognize that they are individuals and that they have the rights that everyone else has." That is something that really resonated for a long time.

We're now entering this world where my son can see a man who loves another man or a woman who loves another woman and treats them no differently. Unfortunately, when I was growing up, that was not the case. We've made many strides, but we also have to recognize that the work is not done and that there are people who are young who are feeling marginalized and who are concerned about this.

I reflect back on when I was a student in high school in 2004. One of the main reasons why I remember getting polarized about this was, I would say, an ad hoc GSA that existed. And you know what? This is almost going to sound like a flashback to a *Glee* episode, but it was my drama society. My drama society at school was basically an ad hoc GSA, and my drama teacher was almost that teacher facilitator. While we made performances and we built sets and we did the drama festivals, it was an environment in which individuals felt comfortable enough to say who they were, and it was an environment in which we all felt comfortable enough to be allies. It didn't matter if you were gay or lesbian or bi or straight; everyone felt included in this environment.

But I can also tell you that there were many students who were in that drama society who came out to us but could not come out at home. One was an exchange student from Mexico. He could not come out until he came to Canada. It was funny; we were talking, I think, about Svend Robinson because we also were very politically engaged. He said, "Who's that?" and I said, "He was the first openly gay MP." That was when he came out. When he found out that we had a politician who was openly gay, he said: well, yeah; I'm gay. It was remarkable to see that, that we created this environment where he felt comfortable. You know, I was taken aback to see that.

There were individuals I knew who, if they told their parents, would be kicked out on the streets. It was an environment in which that teacher, had he told the parents, would have put that student in a very vulnerable position. But in any other normal circumstance or any other normal environment those parents love that child. I can't make any assumptions as to why, if they were informed of this one nuance, this one little thing about their child, if they found out, they would kick their child out on the street. But it was a situation in which we created an environment to help people feel informed. It was a situation in which our teacher could have that conversation, so there were individuals who came out to us first and then found a way to come out to their families. You know, I want to thank the late Mr. Rick Jobb. I was taken aback when he passed away in 2007. The number of lives that he positively impacted by creating an environment in which it was safe to be who you were and creating an environment in which we were all allies was tremendous.

The funny thing was that, like in many other GSAs that are forming, political advocacy came up because we were on this cusp of a time in which we were discussing same-sex marriage and

whether we should move forward with it. It was at that same time that this Legislative Assembly in majority was not in support. It was at that time when I challenged our political leaders, and the only leader who took a firm stance on that issue and said, "We support same-sex marriage, and we view discrimination of LGBTQ members the same as any other type of discrimination" was our hon. House leader. After that moment I went out and I bought my first political party membership. I am proud to still be a member of that political party.

It's interesting as well because as an employer who hires many youth, I've had many situations in which someone has come to me with a personal issue where they cannot come to their parents – they are seeking guidance – and on which, if they did not seek guidance from someone in an adult position or authority role, they could be in some serious danger. These things impact many things, whether it's alcohol, substance, or sexuality. The majority of the times I was able to guide these individuals to make good decisions and to feel safe. I hope to God that if my kids are in a situation where they don't feel comfortable coming to me, they can find that safe person to have those conversations with, because we all want what's best for our kids.

Last year I had an opportunity to go to a middle school. It was right after we had released our transgender guidelines. One person within the PTA had heard a lot of misinformation that had come from our Rebel media friend's sources. I and the principal talked about the policies, and, credit to the principal, he was very honest. We talked about what it meant for that middle school. I reflected back to when I was in junior high. I knew of one individual who you could tell was not happy because they couldn't be who they were. Fast-forward five years later: it was remarkable because this individual joined this drama society that I was part of and eventually came out and then eventually came out to their family. It was exciting two years later to have this opportunity to actually see them perform in a drag show at Twisted Element. This was about 10 years ago. I'm not sure if they still do the drag shows. I need for someone to tell me that because I don't go to the bars as much. Nonetheless, it was remarkable to see him feel comfortable with who he is.

4:20

But I digress. As I was at this middle school, after the meeting I talked with the principal about the transgender guidelines and the feedback that he'd been receiving, and we talked about GSAs. I asked him if they had a GSA, and he said: no, but one will be here soon because there are individuals already coming to us identifying as LGBTQ. It was remarkable to see that because at no point was there ever a situation when I was in junior high where someone felt comfortable enough to be honest with who they were and to start having these conversations.

We were also in a situation when I was in junior high where someone could not be comfortable by exposing that they were an ally. You know, I had an opportunity when I was in grade 9 to go to the Pride Parade when Joe Clark was the parade marshal. I remember putting up a bunch of banners in my locker after that. I also remember the significant amount of discrimination that I got for doing so, but – you know what? – it was remarkable because it was that leadership from Joe Clark which was why I didn't take those down and why I kept them up.

At the end of the day, Madam Speaker, as we look to bringing forth legislation that protects individual rights and keeps them safe, I think it's important that members within this House speak about why they are moving forward on these legislations, why they are taking a certain stance on them because, unfortunately, there has been a history in this House of not necessarily taking the proper

stances. It's moments like these where we're going to be judged by the history books by what we do, just like in 2014, when we saw Bill 10 come forward.

With that being said, I want to thank the members for their indulgence. I will be supporting Bill 24.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the member for your speech and for your explanation. I agree with you on so many levels. I wanted just to point out, too, that I know it might seem, because of our political realm and where we are in the world, that the only time that we participate is when we're having our picture taken when we're at places like Camp fYrefly or like the tremendous honour I had in speaking at the pride Shabbat. I just wanted to be clear and to add to your story and to comment that for me, anyway, my family experience, my friendship experience with all different communities but more specifically the LGBTQ community goes a long, long, long time before I was ever a politician.

I just want to be clear about that because the fact that we have an absolutely beautiful ability to be able to reach out to communities that we may not have been entrenched in before is one of the most wonderful things about the positions that we all hold here, Madam Speaker. It's one of my favourite things, actually. There are a lot of times where it's wonderful to be in here and have robust debate about those kinds of things, but really, for me – and I'm sure I can speak on behalf of many people – the best part of what we get to do is to be involved in communities we wouldn't normally be in and to be educated by those communities because they're the experts. I'm certainly no expert. I don't pretend to be. I would never profess to be, and the insinuation that I might try to or use it for political gain is quite wrong.

I just want to be clear about that. I wanted to say it because when you were talking about your story that you mentioned, you were speaking about all these wonderful experiences that you had had, and nobody would ever say to you that that's not legitimate, that what you've experienced is not true. Well, I'm standing here telling you that I agree with you and that the experiences that I've had are legitimate, they're real, and they're honest, and so are my questions. Maybe you'll be able to answer some of the questions that I put forward, which I think are logical.

I'd like to end with one comment, which actually talks directly about what you were saying. Actually, this comment comes from Kris Wells, the study's lead Alberta researcher and director at the Institute for Sexual Minorities Studies and Services at the University of Alberta. What he said and what I completely agree with is that if passed, the Minister of Education's bill will be the most comprehensive GSA legislation in the country. GSAs literally can save young lives, he said. They invite parents and families into a conversation. They don't exclude them from a conversation. This is from the expert. I draw my conclusions from this expert. This quote is incredibly important to how it is that we're looking at this.

Like I said and to be clear, because it was brought up again, I fully support GSAs. I fully support enhancing them, and I fully support the notion that it is mandated that we should not at any time out a gay child or any child that is a member of a GSA, just to be absolutely, perfectly, and unequivocally clear.

To the member, I would like to ask you about this statement that I said right now, based on a member that has been extremely vocal about how it is that we're supposed to move forward, what our responsibilities are as legislators towards the LGBTQ community. Is that a concept that you agree with?

Mr. Sucha: On this conversation, I apologize if I misconstrued it. It was in relation to speaking to starting this conversation between multiple parties, including parents. I think it's vitally important that, yes, those conversations happen, but when we're in a situation when a child is trying to find themselves, we need to make sure that it's on the child's terms and that the child is in the safest situation possible. That is why I support that it is for the child to find that decision and make that decision to ensure that they are most safe. I think I outlined that within my previous statements as well.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak on Bill 24 this afternoon. I'd like to start out by saying that what politicians say and do matter. You know, we can say one thing but do another, or we can say things that are congruent with our actions, and people are watching us. People in general have a mistrust of politicians. Unfortunately, that's a label that we all wear. It's on all of us to work against that perception of an incongruence between what we say and what we do and people's perception of politicians and how they carry themselves.

I'd like to point out a bit of a paradox that we're dealing with, especially in relation to this bill, in that in this Chamber we often hear about the importance of consultation and how important it is to go out and speak to Albertans to inform our opinions as their representatives, that when we come to this place and have discussions about important matters that are going to affect their lives, how important consultation is for us to inform our view. The paradox that I'd like to point out is that the Leader of the Official Opposition has based his assumptions and the opposition caucus's position towards this bill, perhaps, on a fallacy. I think it's important to point that out.

One of the groups that we turn to when we're making decisions like this on whether parents should be notified and on the disposition of information that teachers may find out in the course of their work and what teachers should do with that information – we're trying to deal with that question and wrestle with that very question on this bill – and I think some of the most important people to speak to, amongst many, of course, including children and parents, are teachers. Fortunately, we have a public statement by the Alberta Teachers' Association that I would like to read into the record. I will plan to table the document in its entirety at my next opportunity. I think it's really important to bring the voice of the teachers to this debate, particularly because the Leader of the Official Opposition has placed the burden of whether or not to inform parents on the teachers. That's a burden that we heard about from the Member for Calgary-East in her former role as a teacher, that she wouldn't want that burden placed on her as a professional.

4:30

I know there are other teaching professionals in here as well. The Member for Drayton Valley-Devon spoke about his experience as a teacher, and I have no doubt that he had the best intentions for his students in mind and always did. I have no doubt about that at all. I do question – and perhaps he didn't have a chance to answer this – whether, if he was in the position, he would want to be the one making that decision. That's an awful burden to bear.

What the teachers have said – and I'll get to the quote in just a minute here – is that there's a bit of a grey area right now, and they don't want to be put in that position. I'll read the bit of the statement here. First of all, it starts off with a quote from the ATA president, Greg Jeffery, and it says:

Some students who are even nervous that their participation in GSA activities might be disclosed simply will not go – and the

support that they need disappears. Making it clear that the support is confidential removes some [of the] big barriers to access.

The statement goes on to say:

The Association has expressed concerns in the past about how the student privacy issue could place teachers in a difficult position. The ATA's Code of Conduct and provincial privacy law would likely preclude disclosure of GSA participation without student consent, but recent public attention and political discussion has raised questions about those obligations.

It ends with another quote from President Jeffery. He says:

Students and teachers will benefit from [the] legal clarity [that this bill provides]. The issue of GSA attendance and student privacy has become unfortunately politicised and unnecessarily divisive. If this bill is passed, teachers will no longer have to worry about managing competing pressures on such a sensitive topic.

Teachers will be able to point to the law and tell students and parents clearly [that] student privacy, safety and security comes first.

The statement concludes in saying that President Jeffery is calling for all-party support of this bill.

When we speak to our experts and teachers who would potentially carry the burden of this bill, if this bill weren't to be passed, the burden potentially goes back to teachers. They're clearly telling us that they don't want to be put in that position. The kids want their own privacy, and the teachers don't want to be put in the position of potentially being the ones faced to make that decision. To me, the fact that the opposition hasn't listened to the very people that they want to bear the burden of this incredibly difficult decision is disingenuous at best. They talk about the importance of consultation, and here they have failed to pay attention to what Alberta's teachers are talking about.

This kind of disparity between what they say and what they do, what I was saying earlier in my speech: the disparity of what the opposition is doing here is dangerous. It seeks to undermine what it means to be a politician, and I think politics can be and should be an honourable profession. We're elected by our peers and our neighbours to represent them, and they watch very carefully what we say and what we do. It's up to us to carry ourselves with dignity.

Getting back to what we say and what we do and inconsistencies, over the course of the summer, around the Calgary Pride Parade, there was intense debate and interest about participation in the parade. Leading up to the parade, I know that several members of the Official Opposition were in attendance at the Camp fYrefly brunch, and also the opposition was intending to march in the Calgary parade. At the time I honestly thought it was genuine, their interest. Maybe they had turned a page and turned over a new leaf and said: we get it now.

The Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, when some not-too-glamorous statements that he had made in his younger years came to light about his feelings towards that community, said to the media: I've changed my views. I've come to realize, being a legislator and learning from the NDP, that he's come a long way, and I took him at his word for that. I know that there are other members of the opposition that I believe felt the same way. Now we come to a point where we're debating the very bill that that community, the LGBTQ community, is saying, "Please pass this. This is what we want. It makes sense for us. It makes us feel safe, and it makes it feel like you're listening." They want to know that the politicians are listening. It's not a partisan issue. It's about making safe places for kids, and it really just comes down to that.

I think that when we examine the entirety of the issue, it's really baffling to me. I'm coming from a genuine place when I say this. I thought this was going to be something that we can celebrate together as a nonpartisan issue, so I'm sorry to see that that's not

the case. But I do have faith that some members over there will have their conscience bring them to a place where they can't support the caucus agenda and the direction of their leader. The Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre did promise to the members over there that they would have a free vote. It's important for all the members of this Legislature to consider very carefully their position and how they're going to vote on this. As the Member for Calgary-Shaw said, history will judge you by your actions. People are paying attention to this. People want to know that they're being heard, and people want to know that what's at the element of this bill is keeping kids safe. If that's what's most important, they can demonstrate that by their actions.

I know that my father was a teacher. He taught high school English for quite a number of years. It was great to go visit him from time to time at school. When he walked the halls, everybody knew who he was and he was very well respected. I had the opportunity to speak with him and ask him: as a former teacher – he's now retired – would he want to be put in a position of telling parents about their kids? You know, he said: "I couldn't bear that. I couldn't bear that responsibility. It's not something that I would want to have done." What we're doing here with this bill makes a lot of sense.

You know, thinking about my parents and my own experience as a kid in school, I got bullied a lot in school. I was even afraid to tell my parents that I got bullied. I couldn't imagine, I couldn't put myself in the place of being an LGBTQ youth and having to tell my parents something like that when I could barely tell them that I was being bullied. I think the only way that they found out is that I might have gotten beaten up at school that day, and when I came home, they said: what happened to you? So I finally told them. They went and fixed it right away. I had a great relationship with my parents, and I felt like I could tell them anything, but sometimes as a kid you just don't see it that way.

When I think about my own experience and how difficult that was and put myself in the shoes of LGBTQ kids, you know, the courage that they express and also the courage that's been expressed by members of the Assembly who are openly LGBTQ in the community, it's remarkable. I think we owe them a debt of gratitude for their courage and for sharing their lived experience with us so that we can have a better understanding and appreciation of what they've gone through.

I do want to touch a little bit on language and how language matters to what we say and what we do, coming back to language. Sometimes things as simple as asking, "Do you have a girlfriend or a boyfriend?" or "Do you have a husband or a wife?" – when you ask someone that, if you don't know what their sexual orientation or gender identity is, that can put them off. So I've tried to make a conscious approach to trying to use nonbinary language. It's difficult, but it's something that I'm trying to be better at. Some people will say: oh, you're being too politically correct, that that's political correctness and political correctness has no place in our language anymore. Well, you know what? I don't think being politically correct is the wrong thing to do. I think it's about using inclusive language. It's about respecting the way people want to be addressed. If someone says, "I want to be called a he," well, who am I to say that they don't want to be called that way? That's the way that they prefer to be addressed, and that's the way I would address them.

4:40

One other thing, too, Madam Speaker, is in regard to LGBTQ tourism. Alberta is having a discussion in 2017 about whether to make safe places for gay kids. You know, the entire country and perhaps the world is watching Alberta have a debate about this

sensitive issue but also wondering: “Hey, it’s 2017. Why are you guys still stuck on this kind of stuff?” Unfortunately, we do need to have this debate because we do need to protect and save kids. But the debate we’re having also reflects Alberta’s position in the world. People look at us and go: “Hey, I’m a part of the LGBTQ community. I want to go travel and spend my travel dollars in places that support this community.”

If we can send a message to the world and make sure Alberta’s reputation is one where people feel safe no matter what their gender identity is or what their sexual orientation is, people from around the world will say: “I want to travel to Alberta. This is a place where I can feel safe, I can spend my money, and I know that the people that I meet on the streets are going to welcome me.” I think that’s incredibly important to understand and something that we want the world to take notice of.

I do want to just briefly mention two organizations in my constituency, Banff Pride and Your Life Out, which is a gay support group in Cochrane. They do fantastic work. I really appreciate the fact that they’re supporting the community and that they’ve also welcomed me. I’ve gone to a drag show a number of times in Banff and, wow, Madam Speaker. I invite all of you to come because it is a fantastic show. Their entertainment there is second to none. You’ll have a lot of fun. I’d really like to thank them for the work that they do supporting the community and making sure that we can have these kinds of conversations and make people feel supported.

I thank you very much for your attention. I’m a hundred per cent in support of this bill, and I encourage all members to do the same.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. minister.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would just like to ask the previous speaker to talk a little bit more about the fact that sometimes as a child he wasn’t able to speak to his parents, and it didn’t necessarily reflect on a negative relationship with his parents but had to do with his own development and his own choices and how that played out. I’d just like to hear a little bit more about how his experiences maybe enlightened his decision to support this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Yeah. Thank you very much for the question. In reflecting back to my experiences as a kid, I suppose I was embarrassed that I was bullied. I didn’t want to tell my parents that kids picked on me in school. I didn’t have any impression that my parents would laugh at me or anything like that, but I guess it was just a matter of personal pride. You know, kids get bullied all the time, so I knew that my situation wasn’t unique. But when I reflect upon kids who are trying to decide whether or not to come out to their parents, if I struggled with telling my parents that I was bullied, I couldn’t imagine the difficult decision and the difficult position those young kids are in. I want to make sure that they have a safe space where they can feel the support of their peers and teachers and get advice and make sure that they’re ready. When the time is right, it’s a choice for them to make.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other questions or comment under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, speakers to the bill? The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for allowing me to rise and to speak in favour of Bill 24. I want to begin by stating one point very, very clearly, and I’d like the members opposite who are still deliberating on what to do with respect to this

bill to think about this and to also pass it on to their leader. Bill 24, An Act to Support Gay-Straight Alliances, is about one thing and one thing only: it is about protecting some of the most vulnerable kids in our province.

Madam Speaker, the new leader of the UCP has offered a number of rather self-justifying, almost conspiracy theories to excuse his decision or his direction to have his caucus oppose this bill. But despite those protests, which I will address in a moment, at the end of the day, the passage of Bill 24 will be an absolutely enormous step forward for LGBTQ youth in Alberta, and on that day, Madam Speaker, we will celebrate with them.

Before I speak about the substance of the bill, I do want to take the opportunity to clear up a few misconceptions that have been propagated in the public conversation about this bill and about what it means, and I hope that in so doing, perhaps I can persuade some members opposite to consider supporting this landmark piece of legislation.

First of all, Madam Speaker, the claim has been made that this bill is somehow all about wedge politics or creating a political distraction. I cannot think of a more cynical claim. It is insulting and, quite frankly, is hurtful to the hundreds of thousands of Albertans who need this bill to go forward. It’s also a well-worn red herring that is used throughout history to halt progress on fundamental issues of human rights.

So let me tell members a little bit about how and why this bill is coming forward to the floor of this Chamber. When our government was elected, we quickly became aware that schools and in some cases school boards, but mostly schools, were still able, under the regime of Bill 10, to actively discourage kids from requesting GSAs. The old approach or the approach that was put forward under Bill 10 simply wasn’t working. It asked those kids to be the heroes, to push against a culture and a set of rules and daily directions that still existed in schools throughout this province, to push against them in order to make that courageous choice to request that a GSA be formed. The fact of the matter is that the rights of young people were being actively frustrated, with little recourse.

Madam Speaker, what we are doing here is that in many cases we are talking about the most vulnerable children inside that school. We are not talking about Norma Rae. To expect those kids to be Norma Rae, to fight against all those subtle and not so subtle pressures against them, discouraging them to stand up and speak about who they are, is to expect too much from the most vulnerable. Quite frankly, when the rights of the few are denied, it is, in fact, the obligation of government to step in to protect those rights. That is what this bill is about.

Another objection to this bill is the allegation that gay-straight alliances teach curriculum and somehow they need to be managed through that regime. Now, quite honestly, that’s simply not true. That is a ridiculous suggestion. GSAs are clubs formed by young people as a safe place to go to find support, to find camaraderie, and friendship, often, as I’ve already said, at an extremely vulnerable time in their lives. GSAs are no more about curriculum than debate club or model UN club or basketball. But, strangely, the members opposite or, in particular, their leader are not suddenly bursting forward with an outcry that parents be informed when their kids join UN model parliament. They don’t. So why, then, must they be required to be informed when they form a GSA?

Well, I don’t think there is a good reason unless you dig a little bit further underneath the objections from the members opposite or their leader, and that reason, frankly, is not very satisfying or one about which anyone should be very proud. The fact of the matter is that these clubs are not about curriculum. They are after school clubs that are about camaraderie and support for kids who are vulnerable.

The third reason that the members opposite or their leader, Mr. Kenney, have suggested that we shouldn't be going ahead with this is that Bill 10 was good enough and that we should just leave the issue alone and move on. Well, Madam Speaker, again, as I've said, we know that's not true. Bill 10 was a step forward, but it just wasn't good enough. In allowing adults to out gay kids, it was, quite frankly, fundamentally flawed. We know that it would allow adults to out gay kids because the new UCP leader pointed to it himself when he said that schools should be able to inform parents if their kids join GSAs. More importantly, we know that because gay kids and their friends have also told us so, and they've told us that Bill 10 was not good enough. Those are the people that we spoke with and listened to when we sat down to get to work on this legislation.

4:50

It's a bit self-serving and, frankly, a bit self-absorbed of Mr. Kenney to say that somehow he is the target of this bill, because – let me assure you – he is not. What this bill targets are adults who want to out gay kids before they are ready, and it targets policies, practices, and procedures in schools that are designed to discourage kids from asking for GSAs under the law as it existed under Bill 10. That is what we need to fix, Madam Speaker.

The fourth objection that was brought forward, Madam Speaker, by the new leader of the party of the members opposite was that somehow this bill will mean that children as young as five will form GSAs. Now, it's hard to know where to begin with that claim. We know already that Mr. Kenney did not consult with young adults and teenagers who are members of the LGBTQ community. It is clear as well, apparently, that he's never actually spoken to a five-year-old. For the record, kindergartners aren't thinking about forming UN clubs, chess clubs, debate clubs, gaming clubs, basketball teams. No, they are typically learning the alphabet and focusing on learning how to tie their shoes . . .

Ms Hoffman: And recess.

Ms Notley: . . . and also recess and wondering if their Elmo will be around during recess.

To suggest otherwise is patently ridiculous. Again, I think the level of ridiculousness of that assertion actually shows the desperation to which the leader of the members opposite, Mr. Kenney, will go in order to avoid having an open, honest discussion of the underlying prejudices which stand between him and his ability to support this bill.

Another issue that was raised was that the governing party, we, the NDP, did not put this issue in our platform; therefore, we can't talk about it. Well, I have to tell you, Madam Speaker, that's an interesting take on the work that we do here. Let me explain something to Mr. Kenney. Sometimes in life unanticipated things happen. In this case, as I've said already, after we were elected, we learned that there were some serious flaws with Bill 10 and in our ability to enforce the very provisions that were designed to protect the health and safety of these vulnerable kids, and we knew that those flaws needed to be fixed. So we listened, and the Minister of Education worked very hard with school boards over quite some time to find ways to improve the situation in these schools. In some cases it worked but not in all.

If the only reason that you have for not supporting this bill is because it didn't appear in the 2015 NDP platform, then you know as well as I do that your leader is reaching for excuses, and you certainly, quite frankly, haven't been listening to what I as the leader of the NDP have been saying and fighting for throughout my whole public life. If anyone for a moment would have thought that I or anyone in this government caucus would hear about the kind of

injustices, that we heard about after getting elected, being suffered by kids in these schools and if they for one moment would have thought that we would have ignored them and not moved forward on them, well, first of all, you've underestimated every single one of us, and secondly, you are the only person in this province who will be surprised.

Another argument that Mr. Kenney offers up for why the Official Opposition should not be supporting this bill is that it doesn't mean you want to out gay kids if you give adults the right to out gay kids. Now, Madam Speaker, I think that's a bit of Orwellian doublespeak, but that, in effect, is what Mr. Kenney is now trying to claim. It's a fundamentally dishonest position, and it belies Mr. Kenney's own words when he discussed this issue with the *Calgary Herald* editorial board just a few months ago. The quote is: "I do, however, believe parents have a right to know what's going on with their kids in the schools unless the parents are abusive." And another quote: "I don't think it's right to keep secrets from parents about challenges their kids are going through."

Madam Speaker, I ask the UCP members opposite to consider those words and what they mean because those words mean exactly what they say: adults should have the right to out gay kids at school. So if you're going to vote against this bill, own why it is you are voting against this bill: you believe that adults should have the right to out gay kids against their will. At least own the position if you're going to vote against this bill.

Meanwhile, as Mr. Kenney tries to skate around this issue and hide from the pressures he appears to be feeling over it, he suggests that the answer to this problem is that we should trust teachers to make the decision on the basis of their professional judgment about whether to out gay kids. Just generally. Not on the basis of health and safety, which, of course, there's already provision for in this act, but just generally. Well, I do have a lot of faith in the professional judgment of teachers, Madam Speaker, but I also know that on matters like this it should be up to the kids; it should not be up to a teacher.

I also find this particular line of defence particularly disingenuous from Mr. Kenney given that he spent the last six months or so travelling around the province of Alberta trying to tell Albertans that teachers were part of some kind of strange conspiracy to impose socialist values in our classrooms. That was the case up until about four days ago, and now they are the arbiters of whether a kid should be outed or not outed. So I will just say that the obvious illogical and contradictory positions that are inherent in that, I think, again, really serve only to demonstrate the discomfort and the overall disingenuous nature of the arguments put forward by Mr. Kenney for why he's actually opposed to this bill, and I think that he should come clean about those.

Now, as well, Mr. Kenney has suggested that this bill is somehow a distraction from the other issues that Albertans want to talk about. And I do agree that we do need to talk about the economy. We do need to talk about our fiscal plan. We do need to talk about job creation. We do need to talk about economic growth. If that's what Mr. Kenney wants to do, then obviously what you should do is simply to vote for this bill and move on. That is the answer to the problem that it's distraction. That is the only answer.

At the end of the day, there have been a number of red herrings thrown into this debate. None of them stand up to any form of scrutiny. I think, quite frankly, that many people see that, not only outside of this building and not only on this side of the House and that corner of the House, but many of you on that side of the House can see through much of the irrationality or the absence of logic in the arguments that have been made by the leader of the UCP.

I suspect there are some members over on the other side of this room who are struggling with their conscience, and to those

members I would suggest that what you should do is to stand on the right side of this issue because you know as well as I do that only one person and one person only has the right to out a gay kid – and you should not pretend otherwise – and that, of course, is the kid.

So stand with us and support this bill. Your grandchildren and their children will be proud that you did. This is what we are talking about in this debate, Madam Speaker. This bill actually is not about partisan politics. This bill transcends partisan politics. When we did Bill 10, that's what it was meant to do, and that's what it's meant to do now. It's about fundamental issues of human rights and the kind of society we are all striving for. It's a bill where we will be remembered for where we stood and what stand we took.

We deal with many issues in this House, and we have honest and profound disagreements about important matters, but sometimes – and this is one of those times – an issue comes before us where we have to ask ourselves: really, whose side are we on, and how will history remember our work? Did we advance the cause of human rights and justice, or did we thwart it? This bill asks that question, and it demands an answer from each and every one of us in this House.

5:00

I say, with respect and with humility, that I know that the leader of the UCP has told the public that his caucus is united in its opposition to this bill. I also know that that truly cannot be true. The reasons Mr. Kenney has put forward are undermined by the facts and by the logic. They just don't stand up. They don't hold together. They are an attempt to excuse the inexcusable, opposing a bill that protects some of the most vulnerable among us.

I've had so many conversations just even over the last few days that bring that simple point home, not only with young people who this bill protects but, interestingly, with Albertans in their 20s, their 30s, their 50s, and their 60s, Madam Speaker, who described to me the painful experiences that they had, these painful experiences of being excluded in their communities, in their towns, in their families and having no one to talk about it with, you know, many, many years ago and yesterday. This is happening right now. These Albertans know that this is not a trivial issue. They know this isn't wedge politics. They know this is not about loopholes. They know, in fact, that this is about life and death.

Yesterday we all sat in here, and we introduced and applauded 50 or more first responders who were here, firefighters. I had the pleasure of meeting with some of them last night, and I had several of them come to me and talk to me about how important this bill was. I had one fellow come to me and talk about attending suicide attempts, suicide attempts that he knew were absolutely about the fact that the person who was attempting the suicide could not get the support they needed to deal with these issues and felt excluded and felt rejected and felt unloved. This is what we are trying to stop. They know well, those folks, the difference that Bill 24 will make in people's lives.

I know where people in my caucus stand, but I ask every other member of this House to know that when you cut through all of the excuses, there is simply one fundamental truth. The bill will protect the lives of some of our most vulnerable citizens, too young to vote, many of them, but not without a voice in these halls, in this room.

So join us. Support this bill, support gay kids, support GSAs, and be proud saying that you did so.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any questions or comments for the hon. Premier?

Seeing none, any other speakers to the bill?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education to close debate.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. If we can have a vote on second reading of Bill 24, I would be grateful.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for second reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:04 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Babcock	Hoffman	Phillips
Carson	Horne	Piquette
Ceci	Jansen	Renaud
Clark	Kazim	Rosendahl
Connolly	Larivee	Sabir
Cortes-Vargas	Loyola	Schreiner
Dach	Luff	Shepherd
Dang	Malkinson	Sigurdson
Eggen	Mason	Starke
Feehan	McCuaig-Boyd	Sucha
Fitzpatrick	McKitrick	Swann
Fraser	McPherson	Turner
Goehring	Miranda	Westhead
Gray	Notley	Woollard
Hinkley	Payne	

5:20

Against the motion:

Barnes	Gill	Orr
Cyr	Gotfried	Schneider
Fildebrandt	McIver	van Dijken

Totals:	For – 44	Against – 9
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[Motion carried; Bill 24 read a second time]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Government House Leader, did you have anything you wish to say?

Mr. Mason: I was voting with my feet, Madam Speaker, but I suppose we should take care of formalities. I will move that we adjourn the House until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:22 p.m.]

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