



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday evening, June 17, 2019

Day 14

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

First Session

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Party standings:

United Conservative: 63

New Democrat: 24

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Monday, June 17, 2019

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Transmittal of Estimates

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, I have received a certain message from Her Honour the Administrator, which I now transmit to you. This message will stand in the place of the messages tabled on June 11, 2019.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order!

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Administrator transmits interim supply estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province and certain sums required for the lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2020, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

Please be seated.

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, I now wish to table the 2019-2020 interim supply estimates. These interim supply estimates will provide spending authority to the Legislative Assembly and the government for the period of April 1, 2019, to November 30, 2019. This interim funding authority will ensure continuity in the business of the province while our government assesses the province's finances before introducing a budget in the fall of 2019. When passed, these interim supply estimates will authorize approximate spending of \$107 million for the Legislative Assembly, \$27.8 billion in expense funding, \$2.4 billion in capital investment funding, \$786 million in financial transactions funding for the government, and \$943 million for the transfer from the lottery fund to the general revenue fund.

Government Motions

19. Mr. Toews moved:

Be it resolved that the message from Her Honour the Administrator, the 2019-20 interim supply estimates, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this government motion is debatable according to Standing Order 18(1)(i). Are there any wishing to speak?

Seeing none, the hon. Minister of Finance to close debate.

Mr. Toews: I waive, sir.

[Government Motion 19 carried]

20. Mr. Toews moved:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 61(2) the Committee of Supply shall be called to consider the 2019-20 interim supply estimates for three hours on Tuesday, June 18, 2019.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is a nondebatable motion according to Standing Order 61(2).

[Government Motion 20 carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 10

Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2019

Mr. Toews: I move second reading of Bill 10.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is focused on amendments to the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act. The changes are largely technical and bring our legislation in line with how the Canada Revenue Agency is already administering Alberta's tax system. We need to do this because the federal government made legislative changes last year that affected how some of Alberta's personal tax credits are calculated. Our legislation needs to reflect these federal changes.

The previous NDP government failed to bring forward the legislative changes required to support the proper administration of Alberta's personal income taxes. However, they did ask Canada Revenue Agency to administer the changes when people filed their 2018 tax returns, with the promise that they would make the proper legislative changes or updates at the next available opportunity. Since that opportunity never presented itself for the previous government, I rise to bring forward these changes so Alberta's tax system can continue to function efficiently. If we don't implement these amendments to the act, Canada Revenue Agency's ability to administer the tax system on our behalf could be jeopardized. If that were to happen, it would increase confusion for taxpayers and raise taxes on the dividend income received by some small-business owners.

Having said that, I will now go over these three important amendments. First, we will ensure that a taxpayer's entire income is included in the calculation of certain credits. Second, we will ensure that certain benefits for Canadian Forces' members and veterans are eligible for a pension credit. This may mean some veterans will get a higher pension income credit. It also guarantees alignment with what is considered pension income when calculating Alberta income tax. Lastly, the amendments adjust the provincial dividend tax credit rate so that federal tax changes do not have a negative impact on Alberta taxpayers. Without this change, some small-business owners would face a slight tax increase on their dividend income.

Mr. Speaker, as I've stated, these amendments will properly maintain Alberta's tax system and are needed to support Canada Revenue Agency's administration of Alberta's 2018 tax system, taxes that have already been filed by the majority of Albertans. Their passage ensures that taxpayers are treated consistently compared to the previous year and protects taxpayers from any potential tax reassessments that could result from the misalignment of provincial and federal systems.

I now move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate lost]

The Speaker: Is there anyone wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverley-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [some applause] I will thank my caucus colleagues now for their warm round of applause although what I'm about to share is probably not as riveting as they might hope.

I do want to start off by just clarifying for the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance that – I always find it interesting when the government, at every opportunity, says: this is something the NDP said they were going to do and didn't. Well, let's look at why it wasn't done until this moment: because we couldn't. I appreciate the fact that the government is bringing this

in. You know, I can assure the Minister of Finance that had we formed government in the 2019 election, we would have brought this forward, but we accept the fact that the minister and this government are bringing it in, recognizing again that whenever there are federal changes, the province obviously needs to make amendments to ensure that we're in sync with the federal tax regulations and legislation.

7:40

I appreciate what these small changes do, again, especially for our Canadian Armed Forces. I mean, I think every member in this House recognizes the sacrifice that the men and women who serve our country make each and every day for all of us so that we may stand in this Legislature and debate. I also appreciate the fact that there's an amendment here for the small-business rate, which will impact our small businesses, so it's important that this is done speedily or expeditiously.

As my colleague the Member for Edmonton-North West said, you know, had we formed government, we might have brought this in as bill 3 or 4, so it's a little frustrating that the government had to wait until Bill 10 to bring this in. But we do support these changes and recognize that this is more of an administrative change. But I wanted to stand up and clarify on the record, Mr. Speaker, that this wasn't done by our government because our government never had the opportunity.

Ms Hoffman: Promise made, promise kept.

Mr. Bilous: That's right. According to the Member for Edmonton-Glenora: promise made, promise kept.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any others wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud is rising to add to the debate.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I felt that this was a bill I just really wanted to speak to. I just wanted to say that there are few opportunities in this House where we can be all in consensus and have unanimous support, but I would like to share as well our support for this bill. As the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview just said, this seems like very straightforward changes. I'm glad that the government members are willing to follow through on something that the NDP government committed to do. We appreciate that very much. It seems like very straightforward changes to align our income tax system with the federal system. I'm sure there will be other opportunities where we will find that if we don't align with the federal regulations, they will impose them upon us. I think we might see that shortly, January 1, I believe. In any event, this seems very straightforward.

I'm glad to rise in support and to see this opportunity for all members of the House to come together unanimously and support what will only make – they may be administrative, but they will have benefits, particularly for our veterans, and that's a very important thing. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to rise in support of this bill.

The Speaker: Well, teamwork does make the dream work.

Are there any others wishing to speak to 29(2)(a)? Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, are there any others wishing to speak to Bill 10 at second reading?

Seeing none, the hon. Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board to close debate.

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and hear pretty unanimous support for this housekeeping bill, that really needs to get accomplished by this Legislature in order to serve Alberta taxpayers well for not only the upcoming year but, in fact, for 2018.

With that, I move to close debate.

The Speaker: Well done.

[Motion carried; Bill 10 read a second time]

Bill 8

Education Amendment Act, 2019

Mr. Bilous moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 8, Education Amendment Act, 2019, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 8, Education Amendment Act, 2019, be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that further time is necessary to enable school boards to adjust their policies to comply with the proposed legislation and regulations.

[Adjourned debate on the amendment June 12: Mr. Dang]

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are on an amendment to Bill 8. Anyone wishing to add to the debate this evening? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Just to clarify, Mr. Speaker, the amendment on Bill 8, correct?

The Speaker: Correct.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to my colleagues for this opportunity to rise in this House and speak to why it's so important that we move forward on this referral amendment that is being proposed before this Assembly.

I have to say that it is with great sadness that we're here considering Bill Hate tonight. I think that my colleagues earlier today did an excellent job of walking through some of the legal history and background. I, too, was there at the time when we were considering this originally. I know that ATA members were brought forward. I know that parents were brought forward. I know that a lot of consultation happened around the province around high school completion rates – that was primarily the focus that I recall at many of the working group sessions that I went to – high school completion rates that were certainly among the lower portion of provinces in the country and not at a stage that I think we wanted to see moving forward. That's why I think the consultation that took place did in such a fulsome way.

I have to say that most of the amendments that were being proposed to the School Act – and then subsequently they came up with an act they called the Education Act – were done, again, with this focus on high school completion. The main thrust of that was around increasing access from 19 to 20 years of age, well, to 21, essentially, as of September 1. It would have meant that many more students would have access to that K to 12 school system in an attempt to support high school completion.

Many of the students who would have benefited from that in particular were students with disabilities and students who had a lot of other pressures outside of the regular K to 12 school day. At the time when I was on the school board and there was consultation in this area, I know that I represented students who attended Braemar school, which we heard about just a couple of weeks ago. Braemar is in the riding of Edmonton-Gold Bar. It's the name of the

neighbourhood. The elementary school used to be there. It's the name that was in Ottewell for that neighbourhood at the time.

The programming that's available there is focused specifically on pregnant and parenting teen moms. It's those moms who, when I met with them and discussed the changes, said: it would make a big difference for me if I felt like I could take an extra year or even two years. Most of the moms are only away from school for one to two weeks after they've given birth and usually bring their babies with them back to school. They said: you know, this is a change, if it was extended to 21, that would help me and my family and put some ease on some of the pressures that I face.

That's not what this bill is actually going to do. This bill is going to keep the age limits as they were, at 19. I understand that there are financial pressures that come with expanding the age of completion by two years and that the decision has been made not to move forward on that, but that, to me, was the main thrust of why the Education Act consultation took place.

I have spoken with many school board chairs, and when I spoke with my former colleague and, I guess, once-again colleague Mary Martin, the chair of Calgary Catholic, the piece in the Education Act that she was most excited about was the work to increase high school completion rates. She talked about how some of the consultation included going to prisons and talking to educators in prisons as well as inmates about what their experiences were in the school system. I've had many friends who've taught at the remand, for example, here in Edmonton, and they said that most of the folks who are there haven't completed high school. What a difference it would make if high school completion opportunities were more available for them in their earlier years, in their younger life.

Again, that was the original intent, I believe, of many of these conversations as well as aligning ages of entry, having more consistency and certainty for families so that it didn't matter, you know, if they lived on one boundary or another or if they chose Catholic or public but that they have greater certainty and consistency around age of entry and age of access. These were given to us in this decade-old consultation as the main reasons why the Education Act was being considered.

7:50

So this title still is here, Education Act, but certainly the focus of what this bill is is very different than what was proposed. I believe my colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud talked about a transformative educational opportunity. I think that anywhere, anyplace, any time was one of the taglines that was used. It kind of reminds me of: right care, right place, right time, right provider. Interesting. Anywhere, anyplace, any time education: again, this act doesn't do that. It doesn't, I would say, do much to address high school completion at all.

Good news, Mr. Speaker. Over the last four years, with an NDP government that really focused on trying to make sure that schools had the supports they needed and that youth had an increase to their minimum wage and felt possibly less pressure to have to try to cram in as many hours of work and with a number of other initiatives, high school completion has increased. Is it where we want it to be? I imagine the Education minister would say no, that she wants it to continue to grow, and I do, too. I think it's important for every student to have the opportunity to benefit from an excellent public education, whether that be provided in a public school or otherwise, but with the idea that one of the components of public education is: free from fees. Right? That's what this purpose of considering the age of access is.

Okay. It doesn't do the things that were originally set out in consultation as the main focuses of the bill. Well, then, why do

it? I think that the truth is – and I think we've unpacked it over the last sort of two weeks and will continue to unpack it over the coming days – that this is a backdoor way, some might say, to undo the important work that was done with Bill 24 and other legislation brought forward by our fantastic MLA for Edmonton-North West, the former Minister of Education under the previous government, legislation that was brought forward because students and staff regularly said: we need greater clarity; we need greater certainty.

Some might say, the Education minister might say, and others might say: "Well, we have PIPA. We have FOIP. That's good enough. There's lots of privacy legislation." Actually, PIPA and FOIP have very clear assumptions that parents have a right to information, including section 85 . . .

Ms Pancholi: Section 84.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud. I was one section off.

Section 84 very clearly says that parents are entitled to have information about their children in the school system: their school records, these types of things. It has been argued that therefore parents should have the right to know about any extracurricular club or activity that their children are engaged in. That is exactly how this debate really started, when the Education minister at the time said: we're going to make sure that nobody is outed before they're ready, that students have the ability to be safe and protected and supported in their schools and have an ability to access a support group without having the risk of it putting them in a social situation that they themselves aren't ready for.

Honestly, Mr. Speaker, I am of the opinion that no one – no one – should ever be outed before they are in a position where they feel confident in doing so. Sometimes it's hard, because sometimes people say: hey, there are people around you, people close to you who, like, come on, you know are probably gay. I say, you know, that I live my value of not outing anyone before they're ready to make that decision for themselves. I think that it's an important principle, and I think it applies to all, whether you are somebody who has lived for many, many decades or whether you are a youth. I think that those rights to have privacy and dignity should apply to all. Sometimes it's hard. I know that sometimes we feel pressure and that sometimes people feel compelled to try to disclose somebody else's orientation, but I think that that's an important value and principle. I think that people should be allowed to make their own decisions about talking about who and how they love if they ever choose to do so.

It was really clear that some schools said: "You know, I feel a lot of pressure when I'm acting in the role of guardian to disclose. FOIP has clause 84. I should probably disclose this to the parents. I don't feel like I'm in the best position to do that, and I worry that if I do and it does result in harm, I will have to live with that on my conscience."

So we, with the Education minister, entered into discussion with youth, primarily, as well as those who work with them, including teachers and others through the school system and so forth, and it was very clear that they wanted that clarity that they were not to out somebody. Sometimes we say: other duties as assigned. Outing kids would not be assigned. That would not be a duty where any educator would have to be put in a position to make that decision.

Many educators who support GSAs work with youth on how to have those conversations with their families, how to put themselves in a position where they're feeling strong enough to be able to have those conversations, and to have contingency plans if they need

them, of course. But many of them are supported in a proactive way in having their own voice and making their own decision about their own orientation and on how, if, and when to share that.

Given that this is going to undo that piece of legislation that was brought forward, I think it is very damaging. I've said in the House previously that we will have experiences in this House, experiences that are going to be very difficult, where people have to rise and answer for why something terrible happened. There will be ministers, primarily, that stand up and say: one child dying is one child too many. And they're right. One child dying is one child too many. One child being forced into homelessness is one child too many.

If you go to the youth emergency shelter here in Edmonton, a fantastic place on Whyte Avenue, or if you go to other homeless shelters for youth in your own ridings, you will talk to those case workers, and they will say that statistically there is significant overrepresentation of youth who are LGBTQ. Significant overrepresentation. One of the ways that we can prevent that is by making sure that they have some say over how their story is shared and with whom rather than by creating increased opportunities through existing legislation to put these kids in vulnerable positions. So that's one.

The other one is the timeliness piece. I am deeply concerned by the lack of commitment. I want to say that in the Education Act that's being proposed today, there are many things that we did through the School Act that the now government has taken and said, you know, that that was important. Like school fees: that was important; we're going to carry that on. Like a trustee code of conduct: that was important; we're going to carry that on. Like superintendent compensation: that was important; we're going to carry it on. But timeliness on creating support groups for vulnerable kids: "No. Not important. We're going to shelve that. We're going to shelve that. We're not going to create opportunities for these kids," who are often at their most vulnerable when they're asking for GSAs.

I'm going to back up for a second. I think of the fact that we even have to ask for GSAs, that you're saying to kids who are vulnerable, "Hey, put up your hand if you want us to create a support group." I talked to a number of youth who said: "You know, by the time I put up my hand, it's already a month or two into the school year. Then it takes a little while to set it up even if it was timely, and then the next year I have to ask all over again to have it created." There should just be one automatically, and if nobody shows up Wednesdays at lunch, so be it, you know. The teacher will eat their sandwich in their classroom, and that's that. But not only are we going to fail to make it easier for kids to set up, but we're actually going to remove that "immediately" clause so that it can be prolonged so that kids are asking, often in times of crisis: "Hey, I need a support group. I need somebody to talk to. I need a safe place at lunch. I need a bathroom where I can go without being worried that I'm going to be harassed."

I talked to an ATA member just last weekend who talked about how in all the years that his son rushed home and used the bathroom immediately as soon as he got home, he never thought, "Why aren't you using the bathroom at school?" Well, three years later, when his son did come out, he said, "Is that why you rushed home to use the bathroom?" He said: "Yeah. I didn't want to be in the bathroom. I was nervous. I was around all these guys. I didn't want them to see me. I didn't want them to harass me. I certainly didn't want to get beat up. There was already speculation that I was gay. I didn't want to have to put myself in that position, so I held it all day, and, yes, as soon as I got home, the first thing I did was that I ran into the bathroom."

If there had been a GSA at the school at that time, these are the kinds of things that can be discussed, and people can come up with plans around which bathroom you can use, when you can use it, and how we can make sure that you can focus on learning math instead of focusing on: how quickly can I get home so I don't pee my pants. Right?

It's pretty basic. Kids should be able to go to school, hang up their coat, put their books in their locker, go to class, and focus. Most of the kids that are benefiting from having GSAs can do that once they have some additional structures in place to give them opportunities to strategize and work with their classmates and work with other caring adults at that school. By saying that we're going to remove the obligation for it to be immediate, we're going to create an opportunity to sort of rag the puck a little bit longer for kids who are already in a position of significant vulnerability, and that, I think, is an injustice.

So, again, changes that we made in other areas of the School Act – superintendent compensation, board code of conduct, school fees – are being picked up and implemented into Bill Hate, but the protections around youth: "No. We're not going to do those." Okay. So that's actually going to also have a negative impact on high school completion rates. I'll tell you that I went to many outreach graduations over the years, and many of the students at those outreach graduations – you probably have some in your ridings too, hon. Speaker and colleagues.

8:00

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre rising to ask a brief question or comment.

Mr. Shepherd: Indeed, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was greatly enjoying the remarks from my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora. I think she has some deep knowledge and expertise on this subject, having served as the chair of the Edmonton public school board, and I would appreciate it if she would like to share any final thoughts.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has the call.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and to the Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

They would say: "I'm at outreach school, and I'm really proud that I'm completing now. One of the reasons why I ended up here is because I didn't feel safe in my neighbourhood high school. I didn't feel safe in the high school I was attending originally." If we can create opportunities for kids to feel safe, kids who are these vulnerable, marginalized youth, in their schools so that they don't have to end up going to an outreach school – I'm glad that outreach is there, but nobody should end up there because they felt that they weren't safe going to their regular neighbourhood school that they chose. I think we owe it to those kids.

Also, research, which are surveys that are done by Alberta Education and by others, is very clear that GSAs and the creation of LGBTQ stand-alone policies, not inclusion policies but LGBTQ stand-alone policies, in schools that have them, the sense of safety and the sense of inclusion for students who don't identify as LGBTQ also goes up because you create a culture where discrimination, harassment, bullying, and specifically naming out for sexual orientation and gender identity minority youth is unacceptable. To me you're keeping vulnerable kids safe, and you're also creating heightened opportunities for safety for others.

These are a few of the pieces why I feel that Bill 8 in its current form has nothing to do with the original intention of the Education

Act and everything to do with hate: outing kids, timing them out, and creating more risk and opportunities for harm for these youth who certainly didn't ask for it, certainly didn't ask to be different, certainly didn't ask to be harassed, and certainly don't deserve to be treated in the way that they are. I know that we will probably hear people say: we spoke to all the stakeholders. I will tell you that there are hundreds of kids who have reached out to me – and I will have opportunities, I imagine, to share some of their thoughts and words on this in the days to come – and said: “No, I didn't. I finally feel safe at my school. No, I didn't ask for my rights to be balanced against somebody else's rights. My rights are my rights, my human rights, and they aren't out of balance. They should be protected, and I deserve to have my voice and my rights respected.”

Again, during the election – and members opposite will talk about it – pipelines, economy, jobs. I remember those big words on placards up behind the now Premier. This wasn't put out there as one of the top three things that were proposed to be done, hon. members. This wasn't: “Hey, this is what we're really going to focus on. We're going to focus on finding new ways to out gay kids.”

Actually, I think when we said that there was a long history of the now Premier working to create unsafe situations for LGBTQ men and women in San Francisco in particular and for lack of equal marriage opportunities, then we got: “Oh, no, no, no. The now Premier says that he supports civil unions.” Well, that was in the face of losing challenges around equal marriage, right? Saying that your rights aren't equal rights, that we will have a subset of rights for another group of humans or class of individuals is wrong.

That's what these youth told me, and that's what I will continue to fight for. I will fight for their voices to be heard and for the changes that were implemented, under thoughtful consultation, to keep kids safe and save their lives not withheld as we continue to move forward. Somebody said, you know: well, don't you think it would be nice to have a few evenings off? I'm sure there are many people who want evenings off, but I would not bank on anyone having any evenings off until we have assurances that our kids will not be outed, our kids will have timely access, and that they will be supported and respected in their schools.

It's quite easy. Either pick up the same sections from the amended School Act and other pieces of legislation and move them over into this ed act, or shelve this ed act altogether. Let's be clear again. This isn't the implementation plan that original consultation a decade ago set out to achieve. There are a couple of choices on how we can get to a better outcome, where we actually do have the strongest protections in the country, because we have them today. We have them today, and nobody said that we need to move backwards. I doubt that anyone when we were door-knocking – and if people did, when you were door-knocking, say that we need to move backwards on protections for LGBTQ, I certainly welcome my hon. colleagues to stand up and say so because I will tell you that I heard not a lot about GSAs, and when I did, it was: thank you for the work you did to keep me safe.

The Speaker: Hon. members, anyone else wishing to join the debate this evening? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise. This is my first opportunity to speak in this House with respect to Bill 8. I suspect it will not be my last opportunity, and I promise you that I think I have enough material here to speak many, many, many times on Bill 8.

I'm pleased to rise today to voice my significant concerns regarding Bill Hate, the Education Amendment Act, 2019. It is a privilege to speak on this bill right after my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, after her expertise as a board chair for the Edmonton public school board, one of the largest school boards in the province, and also to sit on this side of the aisle with some excellent advocates for education such as the MLA for Edmonton-North West, David Eggen – pardon me – who was the former Minister of Education, who made some significant progress in bringing the School Act up to date.

I spoke today, Mr. Speaker, about my experience because I have significant and substantial experience with the Education Act, which this government is now bringing forward in an amended form. I was privileged to serve in the public service of this provincial government from 2006 to 2014. The last five years of that period of time I spent significant time working with three different Education ministers – Minister David Hancock, Minister Thomas Lukaszuk, and Minister Jeff Johnson – on three different versions of the Education Act, which was the result of, I think, some very good intentions, actually.

You know, I think it was in 2009, I believe, that the province underwent a significant consultation on the education system as a whole. That consultation was called Inspiring Education. It was also connected with a review of what was then called special education. We don't use that terminology anymore, but that was called Setting the Direction for Special Education in Alberta. I applaud those previous governments for doing significant consultation work with stakeholders, with parents, with students, to try to see a vision forward for education in this province.

The School Act has been in place since 1988; however, it is important to note that it has undergone a number of changes and amendments, in particular in the last four years. However, it was 1988 when that piece of legislation was formed.

I worked as part of the legislative services team within Alberta Education, working closely with colleagues in Alberta Justice, to try to put into legislative form some of the feedback that was heard throughout that consultation period and responding, of course, to the ministers with which I worked. What I can tell you is that there were very high ambitions with respect to overhauling and reforming and modernizing our education system, and there were some pieces within the Education Act which were intended to be transformative.

However, as somebody who literally spent hours and hours and hours reading every word of the School Act and rewriting every word of the Education Act, I can tell you that there was a little bit of a sense – actually more than a little bit; there was a significant sense of disappointment that where we landed with respect to the Education Act was actually not transformative.

What we had heard in the consultations, what the government had heard in the consultations was about removing sort of the bricks and mortar of schools and having a real way for students to learn any time, any place, any pace, and the idea was to support kids. At that time the main objective of that government was actually to increase high school completion. The goal was to think about education in a different way that would support all kids to be able to finish their high school diploma. Unfortunately, for various reasons, what we ended up with in terms of the Education Act was primarily a cleaned up version, some changes but, really, just a cleaned up version of the School Act.

There were some key pieces, though, that I think many of us who believed in the idea of any time, any place, any pace were excited about. There were some provisions in the Education Act that were going to really encourage kids to stay in school, to finish school, and learn at a pace that worked for them but that also allowed them to achieve success. What I am most disappointed about is that there

were a couple of pieces that were transformative, and those are the pieces that this government has decided not to go forward with in the Education Act. Those are the pieces that they're actually choosing to repeal from the Education Act.

8:10

Specifically, those are the pieces around increasing the age of access from the age of 19 to the age of 21, increasing the age of compulsory attendance at school, which means you can't drop out of school, to the age of 17 from the age of 16, and it was about basing residency of the student, which determines which school board is responsible for delivering education programs to that student, to be based on where the student lived, not where the student's parents lived. That was significant because, like many other services, health services in particular, services follow the recipient of the services. Where that person who's getting the services goes, that's where they get to receive it, and the thinking was that we have situations – we have many situations – where students unfortunately are not living with their parents, and they should not be denied access to the resident school board that they reside in simply because their parent does not live in the same school district. The idea was that kids, no matter where they are, should have access to the same high quality of education. Those were the changes that were probably the most transformative in terms of actually implementing the vision of Inspiring Education and Setting the Direction, which was focusing on: any time, any place, any pace. Unfortunately, those are the provisions that Bill 8 chooses to repeal. So they're not going forward with it.

I actually appreciate very much the comments from my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora as well as, I know, the expertise of the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West of why those changes. They are difficult to implement, and I'm sympathetic towards that. There is a dollar figure attached to making those changes because if you're going to be requiring school boards to provide access to education to kids to the age of 21, yeah, that means kids are in school longer. Now, it does give them more opportunity to succeed and to complete their education, but it costs money.

I do want to point out, however – this is part of the privilege of having worked in public service and being a detail person. Our current education system – and this has been the case for quite some time – actually currently funds kids till the age of 20. Even though the legislation and the School Act says access till the age of 19, we actually provide funding up to the age of 20, so at the very least I think this government could have chosen to still increase the age of access to the age of 20. That is consistent with funding practice already as it is.

However, I want to speak a little bit more about the amendment that's before us today. It is talking about providing the opportunity for consultation, and I can tell you that there are a few reasons why. This legislation actually passed in 2012 originally. As a public servant who worked many long hours and weeks and days on that legislation, I can tell you that I was actually thrilled to see that Education Act finally pass, the work of many, many, many public servants who put in a lot of time and energy. However, there are a few things that – that was now almost seven years ago, and I can tell you that in that time two things have happened.

There was a reason why the Progressive Conservative government at the time did not proclaim that act right away. Let's remember. It passed in 2012. Government did not change until 2015, three years later. The reason why they didn't proclaim it was because the devil is in the details, because a significant amount of work under the Education Act was in the regulations. It's true of the School Act now, and I can tell you again that this is why it's not

that much different than the Education Act. If you look at the Education Act right now, there are a number of opportunities where regulations need to be developed, and those regulations are the meat and bones of the operations of school boards and private schools and charter schools in their system. Transportation, school fees, all of those things are set out in regulation. There was a significant amount of work that needed to be done before school boards, private schools, charter schools, parents, students were ready to operationalize the Education Act.

I can go through and I can identify that there is – for the lawyers, yeah. We like lots of regulations. That's what we do. We read that stuff all the time, but it's really important in the education system. I've worked in a number of different areas where we never look at the regulations. I can tell you that in the education world – and I worked in the provincial government and then I worked for school boards for five years – we look at those regulations a lot. We look at them a lot because the details are really set out. It's a process by which charter schools are approved. It's a process by which private schools are approved. It's a process by which home education is delivered by parents. It's a process by which transportation fees are set, school fees are set, school councils function, separate school establishments happen, student evaluations, student records, requirements that school boards have to have about what information they need to keep about their students. It's all in the regulations. So when we're sitting here today and we're talking about this reasoned amendment, which is to wait and consult, the reason is because this is not an act that we can simply snap our fingers and it will be implemented.

There is a lot of work that needs to be done, that school boards need to know, private school operators, charter school operators, home educators, those parents need to know to be able to implement this regulation. To date we do not know what those regulations are. It's a long process because I can tell you each piece of those regulations require as much – we've got stakeholders who are just as invested in those regulations as they are in the legislation. They want to be part of it. They want to be heard. They want to be consulted. They're important details. All you'll see in the act is very general: the minister may make regulations about this. But what's actually going to be in there requires discussion with those stakeholders in our education system.

I sit here and I remember thinking back in 2012 when the Education Act passed in this House: "I don't know how we are ever going to be able to get regulations, which almost each one is a mini-piece of legislation. How are we going to be able to get this done so that school boards know how to operate? Private schools, home educators: how are they going to do that?" It took years and next to no progress was made on that, and that was by the previous Progressive Conservative government.

We still don't know what those regulations will look like. As we draw to the end of the 2018-19 school year and we are a mere two months away from the beginning of the 2019-2020 school year, I can tell you, those school boards, those operators, need to know those details. There is simply no time to prepare over the two months when, let's be honest, for school boards, just like a lot of our students, they're quieter times. We don't even know what those regulations are going to look like, so to expect them to be implementing them is a significant administrative burden. I think it's preparing ourselves for a real administrative nightmare come September 1, 2019.

I think the amendment before us is important because it's really talking about: "Let's talk about what those regulations will look like. Let's give an opportunity for the actors in our system to know what those are going to look like so that they can operationalize them." I think it's a very responsible thing to do because the other

reason – and I know this has come up in the House before – is more than 50 per cent of the current sitting school board trustees were elected in 2017, five years after the School Act passed. They were not involved in the consultations. They don't know what's in this act. The regulations were not going forward. There is no understanding for almost half of this province's school board trustees, very little understanding about what is actually going to be meant by implementation.

I can tell you that it's really easy. It is actually easy in this House as government to simply say: "Here's the law. Go follow it." Who it's really hard for are the actors in our system who are responsible for putting it into place. The amendment here today is a reasonable amendment because they are the people who are going to actually have to implement what's being proposed here today. I think we owe them a duty to speak to them, to prepare them, to talk to them, and to get their feedback. Otherwise, I can tell you what I anticipate is going to happen. I anticipate that this government is simply going to put forward the same regulations that currently exist under the School Act. That's what I anticipate is going to happen – and why? – because there's absolutely no time to do appropriate work and to actually develop strong regulations. What's going to happen is we're going to see regulations that look very close to what's currently in the School Act.

That goes to my other point, which is that this is really not transformative legislation. I talked already that there was a sense of disappointment about what actually came out of Inspiring Education with respect to the Education Act. The only really transformative pieces about it were those changes to the age of access, age of compulsory education, and residency based on the student. This government has taken those provisions out. I can tell you that – and we see it in Bill 8 – Bill 8 actively goes and looks at what this NDP government did, and it actually adopts those changes. It adopts the changes that NDP government made to the School Act because those were the good pieces from the Education Act: the piece about trustee code of conduct, the pieces about superintendent compensation.

The pieces actually that I think are really great – my husband is an assistant principal – are the establishment of leadership certificates and standards for superintendents. Those are great pieces, and I can tell the government agrees because they have also adopted those changes in Bill Hate to the Education Act. The good stuff that was in the Education Act has already been put into the School Act.

8:20

All that Bill Hate proposes to do right now is to take out what was great and was potentially transformative about the Education Act that was passed in 2012. It scraps that and it takes on all the good work that the NDP government did to amend the School Act. The only difference, the one outrageous outlier, the one piece of work that the NDP government did to amend the School Act, it amended the School Act with respect to GSAs. And that is the one piece.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore is rising to ask a brief question or make a comment.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I really appreciate the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud. Her comments very, very eloquently gave us a bit of a history lesson on how this all worked, getting to the point around some of the reasons why it is so necessary for these consultations. I was hoping that maybe she might give us a few more thoughts about who she thinks might be

best served by these consultations and maybe talk about some of the others that we could be reaching out to.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore for the question. As I was saying, one of the big outliers with respect to the provisions that this government has not taken from the School Act is the piece around GSAs. When we talk about consultation, that is key.

Unfortunately, what is being proposed in Bill Hate is going to affect kids. It's going to affect students. And those are the people whose voices that we most need to hear from, and those are the people whose voices are most difficult to hear from, especially if you're government and you're not opening your hearts and your minds to those conversations. I think it's very important.

I attended an event this past weekend with some fabulous teachers and administrators from Edmonton Catholic and Edmonton public schools who are part of their GSAs, and they've done great work to establish GSAs in their schools. What they said is: "We are teachers. We are not here to out kids. We are not here to be put in the middle between parents and students. We are here to simply support our kids and we want their voices to be heard. That's who we need to be talking to. We need to be talking to the kids."

I've heard the comments from the hon. Minister of Education. Unfortunately, I don't think she's talking to the same kids that we are talking to. Actually, the kids that we are talking to are the kids who are most likely to have their voices silenced, and we see that right now and we need to provide them – it is our duty. I take it very seriously. I think it's our duty to hear the voices of the most vulnerable, and that is who we really need to hear their comments on. I don't believe that this government has a mandate to roll back GSA protections to LGBTQ students. I promise you that I have a lot more to say about all of these issues. I could go into great detail in particular – and I will – but I will save that for, I'm sure, another opportunity to debate about why these GSA protections are weaker, substantially weaker.

The only thing I want to comment about, I want to come back to the fact that I was involved in this legislation. I've been asked the question, I have said that I'm proud of the work we did on the Education Act up until 2012, but I was not part of the public service for the last five years when this NDP government brought in the changes to Bill 24 and strengthened the protections for GSAs. Back when I was working on the Education Act, we weren't talking about GSAs. That was not part of it. When I say that I'm proud of it, I'm proud of what we did back then, but I see now, very clearly, that based on what we know about GSAs, based on what we hear from kids who are vulnerable and who need those GSAs to have a safe and secure place to be, that what we had in the Education Act was not adequate.

While I can speak to the great work of my colleagues in Alberta Education who worked very hard to develop that piece of legislation, I can say with absolute certainty: we did not know what we were talking about when it came to GSAs because we were not talking about GSAs. We had a lot to learn and a lot has been learned in the last five years. I can't see how it is a benefit to any Albertan to roll back. Why are we trying to forget what we've learned? We're trying to move forward and one of the conversations I've had with teachers about this, they said that there's still work we needed to do with respect to GSAs. There was more work about training trustees. One of the teachers mentioned that she knows that her local trustee is really interested in learning more about GSAs. They said that's the next step that they saw, was establish the protections, make sure

GSAs can be established in a timely and effective way and respond to the kids' needs. Then let's educate. Let's talk more at the principal level, at the superintendent level, at the school board level, and let's go further. She said: we were really looking forward to what was next in terms of protecting and supporting our LGBTQ students; instead, we're now fighting to just keep things from being rolled back.

I can say with an absolute clear conscience that we did great work on the Education Act, but what is in the School Act right now, particularly with respect to GSAs, is much better, is much stronger, is much more effective, and much more important. It is transformative, and I really think that if we are talking about modernizing our school system and really taking our school system forward, that is where we were going. What we're seeing by Bill Hate is really just regression. It's moving backwards in time. It's pretending that we don't know what we do know.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been pleased to speak to Bill 8, and I will speak to it again, for sure.

The Speaker: Hon. members, is there anyone else wishing to speak to Bill 8? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak about Bill Hate and the amendment that this bill should not be now read a second time.

I've reviewed this legislation – and it's quite extensive – and I have lots of questions, Mr. Speaker, about what the intention of some of this is and what the real benefit of some of these pieces are. I know that one of the things that they're talking about is having no board for private schools. I know, as a mom, having the ability to advocate for something that may not be going right for my kids at school, whether it's with other students or whether it's with staff, if they don't have a board that reviews spending or best practices or decisions or disputes, how can parents solve disputes objectively? It seems that this would take away the rights of a parent to have some of those questions answered or the possibility of having a mediation.

I know that I used to work as a mediator with the city of Edmonton, specifically in schools, to talk about disputes, sometimes between kids and staff, sometimes between some of the students and students. Sometimes it was a parent conflict that had come into the school system. When you have another level such as a board, that gives the opportunity for more rights for parents. They have more of a voice. It's not just the staff. It gives them an opportunity to have their concerns expressed. It's not an absolute no, Mr. Speaker. If there is a concern that's happening, it gives that parent an extra venue to discuss concerns or anything of the sort.

I've had many constituents come to my office with questions and concerns about this. I have great working relationships with the school trustees in my area, and thankfully because of those working relationships, when there have been concerns that have been brought forward to my office, I've been able to work with the families as well as the trustees to get some resolutions to some of the concerns.

Sometimes it's not a resolution that the parent might be appreciative of. However, some of them have been positive. But in the moments where it wasn't perhaps the exact resolution that a parent had hoped for, having that opportunity to sit down and to talk about it can be a really wonderful process in just the talking, just being able to express their concern, feeling validated, feeling heard, because sometimes there's that power dynamic between the school and the family, and they just don't feel like they have the authority to come in. When there's that third person that's a part of that process, just sometimes being heard and feeling like there's

someone that's a real neutral party can have a huge impact on the outcome of a resolution.

There are sometimes concerns when a family is advocating for special services within their school. They might feel that their child deserves an aide, perhaps, and if the school says no, what is the parents' recourse? Are they able to appeal that decision? Are they able to have someone advocate on their behalf to assist with maybe what's not being seen as important in that school setting? I think by having a board and someone that you can talk to, it would perhaps alleviate some of those things when you have a child that's struggling and could use a little bit of help in the classroom. Having that extra person onside with you to listen and help advocate might help, Mr. Speaker. That's one of the concerns I have.

One of the changes says that all references to the "director" under the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act are changed to "child intervention worker." Under CYFEA the director is clearly defined. It says:

- (j) "director" means a person designated by the Minister as a director for the purposes of this Act and the Protection of Sexually Exploited Children Act and without limiting the generality of the foregoing includes a person designated as a director in accordance with an agreement under section 122(2) of this Act.

8:30

Mr. Speaker, they're suggesting to take the word "director" out of CYFEA and replace it with "child intervention worker." Unfortunately, the words "child intervention worker" do not appear in CYFEA. So they're suggesting that you take a word that is clearly defined in CYFEA, replace it with a new term, and it's not defined. I'm curious what the intention of removing the director is because the director under CYFEA has the ability to delegate authority to different workers. They can deem whom they see as appropriate. Whether you're an assessor or a front-line worker or whatever the director has deemed your authority to be, they can provide that. If you take the word "director" out and delegate someone who is not even named under CYFEA, I'm confused about what that does.

I'm also confused about what the motivation behind it is. Notwithstanding that there is no such term in CYFEA, what's the intention of taking away the authority from the director to a child intervention worker? I know as a front-line worker myself under Children's Services that there's a lot of pressure on those front-line workers. I'm wondering: is this adding more work onto the front line without considering what the director would deem as appropriate? Right now under CYFEA the director decides who has the authority to do what. This would imply that it's just putting it directly onto a child intervention worker. Has there been any consideration into the pressures that that would put on the front line? Does this mean more paperwork directly to that front-line worker? Is it more red tape, perhaps, that they're adding to this legislation?

It is completely unnecessary because CYFEA already has a clear definition. It feels like it could be giving more responsibilities to front-line workers without actually talking to front-line workers about what their job is and what their day-to-day activities are. By changing this one piece of legislation, it could have a huge impact on front-line staff. I know as part of the child intervention panel that when we talked to front-line workers on their caseloads and concerns, this wasn't something they said that they would like to be identified and have specified in other pieces of legislation. So I'm curious if they've actually spoken to anyone from the Ministry of Children's Services to see about what this impact would be. I know that our front-line workers are struggling right now with the amount

of casework that they have on them. It's a little bit frustrating to see that there's this term in there that doesn't even exist, Mr. Speaker. So that tells me that they didn't consult with Children's Services.

The piece that I think is the most upsetting to me, Mr. Speaker, is everything around our GSAs. We know that when Bill 10 was originally introduced, we discovered that it was only somewhat of a shell of legislation with very little intention to ever be enforced. That's why we introduced legislation that took further steps to make sure that we were protecting our vulnerable children and our youth to create safe spaces. We know that GSAs save lives, that these are important to our children and youth. It's somewhere in their school, in their space where they spend most of their day, where they feel safe. The staff that support these GSAs, the other kids that are part of it can surround a youth and give them that one space in their school where they feel that they belong, where they feel that they can thrive, not just somewhere safe but somewhere where they can actually feel good about themselves. They have positive reinforcing messages.

I'm just confused why they would want to roll back that legislation in Bill Hate and put, literally, our little ones' lives at risk. It's concerning. It will allow staff to out students. We heard from the Alberta Teachers' Association that it was not in their job description to out children. They felt that that was something that they were not comfortable doing, and we heard that. We listened to them, and we felt that they should absolutely not be put in that position. It's a horrible situation for a teacher or staff to be put in. We heard that loud and clear from the teachers, and I'm confused about why this government would ignore teachers. If they spoke to teachers. They're saying that they need to support students to be in a healthy space and that they need Bill 24 to remain in place. I know that when I talk to parents whose kids attend a school with a GSA, whether their children are attending the GSA or not, they are supportive of that GSA. They know that there are kids at their child's school that feel supported.

I'm concerned that also under Bill Hate the GSAs are weakened for different schools. Private schools will no longer need to submit policies at all, and I'm curious, Mr. Speaker, why this would be allowed, other than an assumption that the intention would be that they do not have to do it. If there's no policy, there would be no expectation for them to actually have a GSA.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The fact that they don't have to have the word "gay" in the title: I've heard from the LGBTQ-plus community that it's like a slap in the face. It's a gay-straight alliance, or it's whatever the students want to call it, not the administration, not the principal, not the teachers. It's just really sad. It doesn't speak to inclusivity and support when they're not even allowed to say the word "gay," Madam Speaker.

It is concerning, too, that the timely establishment of a GSA, after students request it, would be removed. There's no time expectation that's put on the school. When a student comes forward, we heard several stories about students being fearful. Finally coming up with the courage to ask some of the grown-ups in their life for support, and then not having a timeline in place, Madam Speaker, is concerning. We know that some of the intention could be to just take the request and never look at it again. That's devastating to a student who has finally got the courage to come forward and say, "I would like the support of a gay-straight alliance in my school," to have a grown-up take that request and just sit on it and do nothing with it. It's concerning.

We know that when kids come forward and they speak their truth, it's important we listen. It's important that we support them and that

we provide leadership to our young people when they're being brave and coming forward and asking for support and asking for help. We can't turn our backs on them, Madam Speaker. I don't understand what the point is of having the legislation say that they can have a GSA if there's actually no time limit allotted for them to do it. Again, it makes me question what the intention of this bill is if it's not clearly identified that there's a timeline in place for it to be implemented for the students.

It just, again, reinforces that this government does not see value in GSAs. We continue to hear from the community that there's concern about this government, that they feel that they're being attacked, and when you look at the legislation and what it's allowing to happen in schools, I can't disagree with them. It feels like an attack on the LGBTQ-plus community. It's clear that they're trying to not encourage GSAs. They're making it difficult for young people to come forward and to get the support that they're bravely asking for. It's devastating. As a young person it's hard to necessarily express what you need and what your supports are, and to know that there was legislation in place that allowed that to happen, to know that it's now being taken away is terrifying. It gives a strong message to youth that they don't matter, Madam Speaker. To me, as a mom, as someone who sits in this Chamber to be the voice of all of my constituents regardless of age that's concerning.

I question what this government is doing regarding the GSAs. I mean, simply put, if you value our children and you value lives – we know that GSAs save lives. Children have said, "I felt alone; I felt isolated; I was depressed; I felt suicidal," and then knowing that there was a GSA available saved lives. They were able to come forward and sit in a group of people where they could openly express who they were in a safe environment without being judged, without being ridiculed. Taking that away is very, very frightening to me, Madam Speaker.

8:40

We know that the enforcement mechanism for school boards and private schools not complying with GSA legislation will be removed. I just again question: what is the government trying to do with this stipulation? They want to allow those who do not want to keep the safety and protections of LGBTQ-plus students at the top of mind. They want to support those who are not supportive of this community. That's what it feels like, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs for, I think, perhaps helping to touch on something that we haven't talked about here in regard to GSAs and the former legislation and this current one. You were, I think, channelling some of your experience as a social worker in regard to students and offering those protections to the confidentiality if a student does choose to be in a GSA as a protection, as a safe place. Of course, Bill 24 does not exclude the intervention of a social worker for, you know, potentially criminal purposes or self-harm and so forth. I mean, that was already built into that very strong and, I think, coherent law that we have in place now, that seems to be under attack.

I was just hoping that maybe you could tell us a bit more about that because, you know, this was one of the false arguments that was brought forward on Bill 24, that someone would not have the confidentiality regardless of if they were in the potential for either self-harm or other criminal activities and so forth, which categorically wasn't true. But, I mean, it's always good to cast the

clear light of day on what is confusing and help to clarify that for everybody if you could.

Thanks.

The Deputy Speaker: Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think that's a valid point, in that there were some mistruths that were being spread around Bill 24. There was concern about things not being reported, when that is absolutely not true.

As a professional who works with children and youth, you have an obligation to report when there is a threat of harm to self, when there is a threat of harm to others, or when there's a threat of some sort of criminal activity or an awareness of a criminal activity. You are ethically responsible and, under most professions, legally responsible to report that. If a child involved in any activity at school, whether they're part of the chess club, whether they're part of the soccer team, or GSA, if that child discloses that they are considering self-harm, absolutely the school would be in contact with the authorities and the parents to ensure that that child is safe. But the simple fact of belonging to a GSA doesn't mean that that child is at risk and that that child is at harm of anything.

When my kids were involved in some of their extracurricular, I wasn't phoned as a mom to say: "Hey, guess what; your child just joined the glee club" or "Your child just joined soccer." It wasn't important for the school to reach out. As a parent I didn't feel that my rights were being infringed on because my child was participating in an activity that they felt they needed at that time, whether that's expression of drama or working on their sports skills or going somewhere where they feel safe and included.

As a mom I want my children to be able to access supports and services. If my children choose to tell me what those are, I think that's great. If they don't, I trust that the grown-ups at the schools have my children's best interests. And I know that ethically they have to report if there is something that is happening that is criminal or self-harm or hurting somebody else, Madam Speaker. I think that saying that that wouldn't happen under a GSA is inaccurate. It puts fear into parents, and it makes people wonder what's actually happening in these GSAs.

I can say that I've personally attended the GSA in my riding and met with the kids, met with the staff, and they are a great group of people. They bring speakers in. They talk about things that they're interested in. We had been asked to come in and talk about politics, Madam Speaker. To some that might be something that nobody wants to talk about at the dinner table. This group brought us in, so I brought myself and the former Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park, Estefania Cortes-Vargas. They wanted to come in and give their experience of being a minority, young, LGBTQ-plus member, to talk about what it was like for them in the Legislature, and give them someone to look up to and someone to ask questions of about if they chose a career in politics.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other speakers to the reasoned amendment? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to the amendment on Bill 8, commonly known as Bill Hate. One of the things I just wanted to touch on or, again, just underline some of the things my colleagues have said, is that I think the members opposite have reminded us time and again about how important consultation is. Well, actually, I think they reminded us quite a bit before the election, not so much afterwards. But I do think that consultation is important and, I think, particularly as it relates to this bill.

Here are some important facts to think about. Nearly half of Alberta school board trustees are serving in their first term. I think the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud mentioned that also. They've not participated in any consultations on the Education Act. I think that's pretty important. Should school boards need to update their policies to comply with the Education Act, they will need to do the work via emergency meetings over the next three months. That doesn't seem reasonable to me. I don't know what the big rush is, actually. Why not give some thoughtful time to these elected people to do their jobs properly? Bill 28 and 24 both provided more than six months notice before coming into force to give school boards time to prepare. Some portions of Bill 28, the new professional practice standards, have had over a year lead time.

The last major consultation on the Education Act occurred in 2012, and for context students born in 2012 are in grade 2 now. The 2017 consultations on proposed amendments to the School Act addressed topics that Bill 83 doesn't even address such as age of access, as we've heard earlier. At the recent general meeting – I think this is important – school boards voted overwhelmingly to ask the government to delay the proclamation of the Education Act. Trustees have pointed out that the new legislation is concerning if it does not come with additional funding, and of course we know how that goes. We haven't heard exactly what that is and we will not until the fall, so why not delay? This government won't even confirm for school boards whether or not they will fund existing commitments such as the school nutrition program and class improvement fund.

I think there are ample reasons, Madam Speaker, to delay this in order to give all of the people that really have a vested interest in this to consult, to really consult, not just some people but wide consultation so that all stakeholders, particularly elected stakeholders, have a chance to weigh in on this important legislation. I've said this before; what I find quite disturbing is that throughout the election period all we heard was Jobs, Economy, Pipeline, or whichever order that went in, and what's really concerning is – it feels like a bait and switch – that this is what was sold, this is what was advertised as the focus of this new government, and suddenly we've just gone off the rails.

I don't really understand how folks across the way are okay with this. One of the very first things that you've done – and it's not that we don't realize that the changes you've made to this legislation will do the very thing that we were afraid that you were going to do. That is what you're doing. And it's really sort of – I mean, I don't want to give you credit for being sneaky, but it's really sneaky the way that you've done this. You've made this . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, through the chair, please.

Ms Renaud: Yup. Madam Speaker, I will.

I think it's really sneaky, Madam Speaker, that you are saying one thing, that you are moving us forward, that this is about progress, this is about making life better for people when, in fact, we're hearing from the very people that this will impact: elected school board trustees, teachers, and educators. We're hearing from the children themselves, we're hearing from people that did not have the benefit of GSAs that this is going to set them backwards, and that's really concerning.

8:50

Last week, I think it was, Madam Speaker, I read a portion of the letters that I received. I received 60 letters on May 3, before we even started having this discussion, from junior high students in St. Albert. They're upset about a few things, but they were primarily upset about GSAs. They were concerned that there would be

chipping away of the rights of students that relied on GSAs. Let's be clear, this legislation is chipping away by taking out provisions that give a definite timeline that principals have to respond to this request.

I can remember what it was like being a student. You know, if you're focused on something and you want to get it done but you're repeatedly told, "It's not possible; you have to wait," it gets put on the back burner. Life has a way of getting away from you, and it just goes on and on and doesn't happen. That is a really sort of backhanded way to reduce the strength of the legislation that was, really, put in place, Madam Speaker, to address the need when students are brave enough to say, "I would like a GSA or a QSA," or whatever they choose to call it. "I would like it right now, and here's why."

The legislation that we had before, the protection that we had sort of forced administrators to take the request seriously and to act on it immediately. I think that if a child in school is brave enough and recognizes that that is something that they need to be successful in school, we have a responsibility as legislators and as administrators to act as quickly as possible. I think it's important.

I also want to go back. I heard the Minister of Education – well, I think she did actually say the words "gay" and "queer" and some other words last week. I think she continues to refer to this particular support group as an inclusion group. While I appreciate the sentiment – you know, I have no problem with the word. I think it's a great word, particularly when it's used as an action, Madam Speaker, because "inclusion" isn't just a label that you attach to something. There has to be concentrated effort and resources put into inclusion. Inclusion to me is more than celebrating diversity or putting a stamp on something. It's actually understanding what that means and hearing from the people who require or would like inclusion who do not feel included, to hear from them, specifically: what does that mean to them?

I think that when you ask students who identify as part of the LGBTQ community, when they tell you, "I want a GSA," or "I want a QSA," or "I want a peer support group in my school. I know that I'm fully protected. I do not have to worry that anybody will tell my family until I'm ready," that's what they need to feel included. They need to feel supported. While I appreciate the sentiment of using the word "inclusion," I think it's important that we call GSAs or QSAs exactly what they are. They aren't inclusion groups; they're peer support groups that are requested by the people that need them.

One of my constituents that I'm sure people in this Chamber have heard of – his name is Dr. Kris Wells. He now, I believe, teaches at MacEwan University and was previously at the University of Alberta. I think he's a very knowledgeable man. He's obviously a leader when it comes to GSAs, and he constantly reminds me – and I think he likely reminds many of us – of the importance of GSAs. I was going back and reading some of the things he had said, and I think it's a really good reminder. Some of his words are a really good reminder. He himself is part of that community, and I think he speaks with a lot of authority. He reminds us to, first and foremost, remember that GSAs save lives. And that's what they do. They're about supporting the health and the safety of students, helping them thrive in their school environment and to live up to their potential, but I think what is most important is that GSAs save lives.

If you can remove any barriers to creating a GSA, if you could remove a barrier to a time delay to create a GSA, I think that that's worth while, just like earlier today when we voted in favour of second reading of a private member's bill to ensure that some medication was available in schools for students with life-threatening allergies. I feel the same way about this legislation, that the way it is right now does not provide the best protection and response to a student at risk who wants and needs a GSA. All of us

in this Chamber were in support of that legislation earlier, yet we have a very stark division right now about GSAs.

We're hearing from children and from educators and from trustees that are telling us: the legislation that you put forward is not the best it can be. It creates delays. It creates loopholes, and it is not the best it can be. It is not the best legislation to save lives, and we know that GSAs save lives.

Kids that are part of the LGBTQ community are four times more likely to attempt suicide than their peers. I mean, that's a stark number. They are at risk for substance abuse, absenteeism, and, you know – we all know – that all of these things lead to far more harm and far more risk in their adult lives. We know that that risk continues should they then go on to become parents or make whatever choices that they're making in their lives. This will impact that. So this is also about prevention. If you knowingly turn away from protection and prevention that you know will have a direct impact on the lives of students and the lives of young people, why would you knowingly not take every possible step that you could to protect and prevent problems?

Dr. Wells actually quoted a leading medical journal that referenced the likelihood of people in the LGBTQ community – their likelihood of suicide attempts. This leading medical journal called *The Lancet* called it "a mental health crisis." I think we all recognize what a mental health crisis is. I hope we all recognize what a mental health crisis is. So if we have a medical journal, contributors to this medical journal, telling us that this is a mental health crisis from the rate of attempted suicide – and I would suggest that the successful suicide rate is very high as well – I would suggest that it's time to act. This legislation doesn't get us the place that we need to be. If we honestly . . .

Point of Order Quorum

Mr. Bilous: Point of order, 5(2), quorum.

The Deputy Speaker: Ring the bells.

[Pursuant to Standing Order 5 the division bell was rung at 8:58 p.m., and the Deputy Speaker confirmed that a quorum was present]

Debate Continued

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker, for that little break. Back at it.

Again, I'm just going to remind the members that perhaps weren't in the Chamber that GSAs are about supporting the health and safety of students and helping them thrive in their school environment and live up to their potential.

9:00

As I said earlier, people in the LGBTQ community are four times more likely to attempt suicide than their peers. They are also often struggling with substance abuse and absenteeism while in school. Again, going back to my point, if you knew as a legislator, just like we did earlier today with all of us supporting legislation to ensure that children or students with severe, life-threatening allergies had access to support that they needed, intervention that they needed to live, to survive, to thrive, why would you knowingly, after we've told you, after elected trustees have told you, after students have told you, after other students that have used GSAs have told you that this legislation will cause problems – that is why we fixed the loopholes that we did when we were in government. Why would

you knowingly not work to amend the legislation that doesn't do the best that it could do to protect students, to ensure that they are not subjected to some of the things described? This is a mental health crisis. I'm not calling it that. Leading medical journal *The Lancet* is calling it that, a mental health crisis. I think a mental health crisis deserves intervention, intervention like a GSA.

For those of you that haven't ever visited a GSA or chatted with students who belong to a GSA, I guess I really don't understand what the big ...

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, any comments or questions under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you so much for the insightful comments by the Member for St. Albert. I think that one thing that certainly caught my attention was talking about the larger societal impacts of an attack on GSAs here in the province of Alberta. As you mentioned, you know, of course, this is a relatively new protection that is being afforded young people in schools across the province, and lo and behold there are generations of people in the very same situation that were completely exposed with no protections whatsoever.

You know, when you talk about a larger mental health issue or crisis, as you said, as you referenced from *The Lancet* magazine, GSAs and QSAs and what they represent to not just kids in school but to LGBTQ2S-plus people and their allies in general – right? – because let's remember that GSA, the last word in that acronym is ally. What we have managed to achieve through the GSA and QSA fight here in the province of Alberta over the last number of years has helped to embolden and create confidence, a sense of security amongst thousands of other people besides the people that are actually involved in GSAs. You know, if you can just perhaps elaborate on that a bit.

One thing I saw that struck me last fall when we were at the Calgary Pride Parade and there were probably 70,000 people, and for the GSAs of Calgary we're the marshals – it was very emotional. Part of what I realized when people were often tearing up as they came through, and it caused me to do the same, is that there was a generation of these adults that saw kids in their own shoes 20 years before and didn't have those protections, and here they were, this new generation with this new-found empowerment and support from society. Perhaps if you could just elaborate more on that aspect of mental health and inclusion of all of us as Albertans, I would be grateful.

Thanks.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Okay. Well, thank you for the question. We've all gone to school. I think we all understand the difference between feeling like you're part of something and you're included and when you're not. I actually had never heard of a GSA or a QSA until I started doing this job. I certainly was aware that support clubs were available, but I never really understood the value until I spoke with students that were a part of that group and I spoke with allies. What I heard from them was really quite simple, and it was kind of beautiful in the simplicity of it, that it was just a place that was free from labels. It was just private. You just knew that you could say what you needed to say. You could be with your friends. You could be with people that maybe you identified with, maybe people you didn't know yet. It was a place to feel safe and to know that your privacy would be respected. That was key, that your privacy would be respected.

Then you hear about the activities, and they were really no different from any other club, whether it was a bake sale that people

were having or a pizza party or a movie night or that somebody was talking about, you know, how awful their older siblings or their parents were. It was just a safe place to be. I suppose I always go to: why is it that people have such a problem with this club as opposed to – I don't know; the member earlier said the chess club – any other kind of club?

It boils right down to the premise of equality. Do you believe that students who are part of this community and their allies deserve the same rights and protection and access as every other student? I think they do, and I think that we need to listen to these students. It's not taking away from their education at all. In fact, I think the members before me have clearly explained that all of the protection is in place already, so if there is a danger to a student, that is taken care of. This is about ensuring that students get the GSA or QSA as quickly as possible when they request it, that their privacy is of utmost concern, and that they feel safe and secure in the knowledge that nobody is going to call their parents.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any more speakers to the reasoned amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate you recognizing me this evening to speak to Bill 8. As some of our speakers have already talked about this evening – you know, the Member for Edmonton-Glenora and the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud spoke very eloquently this evening about some of the history around how we got to where we are with regard to the legislation and some of the stories that we've heard. As you can imagine, I'm standing in full support of this amendment that we have before us to hit the pause button. Quite honestly, I think we need to do more than just hit the pause button. We need to drop anchor, we need to hit engines full reverse, and I think we need to tie a rope to the piano and throw that overboard, too, to stop this.

I know that Edmonton-Decore is home to 26 very fabulous schools. All three of the high schools in north Edmonton call Edmonton-Decore home, and in those schools I have some pretty fantastic students that attend as well as some GSAs that are absolutely amazing. One of the things that I learned when I very first had the opportunity to visit a GSA – you know, I'd heard some stories out there. I'd heard some positions out there. I'd heard some innuendo out there about what's going in these GSAs, what's happening in these GSAs, and how our students are somehow being – I don't know – corrupted, misled, uninformed. So what better way to find out than to go there and visit one and see what happens with your very own eyes?

I have to say, Madam Speaker, that what I saw was not what I was hearing. Some of the conversations that I had that day surprised me. We talked about things like: what are appropriate toppings on pizza? I tried to throw out there, of course, that maybe anchovies aren't one of the best, but a couple of the students there disagreed with me; they thought that was a great idea. We talked about, you know, what students are listening to in terms of music. They mentioned a couple of bands that I hadn't heard of, so clearly I need to do some homework around there. We even got into talking politics a little bit, actually quite a robust conversation around students being legislated so that they would get their birthday off school. There was quite a robust conversation around there.

9:10

The bottom line is that I'm starting to see a trend now with this government. I'm seeing a trend that is targeting young people, our young emerging leaders, the ones that will be taking over from us. I don't know if it's a mentality that's out there that we have to put our thumb down on them. I'm not too sure what it is. I've heard

members opposite go at this almost ad nauseam, about how: “We won the election. We got a mandate from Albertans. This is what we were elected to do.” I don’t remember this being in your platform, to take out GSAs. The funny thing that I’ve noticed about this: the ones that can’t vote in this election seem to be the ones with the crosshairs on them. We’re taking away their pay. We’re taking away their GSAs. I’m starting to wonder what’s next.

My concerns with this – and I’m not even going to begin to try to go into some of the details that I saw the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud go into, but I’m very laser-focused right now on what’s going on around this attempt to destroy GSAs. That may sound like some harsh language to some of the folks across the way, but that’s what the students think it is right now, Madam Speaker. They are out to destroy GSAs, the one place where they just want to feel like they belong. The Member for St. Albert was talking a little bit about that, a safe place to go where they can just, you know, be a youngster, be just part of the team, part of the group. Nobody is judging. Nobody is putting labels on. Nobody is, you know, coming up with some names to call them.

Because of the number of schools I have and because of the number of times I get to interact with these kids, I take what they say very, very seriously, and I really think that the government needs to start doing the same because our young emerging leaders happen to have some really great ideas, Madam Speaker. I think that the members of the government – you know how we say we’ve got two ears, two eyes, but only one mouth. They need to listen and watch them and take what our young emerging leaders are saying very, very seriously.

The number of concerns that I have had – my gosh, I mean, I’m in the grocery store and I run into one of my students: “Hey, Mr. Nielsen, can I talk to you for a second?” “Sure. I can probably direct you to the chip aisle.” “No, no, no. It’s this thing around Bill 8 and GSAs. I’ve got a friend that I really care about that belongs to a GSA. Why does the government want to take it away?” This is what’s going on out there, and you guys need to hear this.

I’ve had teachers express significant concerns around the positions that they might be placed in because the only thing that they are focused on is those kids. How do we teach those kids so that they grow up with what they need to go out into the world, lead on the world stage, have successful lives, and just have some fun? No. We’re going to take a safe space away from them because of – I don’t know – some ideology out there. I seem to remember, at great length in the 29th Legislature, Madam Speaker, being told about my ideology: it’s your ideology this, and it’s because of your ideology that.

An Hon. Member: It is.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, I hate to tell you this, Member, but if you’ve got to keep explaining to me about my ideology, maybe you have one of your own, and our kids notice it. Our kids notice it.

When I have rules requiring that the detailed policies to support GSAs are weakened within public schools and not even in existence in private schools and there are claims that we’re here to represent all Albertans: sounds like only a very small few, Madam Speaker.

No policy is allowed to use the word “gay.” That’s what this is about, gay-straight alliances, queer-straight alliances. Listen to the kids. I’ve learned some pretty incredible things from them.

Timelines. That’s all great. I remember the Minister of Education standing up here saying: “It says right here. Kids are allowed to ask for a GSA.” Great. They can ask. Then what? I don’t know. Maybe we’ll start giving them the answer: yeah; well, we’ll get back to you on that in due course.

We need to take a very long second sober thought on this, Madam Speaker. We need to hit the pause button. We need to go out. We need to talk to our young emerging leaders that are affected by this. You know what? It’s not even GSAs that I’ve heard from that say: whoa, whoa, whoa, slow down here. It’s other organizations that have come to me and said: “Can you come visit us? We’ve got some people that would really like to talk to you about protecting these clubs, these organizations that provide just a nice, caring, safe atmosphere so you can come in and – well, let’s talk about what’s appropriate to put on pizza.”

So I stand here imploring with the members opposite. I don’t know. I’m probably even willing to get down and beg because what I am hearing is scaring these kids. They’re worried they’re going to get outed before they’ve gotten to the point where they’re comfortable to do that.

I remember having a discussion with somebody around this, and they said, “Well, this infringes on my right to know what’s going on with my child.” I said, “Well, wouldn’t you agree that if you have the relationship with your child that’s open and caring and honest, they’re probably going to tell you?” Then I couldn’t help but ask. I said, “You know, if you think back to when you were a kid, did you tell your parents absolutely every single detail of what was going on in your life?” The person paused for a moment, two, three, five moments. I said: “I didn’t think so. Don’t worry. Neither did I. I just thought there were a couple of little details here and there that I didn’t need to share with them. They didn’t need to know.” Believe me, Madam Speaker, they weren’t actually that big a deal.

9:20

But for these kids it is a big deal. It is a huge deal. We’ve all agreed in this House, on many different things, that if that happens to one child, that’s one too many. Explain to me, then. I saw a tweet one time where supposedly a father tweeted out: I would rather have a dead son than a gay son. Is that one too many? Do we need 10 of those? Do we need 100, 1,000? I don’t know. At what point do we say: maybe we made a mistake; maybe we shouldn’t have done that.

I’m very adamant to stand here. I will not support this bill as presented, but we have a chance to change it. We have a chance to put on the brakes. We have a chance to go back. We have a chance to change it, put in the protections that we had in Bill 24. I very clearly heard that everybody was happy with those changes. It was, like: “Yeah. That’s exactly what we’re looking for. This will provide us with the atmospheres that we need to feel safe, to feel a part of, and be able to flourish.” But for some reason here, we seem to think: the bicycle is broken; we need to fix it. Again maybe I’ll pose a bit of a challenge here, Madam Speaker – it’s like with another amendment we proposed – to go back and to rethink this. Go back, rethink it, prove me wrong. I will be more than happy to eat humble pie. I’ll do it right here in the House.

The Deputy Speaker: 29(2)(a) is available. Any comments or question? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker and to the member for his comments. I appreciate him talking with passion. Clearly, he has shared many a passionate speech in this place as well as through other channels. Your focus is appreciated, hon. member. I was hoping that the member could talk a little bit about some of his experiences, perhaps, as a dad and how his kids helped him get to a place of understanding over the years. Sometimes I think we do our best learning when we are in a position where we think that we’re there to instill wisdom but sometimes it comes back to us instead. I thought maybe he could talk about parallels he’d

experienced through his own parenting or that he's heard other youth talk about in how they've helped their parents come to greater understanding with regard to who they are.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate that question. You know, it's always funny. As a parent, no matter how hard you look, there never seems to be an instruction manual that comes with your children for how you can best interact with them. I can easily look back and say: maybe I haven't made all of the best decisions around that. Certainly, as my daughter has gotten older, we've had conversations about things that, quite honestly, I was surprised that she shared with me, surprised in a very good way because I finally managed to build that relationship, that trust so that she felt it was okay to share with me that piece of information. I never at one time felt: "Well, jeez. My rights are being taken away. Why isn't my child talking to me about these things?" Because I didn't create the relationship for her to feel like there was an avenue there, I'm hoping that as we move forward and she gets older, into her adult years here now, there will be more that she'll share with me.

One of the other experiences. I have a friend from high school, and I follow him quite regularly on Facebook. He lives out in B.C. He's become a rather successful actor. One of his children approached him one day and said, you know, essentially: Dad, I feel like I should be a girl. To watch her journey – because he was incredibly supportive. I mean, she travels now; she speaks about her experiences. My gosh, the pride that I see that he shows for her journey is so, so inspiring. My gosh, I hope that one day I'll just get a chance to meet her and shake her hand. Hopefully, some of that energy that makes her who she is will – I don't know – maybe rub off, and I'll be a better person for it.

I've also seen experiences that didn't go so well. Those relationships deteriorated very, very quickly. That's when we start seeing our youth become homeless. We've seen some very, very staggering statistics around our homeless youth and the percentage of them that identify with the LGBTQ2S-plus community. You just can't ignore those figures – you can't – unless, of course, you're blindfolding yourself, turning your back, which, of course, is a whole other problem.

We need to pass this amendment. We need to pause. We need to take a sober second thought, Madam Speaker. We need to talk to the ones this most affects, our young emerging leaders. They are the future. We have a responsibility to set them up for success. I can tell you right now that Bill 8 the way it is set up right now will not set them up for success. It will set them up for failure, and I for one will not stand here and allow that to happen.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to be able to rise to speak to the amendment to refer the so-named Bill Hate to more consultation, something that I strongly, strongly support because it is my view that insufficient consultation has taken place. Throughout the debate in the 30th Legislature, of which we are a part, on multiple bills many, many members of the government caucus have stood to talk in this House about the mandate that they achieved in the recently held election.

When it comes to the debate on this topic, I would really like the members to question whether or not there has been adequate consultation, because in the previous election the slogan of the

governing party – Jobs, Economy, Pipelines – resoundingly resonated with Albertans. But how does rolling back protections for GSAs add jobs? How does rolling back protections for youth in GSAs help the economy? How does rolling back protections for youth in GSAs build pipelines? The government, who loves to talk about the mandate that the election gave them, was elected to focus on these issues. Rolling back protections for youth in GSAs was not the agenda you told Albertans you would work on. In fact, your party, the governing party, the then leader of the UCP, now our Premier, specifically avoided talking about policies like rolling back protections for youth in GSAs. This is not the agenda you told Albertans you would focus on.

I would suggest that if you had, if you had included this in your door-knocking script, particularly many of the members here from Calgary, you may not be sitting here, because I can tell you that Albertans do not support a socially conservative agenda. Albertans do not want to revisit these issues yet again. You will see that on the signs at rallies. They do not support rolling back the protections for youth in GSAs.

9:30

Now I do not say this out of opinion, Madam Speaker. We know that Albertans do not support socially conservative ideas, and we know that because during the election almost 74,000 people shared their thoughts using the CBC's Vote Compass online questionnaire. This is just one survey. But when most Albertans are asked, "Should parents be notified when their children join a gay-straight alliance group at school?" the overwhelming majority say that they disagree with that statement, 63 per cent of Albertans. In fact, 54 per cent of the voters in Calgary think parents should not be told about their child's participation in a GSA. To be clear, Bill Hate will allow parental notification when a child joins a GSA, as many of my colleagues have mentioned in this debate over and over because it is important and because it matters, particularly to these young people.

We know that Albertans do not support a policy that will allow young members of a GSA to be outed to their parents. We know, based on the polling, based on the conversations at the doorstep that we had – although members opposite may not have wanted to raise these social issues at the doors – that when students want to form a GSA, having that happen in a timely way is meaningful, that enforcement and administration of these powers are critically important, and that Bill Hate removes that "immediately" clause, that language that says that it shouldn't be a fight, that it shouldn't take somebody who is already likely in a vulnerable position having to argue to get a GSA started in their school, that it shouldn't be a fight to use the word "gay" when they get a GSA started in their school. As often as the members of the governing party like to refer to their mandate, like to refer to the results of the election, Albertans did not elect you to out gay students, and I will continue to repeat that as we discuss why this deserves more consultation.

Now, Madam Speaker, I have had the opportunity to speak to Bill Hate once before, and during that earlier address there were a couple of things that I was able to raise that I think really speak to the need for more consultation. I'd like to just touch on them very briefly without repeating myself. I talked about, from the LGBTQ2S Youth Housing and Shelter Guidelines, some of the shocking, horrifying statistics that members of the LGBTQ2S communities face.

- Nearly one in three homeless youth in Canada identify as LGBTQ2S.
- [These] youth identify the primary reason for homelessness as family rejection due to gender identity or sexual orientation.

So 1 in 3 homeless youth are homeless because of family rejection due to gender identity or sexual orientation, which means that

outing kids to their families before they are ready poses a very, very real risk to a good number of those students.

- LGBTQ2S homeless youth face higher rates of discrimination, violence and abuse . . .
- [They] are at a higher risk of mental health concerns and self-harm and exhibit higher rates of suicidality than the general [populace].

And all of this paints what is, obviously, a very difficult picture for students going through high school or junior high.

Upon hearing that, I know it because I have had conversations with members of our society who think this way, that the higher rates of homelessness and the higher rates of mental health issues are connected to the fact that these youth are gay or are part of the LGBTQ2S society. But, fortunately, we just had a new study released, and I've already had the opportunity to table this, Madam Speaker. I realize most members will have already read it because we all read all of the tablings, but just in case somebody missed it, I really wanted to emphasize this important document, that I had the chance to table last week, titled *1 in 5 Queer Young Adults Attempted Suicide in the Past Year, Study Shows*.

Mental health should be taken seriously no matter what, but a new study shows it's . . . especially pressing . . . in the queer community.

A suicide prevention and crisis intervention organization for LGBTQ youth released a report

on the mental health of queer young adults. The results are pretty horrifying: Nearly 1 in 5 LGBTQ people ages 13 to 24, and 1 in 3 transgender and nonbinary young people in the same age group, attempted suicide in the past 12 months. Approximately 39% of LGBTQ youth surveyed had seriously considered suicide in the past year.

When we are talking about youth who belong to the LGBTQ2S community, I would love for the members in this House to hold in their heads the image of a young person that you may know, if you know any members of the LGBTQ2S community in your life, and then think that there might be a 40 per cent chance that that person, whom you know and love, may have contemplated suicide. That's the reality of what is happening.

Now, the really critical piece to this report, Madam Speaker, is that these mental health issues are not widespread because of identity or orientation. They are there because of discrimination. They are there because of the barriers that members of the LGBTQ2S community face when people they know and love try to change their sexual orientation or gender identity or when they are stigmatized or when they are misunderstood or feel alone. Each of these factors is critically important, and the creators of this study hoped that the results would be "a wake-up call for mental health professionals and loved ones of queer individuals." I hope that it might be a wake-up call for the legislators who sit in this Chamber and talk about lessening the protections for young people wanting to start and join a GSA: "We'll still have nearly the best or kind of the best or, you know, among the top. Wouldn't that be good enough?" Let's remember who we're talking about. We are talking about vulnerable youth who already face barriers.

I'd like to speak a little bit more about the impact of those barriers on the lives of these young people. We know that LGBTQ2S students routinely experience harassment in their schools but that GSAs and other support clubs provide social supports. We know that students can hear homophobic remarks from students and, unfortunately, instructors at times. We know this from the history, from talking to members of the community. The more harassment students have reported, the more likely the student is to report higher levels of depression, lower self-esteem. But LGBTQ2S students attending a school with a GSA reported hearing fewer homophobic expressions, experienced less victimization than

LGBTQ2S students attending a high school without a GSA. They also had more positive outcomes when it came to high school belonging, school victimization, and whatnot.

Now, this was interesting to me. I spoke in my first remarks regarding Bill Hate about knowing that there was some good information and research out there about GSAs and wanting to bring that back into this discussion in lieu of proper consultation, which, with the acceptance of this amendment, we could do instead. But understanding that the government is not in favour of more consultation, I would really like to speak a little bit more about the different impacts when LGBTQ2S students are not properly supported through a GSA.

For example, there was a study that actually found that two-thirds of LGBTQ2S students reported feeling unsafe at school, so unsafe that they were missing school for safety concerns. It's not uncommon for a student who is struggling, who feels unsupported, to miss school, impacting their performance. That same study found that the GPA for LGBTQ2S students, children, was on average a half grade lower than for straight students. That could be an indicator that LGBTQ2S youth face different barriers to education than straight youth. LGBTQ youth in high school were less likely to report that they wanted to pursue further education than straight youth, and can you blame them? If they are in an unsupportive environment, if going through high school has been hell and they haven't been able to have the support networks that all of us need, going on to postsecondary and continuing to do more schooling is probably not at the top of their list.

9:40

But I think it's really important to remember that by having a supportive school, GSAs, the people there available to support a student, you can be impacting that student's future performance. Now, having an active GSA on a high school campus has been associated with better academic outcomes, so in this case, Madam Speaker, I'm identifying the problem but also the solution. LGBTQ2S students tend to have slightly lower grades, tend not to go on to postsecondary as often. But if they have a GSA, all of a sudden their outcomes improve, and all of a sudden they have a supportive school community. That is what we are talking about. That is what we are fighting about. Having to fight against school administration because the word "immediately" has been removed, having to fight with school administration because the administration is not required to allow the word "gay": these are the challenges that will prevent a GSA from being formed.

GSAs are also associated with better mental health outcomes for LGBTQ2S students. For a lot of those mental health challenges that I talked about earlier, in many ways the students can be supported with a GSA. Students with a GSA in their high school reported less depression, less general psychological distress, higher self-esteem than students without a GSA at their high school as well as less truancy. So those kids skipping school because they didn't feel safe: that starts to happen less and less, helping their academic performance.

LGBTQ2S students with a support club in their school also reported lower levels of victimization and suicide attempts in comparison to schools without a support group. This touches on another article I was already able to table last week, Madam Speaker, which was an opinion piece titled *UCP's Education Bill Plays Games with Students' Lives*. It says, "The truth is simple: GSAs reduce teen suicide – LGBTQ and straight alike."

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, any comments or questions under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm wondering. I've been really enjoying the comments from my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods about the importance that GSAs play in the lives of an identified vulnerable group in our schools, particularly the LGBTQ2S community of students. I wanted to know if she would mind sharing some of her insight as a member of the NDP government over the last four years, when the strongest protections for GSAs were introduced by this government to protect these students. I'm wondering if she can share some of the stories or information that she heard during her time with that government that led to the government of the time's decision to bring in Bill 24.

She's spoken very eloquently about the personal and direct impact that these GSAs have on these kids' lives, how important they are with respect to providing them safety and security and making them feel welcome in their community. My understanding is that those Bill 24 provisions were brought in because there was an identified need for them, that voices were heard from many students, from teachers, from administrators about how the previous provisions, under what was Bill 10, were inadequate. I'm wondering if perhaps the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods could share some of the information that she received in her time as a cabinet minister within the government when Bill 24 protections were brought in.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much. Well, Madam Speaker, when I think about Bill 24 and the changes that were implemented with Bill 24, they are essentially the direct opposite of what the government is doing now. Making sure that there was that enforcement and support, enabling legislation was an important first step. But then making sure that schools, school districts, principals, all members of the school community were adhering to and following that legislation and creating those safe and supportive communities was critically important.

Bill 24 was something that not only teachers were asking for to clear up confusion about outing LGBTQ2S students, but it was also something that the students themselves were asking for after running into difficulties forming GSAs. It is my opinion that by removing some of those protections, those enforcement provisions that were introduced through Bill 24, which is essentially what Bill Hate is all about, as the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has talked about now at length and other members of my caucus, all of the meat of that old Education Act, all of its intended purposes have been removed, and it is now just the dusky cloak that the removal of protections for youth in GSAs is now kind of hiding under so that it can get passed. It's an anti-GSA bill.

One thing I would like to just remark on is that the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud in her remarks was talking about how the old Education Act was really focused on high school completion rates and getting kids to stay in school, and I just think it's so interesting that the version they've brought forward has lost that focus entirely. Instead, we have a government that is reducing the minimum wage for youth, but if they drop out of school, they'll get \$2 an hour more. Really, if we're talking about a pendulum, we're swinging all the way over. We're not worried about high school completion anymore. In fact, we're encouraging kids through a financial incentive to drop out, to make more money because they might need to support their families. I can tell you, Madam Speaker, that it's not the well-supported youth that are going to do that. It's the vulnerable youth. It's the vulnerable youth that need that money to support themselves, possibly to support their own family. Making sure that we have more time to consult, to consider what these youth

and these students may be experiencing, and to talk to all members of school communities is really important.

In my research for my remarks today, Madam Speaker, one very interesting thing I found was that the mere presence of a GSA, whether or not students participated in it – you could just have attended a school that happened to have a GSA – is actually related to students' attitudes towards LGBTQ-plus people in their time in high school. We actually saw that university students who reported having a GSA in their high school were more likely to report positive attitudes towards LGBTQ2S individuals in general when attending university. I think that's important.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak to the amendment?

Seeing none, shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment to second reading of Bill 8 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:48 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Bilous	Eggen	Nielsen
Carson	Goehring	Pancholi
Dang	Gray	Renaud
Deol	Hoffman	Shepherd

Against the motion:

Allard	LaGrange	Sawhney
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Loewen	Schow
Copping	Long	Shandro
Getson	Nally	Toews
Glubish	Neudorf	Toor
Goodridge	Nicolaides	Turton
Gotfried	Nixon, Jason	van Dijken
Guthrie	Nixon, Jeremy	Yao
Issik	Pon	Yaseen
Jones	Reid	

Totals:	For – 12	Against – 29
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[Motion on amendment to second reading of Bill 8 lost]

The Speaker: We are now back on the main bill. Are there any other speakers? The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise tonight to speak to the main bill, which in our discussion of the bill our side of the House and indeed many Albertans have chosen to dub Bill Hate.

A quote, Madam Speaker: Albertans may not want “political agendas” in the classroom, but for the Premier education policy is all about ideology; his comments reflect an ambition to steer the province's K to 12 system toward a more socially conservative and market-oriented underpinning, even to encourage more Albertans to educate outside the traditional public system, and the fastest way for him to do that, critics say, is to undermine the public system itself. That is from an article about the Premier's vision for K to 12. That is what we are here talking about tonight: Bill 8, Bill Hate, the thinnest of fig leaves attempting to cover this Premier's attempt to make a socially conservative revision to schools in the province of Alberta.

Now, members of the government, Madam Speaker, have been very defensive on this point though not very verbally, at least not during debate on the bill. They've been relatively silent on that point. But in question period and at other times and certainly in talking to the media, they have tried to portray the Education Act as being about modernizing the education system here in the province of Alberta. I think several of my colleagues have quite capably disassembled that argument; they've taken it apart. It's quite clear, as the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud laid out, having herself been one of the main drafters of this very piece of legislation, that the bill we have in front of us today barely resembles and is but a pale shadow of what the Education Act actually was. It is thin, it is flimsy, and the majority of Albertans are not fooled.

You know, we talk about what the Education Act was originally intended to do. I can tell you, Madam Speaker, that the only time in my first four years in office that I ever had a constituent talk to me about the Education Act and express an interest in seeing it proclaimed was when I visited with folks at the Boyle Street Education Centre, which is a charter school here in my constituency that works with high-risk and marginalized youth. It's a fantastic institution. It's been running for, I think, over 20 years. It's changed the lives and given new opportunity to many, many young people.

They spoke to me, and they said that one thing that they liked about the Education Act was that it was extending the age to 21. They have many students who come to them after having gone through significant trauma or had real struggles in their life, and for them to be cut off, you know, at the age of 18 often meant that those students would not complete their high school education. But if they had the opportunity to extend that to 21, for many of these youth who went through difficult times and came back to school a little later in their teenage years, that would give them the opportunity to complete it. That's the only time I had any constituent in my many conversations with teachers, schools, administrators, students, all kinds of stakeholders, ask for that bill to be resurrected. Even that, Madam Speaker, is being stripped out because this government felt that it would be too hasty to move forward on that now. Indeed, if they're looking to cut costs, they recognize that making that kind of a change would definitely increase costs in the system, so they're choosing to not act on that.

As we've discussed, the most important changes, the actual transformative pieces of the Education Act, have all been stripped out. In the meantime, as the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud noted, this government has been quick to adopt many of the changes we had already made to the School Act and implement them here. We thank them for the compliment.

10:10

However, on this one point, on the issue of students participating in a peer support group called a gay-straight or queer-straight alliance, this government is doubling down on ideology. It is clear, Madam Speaker, that the only reason we have this piece of legislation in front of us in this House today, the only reason that it was mentioned in the UCP platform – indeed in the UCP platform there was no detail provided. All that was said was: we will proclaim the Education Act. That was a big document. It was thick. It laid out all kinds of promises, but this government did not see fit to actually discuss any of the detail of why it wanted to proclaim the Education Act or how it would actually do it or what it actually intended to do with it. Indeed we did not hear a peep from a single member of this government as they canvassed at the doors, or at least none that were really out in the public. Perhaps they did have this conversation with some, but I think, as my colleague the MLA for Edmonton-Mill Woods noted, they were probably not at the

doors talking to people about the changes they wanted to make to GSAs in the province of Alberta.

I can tell you though, Madam Speaker, that when I was out knocking on the doors and talking to people and when I was out attending events and indeed when I was at forums in my community here, I did hear from a number of constituents who were very concerned, based on the record of comments that were previously made by this Premier in the press and in many other places, sometimes in private at some of the conferences he attended and to other members of this Legislature. As I discussed when I had the chance to speak to this bill last week, intentionally spreading misinformation about what a gay-straight alliance is, what a queer-straight alliance is, what it is meant to accomplish, claiming that these were ideological sex clubs, that these were groups that were intending to smuggle in teaching on sexual education that wouldn't be allowed otherwise, that these were groups that were intended for a political purpose – I can think of no other reason that this government would be bringing forward these changes, bringing forward this bill unless at some level they fundamentally believe that to be the case.

That's unfortunate, Madam Speaker. That's regrettable because this is a government that likes to be very proud of many things about our province and indeed insists that we must as a province have the best of everything. We must have the lowest corporate tax.

Ms Hoffman: By far.

Mr. Shepherd: By far indeed.

We must give employers the chance to pay a lower wage so that they can have that opportunity to grow their business, or so they claim. But when it comes to GSAs, when it comes to protecting vulnerable LGBTQ students, this government is content with good enough.

The only reason, Madam Speaker, to step back and to roll things back from the protections that we brought in for students, ensuring that when they ask to form a GSA, it must be provided immediately and cannot be indefinitely delayed by administration – they are removing that and leaving that ambiguous. Stating that a school must allow students, if they so wish, to use the words “gay” or “queer” in naming their club: they are removing that. Having the clarity laid out in a very simple statement that the only person who has the right to decide when a youth comes out is that youth themselves: they are removing that. The only reason to remove those simple protections, those simple provisions is because they do not believe that GSAs are what they are. They do not believe that they are simply clubs for youth to support each other.

They are believing in the conspiracy theories, the false information, some of the most foul suggestions about LGBTQ youth and not only about those youth, Madam Speaker. They are truly, to some extent, believing that there are adults that are coming in and interfering and looking to corrupt their youth. They believe that there is a gay agenda. That is the only reason to go in and make these changes, and no member of this government has stood up and given any other defence. The best they can do is an ambiguous comment about balance, but they will not define what that balance is or who they are trying to balance this for. They dare not speak it because they know that if they put that on the record, Albertans are not going to support them.

You know, it strikes me as strange, Madam Speaker, how this government decides what balance means. We have heard from the Minister of Advanced Education about his intentions for our postsecondary institutions here in the province of Alberta. He intends to bring in policies to have those institutions be forced to introduce policies that will guarantee free speech on their campus.

When it comes to postsecondary institutions, the rule of this government is that the rights of students to express themselves hold higher place than the values or standards of a particular institution. That's a clear statement. That's the policy they're going to bring forward.

But when it comes to GSAs, all of a sudden they stand their ethics on its head, they flip it upside down, and they insist that the purported values of an institution must be allowed to override the rights of a student to express themselves. They are twisting themselves in knots to try to justify what we recognize is this Premier's payoff to a very particular, socially conservative segment of his base. That is the only reason this government is proclaiming this Education Act, this gutted Education Act, this shell of its former self, and it's disappointing, Madam Speaker. It's disappointing that this government feels it is so important that they must move on it immediately, but they don't have the guts to stand and admit what it is that they are doing.

I had the chance to attend several events last week, Madam Speaker, for Pride Week. Let me tell you that we have an incredible community here in Edmonton, the LGBTQ2S-plus community, their allies. It was wonderful to see people of all ages out celebrating at these events. I can tell you again that at every event I went to, when I spoke to individuals, they said: "Thank you for holding this government to account. Thank you for speaking up against Bill Hate." They see and they recognize what this government is doing, and I think that you will see many of them here on Wednesday night.

As my colleagues have noted, Madam Speaker, this government did not have the courage to actually run on this significant change. I hope that suggests that maybe there is at least some sense of shame, though on the part of this Premier on this particular issue, I don't think there is. I think that's been demonstrated quite adequately over and over again.

Frankly, I don't envy members of the government who are sitting here now through this debate and having to put themselves in the position where, I think, many recognize what it is that they're doing here. They are making the choice, out of political expediency, to sit and remain silent, to not speak up on social media, to not speak in this House, to not go to their constituents and speak to them clearly about what it is that they are wishing to do. They will stand and they will vote for this bill to get that corporate tax cut, to maintain that solidarity with the caucus that they were elected with.

10:20

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is in effect. Are there any comments or questions? The hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was so riveted to hear the comments from the Member for Edmonton-City Centre. I know that his experience and the diversity in his area bring a lot to this debate. Perhaps he would like to enlighten us a bit more on some of what the government should be ashamed of, and if they aren't, perhaps we can hear more from the member about why they should be.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think I've been pretty clear on what my thoughts are on this bill and on members of the government that choose to support it.

What I will say is that I understand from whence this comes. I grew up in a very conservative, religious family. I myself held many of these views for many, many years. What shifted it for me,

Madam Speaker, is when the bottom fell out of my own life and when I had a severe struggle with my mental health. I found out that just like members of the LGBTQ community, who at that time in my life I would have said were rightfully shut out from that community that I had grown up in and been part of, all of a sudden there was no place for me there. I didn't fit the ideology. I didn't fit that picture of faith and that world view, so I found myself on the outside. That was the beginning of a transformation for me. It took many more years for me to make that journey, but that's where it began.

I'll tell you, Madam Speaker, that that is what this bill is trying to codify again. It is trying to say to these students: "Well, okay. We recognize that we can't just shut you down all the way anymore, but we're going to put in a few things just to make sure you know your place. We're going to put in a few things just to make sure we can keep you enough in line that we don't have to challenge our world view or our personal values and we don't have to reconcile the fact that you are real and living human beings and that this is, in fact, who you are with the fact that my beliefs tell me otherwise." That's, I guess, the preacher in me coming out again.

But I can tell you that if there's anything that I have carried forward from what I learned of faith, if there was anything that I learned from the gospels and watching the life of Jesus and the way he treated people, it's that he did not make outsiders. He bent the rules, he broke the rules, he broke the social mores to recognize people as real human beings. The people he questioned were the religious authorities. Those were the people he challenged, and those were the systems he worked to tear down. That is not the spirit of this bill, Madam Speaker. That is not the spirit of those who pressed this Premier to make these changes, who fought and currently have their case in our courts, trying to defeat this support for students in our schools.

That's why it's incredibly important for me to stand and make my voice heard in this Legislature. I cannot stop this government from moving this bill, but I will speak my piece on behalf of my constituents, and I will work to make sure as many Albertans as possible know what this government is choosing to do, the impact that it is going to have on countless LGBTQ youth across this province and what that says about the character of this Premier and what that says about the priorities of this government. This bill is a betrayal of Albertans, Madam Speaker. It is a shameful thing.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, are there any other speakers to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is always a pleasure to rise in this Assembly and to debate at any hour. However, I wish that today we didn't have to stand here and debate Bill Hate, an act to destroy gay-straight alliances. I wish that we didn't have to stand here and explain to the government why what they are doing is going to hurt so many vulnerable students. I wish that we didn't have to stand here and explain why this is the wrong thing to do, because that should be self-evident. It should be clear when students are walking out of their classrooms to tell the government that they do not want this. It should be clear that when we look back to when Bill 10 was originally introduced, the revisions that are being rolled back today – the students are lined up in these hallways and in these galleries. It should be clear that what is being proposed in Bill Hate absolutely hurts the protections for vulnerable youth.

These are things that this Assembly should be ashamed of. We should be ashamed that we even have to stand here and defend these rights, because LGBTQ2S-plus rights are human rights. It is not something that we should have to debate in this Assembly. It is not something that we should be playing with because it is the will of

the Premier or the Minister of Education. These are rights that we should be looking out to protect for every single Albertan and every single one of our constituents. We know very clearly that the Premier is planning to roll back protections for students, and we know very clearly that this puts us behind the pack in Canada for protections for LGBTQ2S-plus youth. That is something that is going to be threatening for lives and for students, Madam Speaker. These are students who need these protections.

When we say things like “gay-straight alliances” and “queer-straight alliances,” those words matter. I know it took weeks before the Education minister had the courage to say those words. But I’ll let you know that students and the vulnerable young Albertans that we are fighting for, the opposition here on this side of the House, understand that those words matter. They understand how important it is that we recognize their identity and that we fight for their identity, Madam Speaker. If government members don’t understand how important that is, then I hope that in this debate they would open their eyes and perhaps open their ears, and they could learn, because this is something that, absolutely, Albertans can learn and, absolutely, we have the opportunity to teach.

I would hope that we’d be able to have a discussion on why these are important protections for young people. When we look at the priorities of this government – Jobs, Economy, Pipelines: I heard it time and time again in the campaign – the priorities of what this government set out to do, nowhere did I see: target young people; attack vulnerable youth. Those were not the priorities that I heard, Madam Speaker, and those were not the priorities that I was sent here to uphold.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, welcome back.

It is something that I absolutely will have to stand against because these vulnerable Albertans need a voice in this Assembly. They need a voice because this government does not understand or does not care about the harm that they are going to do to families. They do not understand or they do not care about the impact that taking out protections like mandatory acceptance of the word “gay” in these GSAs will have.

We can have many opportunities to bring forward witnesses, we can have many opportunities to bring forward experts in this area who can speak to how important it is, or we can listen to the people who have spoken before us on why this bill was changed so many times in the past and why there were so many protests just on the steps of this very Legislature not that long ago. Let me tell you, Mr. Speaker, that I know that students will be just as concerned today as they were years ago. That is something that our opposition will always stand with. We will always stand with the young Albertans who are being targeted by this government. They are being singled out and attacked, and I don’t understand why because members of the government and private members of the government caucus simply will not explain why they think it is okay to roll back these protections, that were some of the strongest protections in the country, and go back to protections that were fought against, basically, by every single student in this province, something that really does not go far enough and something that absolutely will endanger the lives of Alberta’s most vulnerable youth. These are the youth that absolutely need someone to recognize their identity, absolutely need somebody to help protect their identity and make sure that they are accepted in a loving manner.

10:30

I understand that the Minister of Education has said many times that she supports inclusion groups, Mr. Speaker, but that’s not good enough because when you use the words “inclusion group,” what

you are intentionally doing is excluding their identities. You are specifically trying to not say gay-straight alliance, you are specifically trying to not say queer-straight alliance, and you are specifically trying to move the message box away from gay kids. That’s what we are talking about in Bill Hate. That is what this bill does. It destroys gay-straight alliances, it attacks queer youth, and that is something that every single member of this Assembly should be concerned about. If they aren’t, this is their opportunity to learn about why they should be concerned because GSAs and QSAs are proven to help reduce the risk of things like teen suicide, to help improve teen mental health. This is just the tip of the iceberg. It is something that is essential for our school system to be able to protect these young people.

It is essential that we understand the damage this bill will do because this bill, I believe, actually goes against the mandate of the Education minister. It actually goes against the mandate of the Education minister because it puts students that are under her care at risk. It actually encourages students under her care to not have the safe spaces they need, and that is something the Education minister should be concerned about, that she was asked to put forward a bill that would actually harm the students under her care. That is something that all members of this Assembly should be concerned about.

If the Premier wants to push forward with that, that is the Premier’s prerogative, but I would hope that members of the government caucus and the government front bench here would understand what the ramifications of that will actually be, that they would understand how they would actually go in and hurt children where they are the most vulnerable, right in their classrooms.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I’m quite a bit younger than many members of this Assembly, and one of the things that I had in my high school was actually a GSA. I know that for a lot of members who perhaps went to school a few years before me, they maybe did not yet have GSAs, gay-straight alliances, established in their schools. One of the things I remember about GSAs was that I would go visit on occasion, and it was usually – I think they hosted it on a Thursday night. We’d walk into one of the film studies rooms, and they’d screen a movie, and for about 50 cents you’d get a little paper bag of popcorn. They had a popcorn machine in the corner. That was the extent of their activity that week. That was what a GSA was. A GSA was intended to create a safe space that every single student in the school could go to, have their little bag of popcorn, hang out, and speak to each other like real human beings.

It wasn’t something that you put your name on a list and decided whether you were going to be gay that day or not. It wasn’t something that you put your name on a list and decided which parents to send it home to. It wasn’t something that the teachers came to and recorded everyone who was there and said: okay; well, we’re going to be monitoring all these kids to see what they do in the next week or two or if they’re a mental health risk or anything like that, Mr. Speaker. No. A GSA is a social club for students to be able to have a safe, inclusive space so that people can broaden their horizons and understand what people from different backgrounds and different identities have in common with them.

I would encourage members of the government, who perhaps did not have the same opportunity to have those experiences as I did in school, to go out and actually talk to students in GSAs. If they actually went and talked to students in GSAs and QSAs, talked to actual gay kids and consulted with actual gay and queer students, they would understand what GSAs are and how GSAs work. What they would actually find out is that these groups are loving, caring spaces that create opportunity for students, that work and have strong supports.

These support systems are shown to reduce the risk of teen suicide, to reduce the risk of youth mental health issues. It's something as simple as that movie night every single Thursday, Mr. Speaker. It's that simple. But the government doesn't understand that, or they don't care. They either don't understand or they don't care that these simple clubs or gatherings of students are what saves lives, what actually makes a difference in saving the lives of students right here in our province, right here in our schools, right here in our neighbourhoods. That's something that I think all members of the government should take a deep look at and find out for themselves what that means.

These are our kids. These are the kids that go to school with your children. These may be your children themselves. Mr. Speaker, that is something that we should fight for every single day in this Assembly. We should fight for their protections because we understand that they are the ones that matter when we talk about education, when we talk about an education system. We are doing this to make sure that our students have the best possible place to learn and the safest and most loving environment, and GSAs and QSAs provide that. But when Bill Hate is introduced and when this bill goes in and destroys the protections for GSAs to call themselves that, for QSAs to call themselves that, that is all put at risk. The lives of these students are put at risk.

That is something that the government should be ashamed of, Mr. Speaker. It's something that they should be concerned about. Really, it's something that the Minister of Education should be deeply concerned about because those are her students. Her students are the ones that are going to suffer the most because in this province we used to have these protections, and now, very clearly, we will not. Now, very clearly, this Assembly and this government will vote to put those lives at risk.

That is something that the government should either be concerned about or, if they're not, they should be ashamed about. They should be aware of what they are doing, and if they are not, they should perhaps take the earphones out, and they should perhaps just start listening because these are the voices of students all across the province. These are the voices of young people who understand how important these spaces are for them, who understand the importance of being able to say that they attend a gay-straight alliance or that they are gay or bisexual or queer or two spirited, whatever the term is, Mr. Speaker, that they wish to self-identify as. That is so important.

We can see very clearly that the government did not run on this. They ran on jobs, the economy, and pipelines. Now what they've done instead is that they have shifted their tactics to attacking young people. On one hand, Mr. Speaker, they've said that they won't focus on social issues, and on the other, they've gone right in and then started to directly destroy the protections in place for vulnerable Albertans, and that is something that is very concerning. That is something that this entire Assembly should be extremely concerned about.

Now, I understand that this is very new for a lot of these members. Perhaps even when the protections were in place, in a lot of the schools that are in their areas GSAs never did exist or QSAs were not established. But, Mr. Speaker, ignorance is not an excuse. Just because there was no evidence of this in the past, just because there was no experience with this in the past does not mean that these students do not need protection today. It does not mean that these students do not need that protection. Just because in one school there is no GSA and things appear to be okay does not mean that we still do not need to protect those students if they so choose in the future, and that is what is being rolled back in this bill.

What is being rolled back in this bill is all of the protections that have been researched and understood to help save lives, and the

government needs to understand that. If they don't, then they need to listen. If they do and they don't care, then that is something that all Albertans should be extremely concerned about, Mr. Speaker, because these are the things that Albertans understand.

10:40

It's their families and the safety of their families that are under attack by this bill. It's that this bill goes into classrooms and goes into schools and attacks students. It attacks young vulnerable Albertans. It attacks all of the people who are fighting to protect their identities, and that's something that all members of this Assembly should be extremely concerned about.

I would urge everybody to take a deep listen and a deep look and vote against this bill. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I see that the hon. Government House Leader has risen.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you. I appreciate an opportunity to rise under 29(2)(a). I'd like to address a couple of things raised by the hon. member. The very first thing I'd like to raise is some of his comments towards my friend the hon. Education minister, who was my friend long before we came to this Chamber and, I assure you, will be my friend long after we leave this Chamber, who's done a great job. I want to assure the entire Chamber that this caucus, this cabinet, and the Premier, for that matter, have nothing but utmost faith in the Education minister, who is working extremely hard. In all the years that I've known her and as you have, Mr. Speaker, she has done nothing but work very hard for the education system, has dedicated much of her life to the children of this province, and I'm proud of her for that. It's disappointing to continue to see members of the opposition misrepresent the hon. member's integrity and dedication to that fact.

I'd like to also just draw the hon. member's attention to page 60 of the United Conservative Party's platform, the Strong and Free platform, in which we make the following promise: to "proclaim the Education Act (2012)" – it's been around since 2012 – "taking effect on September 1, 2019." It then goes on to say that "a UCP government will trust the hard work done by those who created the 2012 Education Act, and proclaim that legislation, already passed by the Legislature, unlike the NDP's curriculum review," which was done largely in secret and without widespread consultation.

That is the difference between these two parties, and the hon. Education minister is following the platform promises that were made to Albertans and that were voted on by record numbers as the NDP were completely and utterly rejected by the people of this province and went on their way to become the only one-term government in the history of this province.

It's also disappointing to continue to watch the opposition members rise in this House, misrepresent facts, Mr. Speaker, and continue to use LGBTQ children as props in a political push about a bill, a fairly thick bill – I have it right here – a 41-page bill that does not address GSAs. In fact, Bill 10 was supported by both the legacy parties that make up the United Conservative Party and by the NDP when they were in opposition. That bill remains in place, Bill 10.

Mr. Speaker, do you know what will happen when a student or group of students wishes to create a gay-straight alliance right now even after this new bill passes? Do you know what'll happen? Well, step 1, the student or students will ask a staff member at a school to start a GSA. Well, that seems okay. It's seems a lot different than what the opposition is presenting. Step 2, the principal will permit the GSA, the complete opposite again of what the opposition is presenting. Step 3, the principal designates a staff liaison to support

the GSA, very different than what the opposition is presenting. Step 4, the students select a group name. My friends, my friends inside this Chamber, the students select the name of the group. Step 5, if the principal cannot find a staff liaison, the principal informs both the board and the minister, and the minister appoints a responsible adult. Step 6, as a student-led group the students with support from their staff liaison plan the next steps such as meeting dates, times, and activities. The final step: a GSA is formed. A gay-straight alliance is formed.

Nothing changes in Bill 8. The rules and the legislation that passed this very Chamber with the support of almost every member of the Legislature at the time and the majority of members of all parties that were in the Legislature remain in place.

Ms Pancholi: Then why are you changing it?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Now, the question that is being heckled at me, Madam – or Mr. Speaker. I thought you had left for the evening. Great to see you back.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are all very aware that you would never refer to the absence or the presence of a member in the Chamber. I'm sure the Government House Leader is happy to withdraw and apologize to the Speaker.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Not at all. Well, Mr. Speaker, I would be happy to withdraw and apologize if I referred to your absence, but you were here in the Chamber.

The Speaker: That's what I thought.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Of course, that's what I referred to the entire time.

My point is: why we would bring forward the education bill that we brought forward is because this is what was promised Albertans. While the NDP cannot defend the fact to speak against . . .

The Speaker: Hon. members, is anyone else wishing to speak to . . .

Mr. Dang: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: A point of order has been called. The hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Dang: The hon. member to my right from Calgary-Klein here has just actually stated through a heckle, Mr. Speaker – I'm sure you can check the microphones if you'd like – “because you keep lying to them,” referring to myself and the hon. member right behind me. I believe that is actually an affront to this House, and it is clearly in the standing orders under 23(h), (i), and (j). Also, very clearly we know it is unparliamentary to refer to any individual member and say that they have lied to this House or to anybody else. I would ask him to withdraw and apologize.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, did you hear the comments because I certainly . . .

The Speaker: Whoa. Whoa. The hon. Government House Leader is rising to defend the point of order.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thought you had already recognized me.

I did not hear any such comments. I think it's pretty rich, though, for the hon. member to want to be talking about who's misrepresenting things inside this House. I won't use the unparliamentary term, but it's pretty clear what's been happening here this evening, and certainly I will not withdraw and apologize for that.

The Speaker: Hon. members, while I appreciate the withdrawal from the Government House Leader, I would say that it's a fairly long-standing parliamentary tradition that when the member is present and eligible or able to withdraw and apologize, the member would do that on their own behalf. Having said that . . .

Mr. Jason Nixon: I never said that he said it.

The Speaker: It's okay. Let's wait . . .

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker . . .

The Speaker: Hang on. How about you wait to find out what my decision is before you disagree with my decision under Standing Order 13(2).

Mr. Jason Nixon: I'm looking forward to it.

The Speaker: Me too.

I would ask that while the Speaker is on his feet, the Government House Leader – as much humour as he'd like to try to interject into this particular decision, perhaps he would keep his humour to himself while the Speaker is on his feet.

What I would say is that from time to time members will make comments from their seats that may or may not be heard by the Speaker. There have been other cases where I have heard members make comments that are certainly not parliamentary, and I have encouraged them to withdraw and apologize. Without the benefit of the Blues or the opportunity to hear what was said, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-South has quite rightly pointed out, if in fact the hon. Member for Calgary-Klein did make the accusation that someone was lying, it would be appropriate for him to stand, withdraw, and apologize for making that remark. I did not hear that remark, so it would be up to the hon. member to determine whether or not he chooses to do so.

Having said that, I would encourage all members of the Assembly, no matter the time of day, hour of night or early morning, that we would create an environment that promotes rigorous debate but without the use of unparliamentary language.

Debate Continued

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader is rising.

Mr. Jason Nixon: On the bill.

The Speaker: You'd like to add to debate on Bill 8?

10:50

Mr. Jason Nixon: Yes. Awesome. Thank you. I'd like to just finish a few of my comments on debate. You get to step 6 and there's a GSA that is formed. Now, you saw or you heard – I see them; you didn't see them – all of those steps. Where in all of those steps, Mr. Speaker, through you to all of the hon. members of the Chamber, does it call with this act to stop GSAs? For days we've listened to it in the Chamber from the NDP as they misrepresent those facts, clear facts, to this very Chamber and continue to use LGBTQ kids as a political prop rather than to debate this important piece of legislation. It's disappointing because they continue to basically

fearmonger with the LGBTQ community. They continue to tell the LGBTQ community that there will not be gay-straight alliances, that this legislation will stop that. They go so far as to tell the hon. members of this place that if they support this bill, that means that they don't support LGBTQ kids, but the problem is that the legislation actually does that.

Mr. Speaker, I know you were here in these buildings. At the time you were not an hon. member, I know, but you were here staffing one of the opposition caucuses. You were here for the historical debates that would go on to create Bill 10. The reality is that the majority of this Chamber established Bill 10 as law and this party, the United Conservative Party, who now has the privilege of being Her Majesty's government in this province, has always supported that since our conception. We've made that clear. We supported GSAs during the entire campaign, we will continue to support GSAs inside this Chamber, and the hon. the Education minister continues to support them with her education bill that is before this House by making sure that they will take place.

It's disappointing because it takes away from the real debate that should be happening about a bill that is 41 pages long. We've heard no comments from the opposition except for about a topic which, Mr. Speaker, I would submit to you and to all the Chamber, is an important topic. GSAs and standing up for LGBTQ youth and any child, for that matter, who is being bullied inside our schools is something that's important to us in this Chamber and should be important to us in this Chamber. But the issue that they're raising is not part of this bill. Instead of talking on behalf of their constituents about the actual legislation before this House, they continue to fearmonger and tell the LGBTQ community that GSAs will not exist.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein, who we were just talking about earlier, Mr. Speaker, dedicated much of his life to working with LGBTQ youth, much of his life. I know him well. He would not stand and support anything that would say what the hon. members from the opposition continue to say.

Now, I understand the members opposite are having trouble understanding this, but again I want to be clear. The Education Act is clear. The legislation guarantees students are entitled to create groups including GSAs and QSAs, complete opposite of what the hon. members across the way continue to say day in and day out, complete disservice to the people of Alberta. They have a job to do, a very important job to do. I've had the privilege, as you have, Mr. Speaker, to serve in opposition. I respect the opposition's role inside our parliamentary democracy. I think it's an important role. I think they should speak on behalf of their constituents. I will always encourage them to do that. But they should focus on what are actual facts inside the legislation instead of misrepresenting facts for their political gain inside this place. They do a disservice to the debate by doing that. They do a disservice to this legislation. It is our responsibility to get out of this Chamber the best bill that we can, but the hon. opposition, Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, in this place won't even talk about the bill that's before the House. Instead, they continue to talk about misrepresented facts inside this Chamber.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to clarify some additional misconceptions that have been raised by members of the opposition as I think it's important for us as legislators to set the record straight as we debate this very important bill. Now, last week during question period the Leader of the Opposition highlighted a policy for Nova Scotia. What she failed to clearly outline is that Nova Scotia has no overarching provincial statutes protecting GSAs. Unlike the policies for Nova Scotia, the protection provided by the Education Amendment Act, 2019, Bill 8, right here, that we are debating, and Alberta's already robust privacy legislations will all be enshrined

in law, as this side of the House has been saying for days, the best statutory protection in all of the country.

Mr. Speaker, I would encourage the hon. members, if they truly believe that it is their job as the Official Opposition to make legislation better, to stand up for constituents, that they come here with facts, show us the ways that bills could change, come up with good, concrete ideas on behalf of Albertans, bring forward amendments that we could do to make this legislation stronger, but don't stand up in the House and misrepresent facts over and over and over. Don't stand up in the House and attempt to bully an Education minister, who, by the way, ain't going to blink. I've known her a long time. She ain't going to blink, and nor should she because we committed to the people of Alberta that we would bring Bill 8, the Education Amendment Act, 2019, to this Chamber. We brought it to this Chamber. We're going to pass it through this Chamber, I suspect. I know I'm looking forward to voting for it because it's a promise made and a promise kept. That's what we are focused on in this spring legislation.

The opposition should take a little bit of humility finally and maybe go back and look in the mirror and ask what has taken place for them to have to sit on that side of the House. I know, Mr. Speaker, I heard you speak about it much when you were in opposition, warning the then government that if they continued down the path that they have, ignoring Albertans, continued with fear and smear and attacking people, they would end up on that very side of the House. Shockingly, now that they're there, they still have not taken the time to sit down and reflect on what got them there. Instead, they have continued with the exact same tactics that put them inside those benches.

I see the Opposition House Leader shaking his head, but he knows deep down in his heart that I'm right. He knows. See, Mr. Speaker, he agrees. Sometimes when you get to a spot like that, that's when we could finally get some productive debate inside this Chamber.

I will close with this, Mr. Speaker, because I know that you're on the edge of your seat. The reality is this. The facts that are being presented by the opposition when it comes to Bill 8 are not factual. They are misrepresenting the facts. They are debating it from a position of attempting to score political points by using LGBTQ youth as a political prop, an important group of people that they should not be using as a political prop, and instead of making sure that we end up with the best Bill 8, the best Education Act that this province could ask for, they're spending their time trying to score cheap political points.

Mr. Speaker, I will assure, through you to all the LGBTQ youth of our province, that this government remains committed to protecting GSAs. We remain committed to Bill 10 – we've been clear on that – again, a bill that was supported by that opposition's legacy parties. Some of the members in that opposition party voted for Bill 10 at the time, voted for Bill 10. That will remain in place despite what the opposition continues to want to do, and when we're done here, whenever we finally can push the opposition to allow this to be voted on, we will go through with what Albertans have instructed us to do. We will pass Bill 8, the Education Amendment Act, 2019, and you know what? We're not going to stop there. We're going to keep moving through the legislation we promised Albertans despite the fact that the NDP want to play games.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for brief questions or comments. I see the hon. Opposition House Leader rising to ask a brief question or make a comment.

Mr. Bilous: Sure, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for this opportunity. I mean, I need to clarify some of the mistruths that were recently

just said about our government although first I want to start off by reminding all members of this House that regardless of what side of this House we sit on, for the UCP and for the Government House Leader, every single Albertan in his riding did not vote for him. There's no member in this House who collected or earned every single vote from every Albertan. So I find it a little rich considering the arrogance that we are seeing in this Chamber. I did not get every single vote in my riding. There were people who voted for the UCP, just as for every member in this House, including members who won under the UCP banner. They did not get every single vote in their riding. There are New Democrats around this province who didn't vote for them, just as there are members of the UCP around the province who didn't vote for us.

You know, I want to take a moment to remind members that we are here to serve all Albertans and that the government is – honestly, this current government is reminding me a lot of the government pre-2015 election as far as the level of arrogance: we were voted a majority; ergo, we can do whatever we want because Albertans gave us carte blanche to ram whatever legislation we want down their throats. Well, the reality is that they did not. The purpose of the opposition is to debate bills and legislation, and if the Government House Leader is tired of listening to the opposition, well, I'm sorry; you're going to have to listen for quite a while longer because I think we have a lot to say.

11:00

I heard our Member for Edmonton-Whitemud asking the Government House Leader to name some other amendments that this bill makes as far as changes to the other acts. I think what's fascinating is that when you listen to, for example, the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud – she worked on the last few iterations of different education bills. In fact, Mr. Speaker, I was teaching at Inner City High School when Inspiring Education came around. I remember Dave Hancock coming to the school to talk to students and teachers and support staff about their vision for changing the Education Act back then.

But I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that there was, you know, no consultation on what this government is bringing in. Yes, they won a majority, but I don't think Albertans sent them here with a mandate to attack gay-straight alliances and attack the LGBTQ community, quite frankly. I don't remember that in the slogan of the UCP. So it's just a little rich getting lectured from the Government House Leader on the role of opposition, on what we are doing and how somehow by presenting facts, tabling reports that that is somehow spreading mistruths.

The Government House Leader tried to talk about Nova Scotia and the fact that theirs isn't enshrined in legislation. They still have stronger protections for their youth. Whether the tool is through legislation or through a ministerial order or through regulations is not relevant, Mr. Speaker; it's what protections are in place for our students. And I can tell you that Alberta, until Bill Hate passes, has the strongest protections for LGBTQ2-plus students in the country.

If the government thinks that theirs is stronger, again, I would encourage them to look at what this bill does and doesn't do. It actually makes it more difficult for students to create a GSA, and in fact there's no guarantee it will even be called a GSA. There are many schools that will refuse that. What the Government House Leader failed to point out is that a principal can indefinitely delay a decision to students; therefore, they will just outwait a student wanting to create a GSA.

The protections that are currently in place are much stronger than what this bill is proposing, Mr. Speaker, so I look forward to having more conversations with the government.

Speaker's Ruling Parliamentary Language

The Speaker: Prior to proceeding to other potential speakers on Bill 8 if I may, and I almost interjected after the remarks from the Government House Leader but, frankly, thought we may be adjourning debate so didn't. But if I could just say – and I think the Opposition House Leader proved my point – that if we, the rest of the evening, could perhaps do our best to do everything possible to not say “mistruths,” “you're not telling the truth,” “you are playing fast and loose with the facts,” if we could do everything that we can to refrain from implying that one side of the House or the other is lying about a particular issue, perhaps that would help decorum this evening as we move later into the evening. I think the Speaker has taken a fairly broad swath on allowing both sides of the House to imply that both sides of the House are spreading mistruths, but perhaps we might move the debate in another direction.

Debate Continued

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows is rising on debate.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's actually my honour, and I'm so humbled and proud to be here. I will try to get the debate back to the original issue we were on. If I can move it from the election-style rhetoric.

Mr. Speaker, by saying this, I just wanted to say, first of all, that let's see how privileged we are, like, on both sides of the House. On behalf of our constituents and ridings, you know, on behalf of all Albertans we can sit together and we can discuss their issues. We can not only discuss their issues, but we can address their issues. One thing I'm sure that everybody on both sides of this House will agree on is that we have some collective responsibilities, basically, when it comes to protecting the fundamental rights of Albertans. The reason I just stand up to give my input on this bill, on what I see and feel, is that the matter this bill takes in hand is reflecting something totally opposite.

I remember that my colleagues from this side of the House raised concern last week, if I'm not forgetting, to test if we are really on the same page when we are defining inclusion. Under this Bill 8 what do we really see moving forward? I will call the government's type of inclusion the same as like what we have seen, you know, happening in the name of secularism in Bill 21 in Quebec. What do we do?

The series of acts we are seeing through the different bills – it's also reflected in this bill – is that we are seeing that we are identifying people based on their age, gender, beliefs, sexual orientation, not to help them but to attack their fundamental rights by compromising their security to the fundamental protections that they deserve. This bill, Bill 8, failed to guarantee the rights to form a GSA and QSA. What does this GSA and QSA do? As has been said many times, these are just social clubs that serve the purpose to save lives and to provide a secure environment to the most vulnerable. Is that what offends this government? Was this exactly their platform in the election?

If this bill is passed, it will not only be a failure to provide a guarantee of fundamental rights to live safely and be free from harm but also a violation of the right to education in a safe environment. Mr. Speaker, I am concerned about who this government is trying to serve through this bill. We didn't really see a consultation report or something backed by facts, so what is the motivation the government has behind this bill?

We have already seen the students, you know, walk out in support of GSAs and QSAs. That wasn't long ago, so we can't say that we can't really remember. It's not even been two weeks or three weeks since all those students in Alberta walked out in support of GSAs and QSAs and against the proposed bill of the government, Bill 8. Not only this, but the Alberta Teachers' Association has mostly complete support for Bill 24, saying that teachers were put in a horrible situation under provisions of previous legislation.

11:10

We have seen the government leader, you know, blaming the opposition, saying that the opposition in the House is trying to prop up, use the GSAs and QSAs for their political purpose. What this bill will do with the kinds of changes it's enforcing is that school staff will be allowed to out students participating in GSAs. It weakens it for the public schools, and private schools will no longer need to submit policies at all on this. Those policies no longer require the explicit use of the word "gay." These are the kinds of changes you are proposing in the bill.

The provisions requiring the timely establishment of GSAs after it's requested by students would be removed if this bill is passed. Enforcement mechanisms for school boards and private schools not complying with GSA legislation will also be removed. These are the kinds of changes that are going forward in this bill, what we are showing everybody. The students of Alberta are walking out in support of GSAs and QSAs.

Some of the other areas are, you know, the Government House Leader says that this bill is quite long. We know it's quite a long bill, but we're trying to emphasize one of the most important parts of this bill. Yes, we are also aware and we are also concerned with the other changes this bill is proposing.

The government is already saying very little to commit to providing funding to public education. Moving forward, it's also enhancing audit requirements for school boards, creating even a recall mechanism for publicly elected trustees. We are bringing these kinds of changes through Bill 8. On the contrary, the proposal is that it will remove the cap on charter schools. It changes the requirements for establishing a charter school and extends rules and fees to charter schools. Mr. Speaker, we can see the clear direction the government is going in on opening up competition. We are not against competition but on how we are opening up competition. Competition might weaken the public education system.

I remember speaking at an event during my election campaign. A person came to me saying that I should have put more emphasis on our government's campaign of freezing tuition fees and how we are making education affordable. Mr. Speaker, you know who this person was? He was a teacher in one of the private schools. I just wanted to remind that this is how the people in my riding, this is how the people in Alberta value affordable education. By passing this bill, this bill attacks the affordability of education as well.

Mr. Speaker, I oppose this bill because I understand that I do come from a very conservative family. It was mentioned earlier by my fellow colleagues how hard it is for vulnerable children, vulnerable people to come out and seek support when they need it the most and before it gets too late. We're living in the 21st century, and we expect to move forward, and we should move forward. In this case, it looks like we're moving a step backwards. We need to look around at how the world around us is progressing on these issues or the competent codes they're intervening in. It's our collective responsibility: we should create a safe environment, not spread the politics of fear.

Mr. Speaker, I oppose the bill, and I ask my fellow members on both sides of the House, for the sake of, you know, protection of the most vulnerable, to please oppose the bill.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for brief questions or comments. I see that the Member for Edmonton-Glenora has risen.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows for his thoughtful comments and feedback. I also want to take this opportunity to connect what he said to what a previous speaker was discussing. A previous speaker said: you know, this is what we ran on; this is what we said that we were going to do. Actually, what the government, today when they were campaigning, talked about was proclaiming the ed act, so this is very different than that.

Nonetheless, this is the situation we're in. They definitely didn't talk about: we're going to bring in a massive new bill, and we're going to do some of the things the NDP did but not other things the NDP did. I think that they did say that they thought that the protections we brought in were an overreach, that they thought that they were negative, and that's one of the reasons why we're spending so much time talking about why they aren't an overreach, why they're actually life saving and life fulfilling, and why it's so important that we do stand up for those who are vulnerable in our society, I think.

Many of us would say that – I know the Government House Leader said something about using children as props, and I would say that it's shameful to see government use children as punching bags. I really feel that that is – when I talked to the kids at the rallies in Calgary, they said: we are being attacked personally for what club we choose to become a part of. That, to me, is the shameful part, Mr. Speaker. That, to me, is a complete disrespect of what our sole obligation is.

I also heard the member say: well, in 2012 this Chamber passed a bill, and therefore we need to follow it by going back to the bill of 2012. Well, if you use that same logic – oh, it wasn't 2000 – in the early 1900s there were laws in place in this place, people in this place who passed bills saying that women shouldn't vote. Bills were passed 100 years ago saying that women shouldn't vote, so we shouldn't update the laws today and therefore have women voting.

Well, a bill that was passed in 2012 that kids said clearly was an infringement of their rights, that wasn't actually fulfilling the intended purpose of the day: I don't care how many legacy parties voted for it, hon. members, through you, Mr. Speaker. I don't care how many legacy parties voted for it. If it doesn't meet the needs of today, then that law needs to be updated, and that's what our Education minister did. That's why our Education minister worked swiftly to make sure that our kids, all of our kids, everyone's kids had the protections that they asked for in this province. You know, yes, a bunch of people voted on something a number of years ago and, yes, it passed then, but that doesn't mean that we should go back to what was in place in then. That is one of the first things I wanted to say.

There were other things that, certainly, the majority of people in this place passed that, certainly, the government has no intention to keep in place, and that is their right, but they should own that. If they're going to go back in time and if they're going to go to previous legislation that kids told us wasn't effective, that staff told us wasn't clear, and that we worked to improve – because that's absolutely what's happening here. I know that there are 40 pages to this bill, but the main purpose of this bill is to destroy GSAs, and that's why we're spending so much time talking about it.

There are many, many pages that take good things that our Education minister brought in like TQS and LQS, teacher quality standards and leadership quality standards, and put into legislation. That's good. We don't need to keep talking about that. We proposed

that, it passed, it got put into the School Act, it's getting moved over to the Education Act.

We need to talk about what this Education Act is undoing, and what the clear covert intention of it is, Mr. Speaker. That's why we're not going to stop talking. That's why, when these kids tell us to be their voice and to keep fighting for them and to make sure they have the right to be respected and loved and have some privacy when they're going through something that's so difficult, we won't stop fighting for them.

Mr. Speaker, I had to sort of make that part clear. Certainly, there are some people who think that we are doing this because of ulterior motives. I will tell you that my motive is simple: I want kids to live, I want kids to learn, and I want kids to feel love. That's it. That's my motive: live, learn, love.

11:20

Mr. Eggen: Busted.

Ms Hoffman: Busted.

That's my motive. That's my agenda. I know some people think there's another agenda, but that's my agenda. I want kids to have the opportunity to live their fullest lives and to feel love and to learn, Mr. Speaker. We have an opportunity in this place to discuss things that will help that, or we have the ability to hurt that. I feel very strongly that all members need to be aware that this is an act to destroy GSAs.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others wishing to speak to Bill 8? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise again today to speak to Bill 8 and to express my deep concerns with what is being proposed here. I've been privileged. One of the privileges of being in this House actually is to hear the debate around it. I've been very moved and affected by the comments from my colleagues, many colleagues. In particular, I was very affected by the comments by the Member for Edmonton-City Centre. He spoke very eloquently and passionately about his own journey, and I think it's something that we can all learn from. I am so honoured to hear the comments from my colleagues on this side of the aisle.

But what I continue to be troubled by is the lack of comments from the members on the other side setting out precisely why they're bringing forward this bill and why they're seeking to proclaim the Education Act. I've given a bit of a background and my history with this act. I admit, because of my work, because of my background as a lawyer, to knowing probably more detail about this act and the current act than probably most people care to know. My concern is that I believe that the members on the opposite side are counting on the fact that Albertans haven't read this bill, haven't read the Education Act, which is 300 sections long, don't know what's currently in the School Act. I think that to support that, the Government House Leader rose and spoke about and cited from the UCP platform, that they set out, that their intent was to proclaim the Education Act from 2012. That was coded very specifically in that language because they were counting on the fact that people don't know what's in the Education Act.

But the great thing is that I do. One of my concerns, particularly when we've seen the Minister of Education stand up and give what can only be called these talking points about why they're bringing forward the Education Act: they lack any detail or any specifics about the legislation. I think it's really important to know that there is a lot of detail and specifics in the Education Act, and we're not hearing about that content because we believe – and I think it is accurate – that there is only one, sole purpose behind bringing

forward the Education Act, and that is to roll back the provisions on GSAs. One of the things I'd like to talk about – and I think this may be educational and informative for the members on the opposite side as well – is what's actually in the Education Act, because I don't believe they know. We have not heard any of the comments. We've heard very little debate.

One of the challenges of being an opposition party is that we stand up here, and we actually have to know the legislation. We actually have to know what we're talking about because we have to carry the debate and we have to talk about it. We have to make sure that Albertans get the opportunity to hear about it. Unfortunately, the members on the other side have not shown the depth of knowledge and understanding. I have to say, unfortunately, that I don't believe the Minister of Education has demonstrated the depth of knowledge and understanding of the legislation that she's bringing forward.

As I mentioned in my earlier comments today, Mr. Speaker, there were a number of provisions that were supposed to be transformative, that were supposed to provide greater opportunity for students in this province to complete high school and the opportunity to recognize that students are mobile – they move from jurisdiction to jurisdiction – they have different needs, they have different challenges, and therefore sometimes the opportunity must be provided to them to complete high school in a flexible manner. That was why the Education Act brought forward provisions around age of access in compulsory education.

In fact, going back to *Hansard* discussions, Mr. Speaker, on the original Bill 18, the hon. Minister Dave Hancock, who, might I add, I think, was a great minister and cared very deeply about children in this province – I do think he was an excellent human being. He was also my predecessor as an MLA for Edmonton-Whitemud. I do believe he had the best intentions in mind when he brought forward a desire to overhaul the education system. I think he faced significant challenges, however, for financial reasons, for political will reasons. But one of the things that he was proud of – and I recall that very clearly – was the provisions around increasing the age of access in compulsory education.

Mr. Speaker, if I may, I'd like to quote from when Minister Hancock, on April 28, 2011, at page 966 of *Hansard*, spoke to the introduction of the Education Act. He talked about:

One significant change [under] the Education Act that will also affect students is the school leaving age being changed to age 17.

He said:

This change sends a clear message about the importance of education and the need to complete high school if one is to take full advantage of the opportunities Alberta has to offer, and it implements a portion of a private member's bill [that was] brought forward [earlier] . . .

He was very proud of that, yet this government has chosen not to implement that.

He was also very proud of the provisions around raising the age of access to age 21. This government has chosen not to implement that. He was very proud of the changes to change residency to be based on where students live, not where their parents live. Again, this government has chosen not to bring that forward. The original intent of this bill is not being reflected in what we see today as what's brought forward in Bill 8 under this current government.

The Minister of Education has stood up in this House, has done, you know, lots of statements in the media and commented about how this is going to modernize our education system. Mr. Speaker, I wish that were the case, but even putting aside the provisions on GSAs, it's simply not the case. It's simply not the case that the Education Act does really anything more than just tinker with the details of the School Act. I say that as somebody who did that

tinkering, who did that looking at those provisions, saying: well, how can we just . . .

Ms Hoffman: She's a tinkerer.

Ms Pancholi: I was a tinkerer.

. . . clean up those provisions? Unfortunately, there was not even a mandate back then. In the three times this bill came forward to this House, there was not the political will to do significant changes.

Mr. Speaker, one of my activities on the weekend – again, this is part of my lawyerly background – is that I actually went through all of the sections of the current Education Act, that's been proposed and amended today by the government. I went through. There are 300 sections in the Education Act. I can tell you that substantive changes are being made to 25 of them. That is less than 10 per cent of the act. That means 90 per cent of the Education Act reflects substantively exactly what's in the School Act. This is not a modernization. This is not transformational. This is simply about bringing forward, in an undercover kind of way, one change – one change – that this government wants to do.

But they were not forthcoming about that in their platform. What was put forward in their platform was proclaiming the Education Act. People might have presumed: "Oh, Education Act. That sounds new. That's probably got to be updated and modern." But it isn't, because the only thing that they want to do is to roll back the provisions on GSAs.

Again, going back to my legal training, one of the things, when we're drafting briefs or preparing factums or standing up in court to try to determine how to interpret and apply legislation, one of the key tools that any lawyer does – the first thing they do is that they look at the legislation, they look at previous forms of the legislation, they look at the debate in *Hansard*, and they say: "What was the intent? What was the intent behind the change?" And I can tell you that when we have a current School Act in place that provides really robust protections for GSAs, for LGBTQ students, and then they look at what was proposed and what is being put forward in the new legislation, they'll see that it is different. And how is it different? It is weaker. What the conclusion is that will be drawn, from lawyers, from everybody else who'll be looking at it, is that the intent of this government was to weaken protections for GSAs. Let's be honest.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I mean, the Government House Leader rose and went through the steps that are there for GSAs under the Education Act, yet what he failed to say is that what we currently have in the School Act is the same. It sets up a process, but it's better. It still provides the establishment of GSAs, it still provides that kids can be protected in a safe and secure environment, but it does it better. How does it do it better? The NDP government listened to the concerns that were brought forward from students, from administrators, and realized there was a problem, realized that there were schools, there were administrators who were using some of those provisions that this government is now trying to put back in place, they were using them to stall. They were using it to shame students. They were using it to scare students out of joining GSAs.

11:30

If this government is committed to GSAs, why would they have a problem with what's currently in the School Act? If they were truly committed to protecting the most vulnerable kids – I hesitate that we even stop to talk about this. My colleagues have done a fantastic job of laying out how statistically and factually accurate it is that LGBTQ students in this province, and actually in any province, are our most vulnerable kids, the most at risk kids – and

truly committed to having GSAs and protecting these kids, they should have no problem with carrying over the provisions in the School Act into the Education Act.

They had no problem carrying over the changes that the NDP government made around the separate school establishment process. They had no problems bringing over from the School Act the provisions around trustee code of conduct. They had no problem bringing over the provisions around establishing leadership certificates and superintendent certificates to make sure that all school administrators are held to a high standard of practice. They had no problem doing that. The only problem, the only section of the School Act that they seemed to have a problem with bringing over was the provisions around protections for GSAs and LGBTQ students.

This government might stand up, the Government House Leader might stand up and say, "Look, it's not factual that we're weakening it." But it is factual because if it wasn't, just keep it the way it is. I think it's really important to highlight once again that there are other changes provided in the Education Act. The reason why that doesn't get attention is because they're tinkering, because they're small. There are things that could easily be done to the School Act, and they would not have the impact of affecting the most vulnerable group of kids in our system.

I don't see any of the members from the other side rising up, you know, fiercely in defence of the Education Act provision that establishes an audit committee for school boards. I don't see them standing up and saying: "That's really important. It's going to transform our system. It's what we're hearing from our constituents. It's what we're hearing from our stakeholders that we really need." Hey, I actually think that's a great change. It's a good change.

Ms Hoffman: A lot of boards already do it.

Ms Pancholi: Exactly. It's not necessarily a necessary change because most boards already do it. Guess what? It would take about two seconds and two lines to amend the School Act to provide that.

I don't see the members from the other side standing up in fierce protection of the fact that the student advisory council is going to be legislated because one already exists. What we see is silence, and that's my concern. This government is proposing bringing in significant change to legislation. [interjection] I realize that the Government House Leader seems to have a high desire for attention right now, but I do have the floor, so I will continue to speak. I don't see that there is a lot of content to this act, but I feel like the members on the other side need to be familiar with and need to know what they're bringing forward. I think they're all just hoping that people won't know what's happening. I think they were counting on that.

I can tell you that when I was out door-knocking in my constituency – I've been quite forthcoming in this House about the fact that my constituency is not a very highly partisan group of voters; they don't stick to one party or the other; they want to hear reasonable, rational discussions about issues that they care about – there were a lot of members in my riding who were previously Progressive Conservatives, maybe voted UCP this time as well. But one of the things that I consistently heard around the time that this platform piece was being discussed during the campaign was that they knew what was going on. They knew that this was an intent without the government being forthcoming and saying that this was what they wanted to do. They knew that this is what they were trying to do, that they were trying to roll back protections for GSAs. I would have people at their door saying: "You know what? I voted

Progressive Conservative before. I've done that before. I can't get behind this, though. I cannot get behind this. I can't get behind the idea that this government would move forward with legislation that's going to make the most vulnerable kids more vulnerable again."

We have to show that we have moved forward, that we have progressed. This is the human rights issue of our generation right now. You know, it's coming forward because this is a serious need that's coming forward from kids. It's been brought forward because they are speaking out. They need us as their advocates in this House to pass legislation and to pass laws that protect them. That is our ultimate responsibility. When they're saying, "We need these protections," when they came forward to the NDP and said, "This is what we believe we need; we are still feeling vulnerable; we're still feeling threatened about being outed to our parents; we're still feeling like we're not safe and secure in our schools; we need further action," this government took action.

I am still not hearing a good explanation or rationale from this government as to why those protections need to be weakened. The most we've heard is the Minister of Education talking about balance, but what she's talking about there is balance between, you know, protections for vulnerable kids and ostensibly the parents' right to know.

I want to highlight – because the Minister of Education has mentioned numerous times: oh, there's FOIP, and that protects privacy. As the Member for Edmonton-Glenora mentioned, it's really important to know, for everybody to understand how privacy legislation really works in this province. Absolutely I believe that parents should be able to know some personal information. They should, and the FOIP Act actually protects that, but the FOIP Act creates the right for a parent to have access to the personal information of their child. In most cases that is absolutely one hundred per cent appropriate.

We know that, of course, there's personal information at schools that all kinds of public bodies keep about children, and of course their parents should have a right to that information. There's no doubt about that. I'm a parent of two children, one who has just entered the school system . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, comments or questions under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Of course, I've been riveted quite literally all evening with the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud's comments. They've been very, very insightful, very, very thorough, you know, giving us not only a history lesson of how we even got here but some of the background as to why those decisions were made. I know that the member was probably getting very close to wrapping up. I think that we need to hear those comments because we all need to be able to make a very informed decision in this House, and that information is crucial. I hope that she would continue to share that.

The Deputy Speaker: Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Edmonton-Decore. I'm pleased to continue my comments.

I was speaking about the balance of privacy and that I believe, of course, as a parent that I should have access to my children's personal information. Nothing in Bill 24 or in the School Act prevents that from happening. The only thing it said is that principals should be limited in the information that they share of the fact that a GSA has been established in the school. It does not prevent a teacher or school administrator, when a child is in need of

support, is in need of services, from involving the parent. Nothing about that does that. The fallacy about the argument is that somehow the fact that a child has joined a GSA is personal information that a parent requires to know.

No. What they might need to know is that a child might be struggling with some mental health issues. What they might need to know is that their child is struggling in school, that the child is being bullied, that the child is being affected. That's information that nothing in Bill 24 or in the School Act provisions would prevent a teacher, a responsible, professional teacher, which all of our educators are, from actually speaking out and providing the supports and contacting a parent and saying: we believe your child is in need of supports. What this says is that it's not necessary to convey to parents that their child has joined a GSA because that's actually not in and of itself personal information that's sharing anything significant. What it is is a tactic that's being used to scare kids from joining GSAs.

I want to advocate again. I'm a mother, as many people in this House are parents. We want what's best for our kids. We want to know that if our child is in need of support, in need of help, that we will be notified. I'm married to a teacher. I have teachers in my family and my friends group. I've spoken to many teachers. They are professionals. Their job is not – they would not notify a parent about membership in a GSA because that in and of itself is not the important information. What they need to know is if their child is in need of supports and in need of help. That's what they will do. They're professionals.

When I spoke to a teacher with Edmonton Catholic schools this past weekend, she said: I don't see how in any way Bill 24 hampers me from doing my job. What it does is it just provides those children a means of security and safety to know that if they want to seek supports from a peer support group – because that's what we're talking about. GSAs are kids coming together to support each other. She said: "That's a support system that they're seeking out, and I want to encourage them to do that, but if a child is in need of help, I will absolutely – I'm bound by a code of conduct. I'm bound by professional standards, and we are bound by laws. We are bound by laws, as anybody who works with children is, to notify if a child is in need of help."

But the FOIP provisions, as they currently are, give a right of access to personal information. That is not an answer to the question of protecting kids who are trying to join GSAs. To say that we've got privacy legislation: that's true, but that's not the point. The point is that these kids need to be able to seek out these support groups in safety and security. If they choose to come out to their parents, if they choose to come out to their peers, if they choose to come out to school administrators, that is their choice. Nothing will prevent these kids from getting the support they need from their teachers, from their counsellors, from their parents. I feel it is a disregard and a disrespect for the professional standards of teachers and school administrators to think that they don't know or they won't step forward and talk to a parent when a child is in need, because that's what they do every day.

11:40

You know, I come back to – we can talk about the Education Act and what it is. I can go on ad nauseam about all the detailed provisions, but at the end of the day we know that the sole intent for proclaiming the Education Act is to roll back GSAs. If that wasn't the case, the government wouldn't be doing it, because they're taking a number of provisions from the School Act that the NDP passed. This is not a partisan issue because they certainly liked some of the provisions that the NDP government brought in, protections that they brought in in the School Act, but this is the one

that they won't. They're going to need to answer for why because if they are true about their commitment to protecting vulnerable kids, to GSA protections, there's no reason why they wouldn't keep the provisions that are in the School Act.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 9

Public Sector Wage Arbitration Deferral Act

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance and the President of Treasury Board is rising to debate.

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to move second reading on Bill 9, the Public Sector Wage Arbitration Deferral Act.

Bill 9 will postpone wage reopen arbitration hearings until after October 31, 2019. This will mean a postponement of hearings that have already begun as well as the temporary delay of hearings that are scheduled for early this fall. The legislation would affect 24 public-sector collective agreements. Mr. Speaker, we're simply asking for more time to consider Alberta's economic situation and make informed decisions. Public-sector workers make lives better for Albertans every day, and we want to be clear to all of those affected that we have not yet made any decisions regarding a future position.

Mr. Speaker, public-sector compensation is the largest government expenditure making up over half of the government's operating expenses. It would be fiscally irresponsible to have these discussions and make decisions without having the full picture of the province's economic situation. It would also be irresponsible and unfair to public-sector workers if we came to the table without being able to make informed decisions. Government needs time to consider our position and to review recommendations from the MacKinnon panel.

Mr. Speaker, I also think it's important to bring into context the time pressures we've been working under. Prior to the introduction of this bill we scheduled a number of face-to-face meetings and phone calls with employers and unions to explain our situation. The groups were also asked for written submissions so that everyone could adequately articulate their concerns. After receiving this feedback and considering our options, we decided that legislation was needed as time is needed to consider the impacts of our economic situation.

This legislation must be passed expeditiously in order to ensure that we, in fact, are able to defer public-sector wage arbitration processes that are currently in play. Mr. Speaker, we have committed to balancing the budget by 2022-23. We're committed to working in good faith in our arbitration discussions. We just need time to better understand our economic situation and plan a path forward. Let me be clear. This legislation is not a removal of right; it is simply a postponement of process.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods is rising for debate.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise to speak to Bill 9 at second reading. I'm afraid that the Minister

of Finance, who has moved this, may not get this legislation passed as expeditiously as he referred to in his speech because he seems to not understand how unprecedented and insulting this piece of legislation is to our public servants. The risky path that he is setting our province on by disrespecting the workers of our province not only by not participating in good-faith bargaining – we will have a chat about what good-faith bargaining means – but by claiming that he consulted with the workers involved prior to bringing in this legislation when what happened can only be described as threatening letters and some meetings with members of the public service and not the minister himself. The government did not make adequate attempts to even consider bargaining in good faith with our public-sector unions.

In the end, we now have this bill, which is breaking the law. It is breaking contracts. It is breaking the collective bargaining process, something that is constitutionally protected, something that we already know, should this bill be passed and then proclaimed, will immediately be challenged in the courts. We had several members of our labour organizations here upon introduction for first reading, and they said as much to the media as they were in our rotunda. Anyone who was in the building probably noticed them there. Mr. Speaker, you yourself may have heard either directly or indirectly an earful about the gathering in the rotunda, which is just the start of the reaction that we will hear from Albertans should this continue and proceed.

This is an abuse of power and an assault on front-line workers, many of whom have taken zeros for years, many of whom spend their working lives supporting Alberta by delivering the services that we all rely on and by doing a high-quality job. Now this government won't even sit down to negotiate with them. Now, Mr. Speaker, I am not a labour relations expert, but I have learned a few things about this. I certainly would like to share my perspective from what I've learned, having had many, many conversations and consultations with both the employer side and the worker side of the labour relations sphere. It can be boiled down very simply to say that collective bargaining and our labour relations system that we have today have developed from a very real need for systems and processes to balance out the difficulty that can arise when there are disagreements on how things proceed.

We have here a group of people who want to be employed, who want to provide a service, and we have a group of people who need workers to provide their services. Workers need employers; employers need workers. Seems like everyone should just be able to get along, but that's not what's happened historically. We just had the 100-year anniversary of the Winnipeg strikes, a key pivotal moment in Canadian history and one that impacted other provinces. In fact, Alberta has stories to tell about how we participated and supported workers 100 years ago. The system of labour relations that we have today has been developed over decades of finding ways to balance the needs of employers and the needs of workers and respecting the fact that both have power. They use and exercise that power in very different ways, but I can tell you that one of the ways that workers can exercise power is through withdrawing their labour, through striking. When workers feel disrespected, when workers feel that they do not have a voice, those types of decisions and actions are what start to happen. All workers want is to be respected for the hard work that they do each and every day on behalf of Albertans. This early move from a very new government taking action – even during the height of labour disputes and discord in the '90s Premier Klein never broke contracts, never reached in this way – is shocking. Workers should not have a government that is using legislation to delay their negotiated Supreme Court protected rights.

11:50

Now, how did we get to the point where arbitration was already beginning? I appreciate that the Minister of Finance recognized that this is directly impacting many groups of workers who were actively in the process of working with the government. This was a solution that was achieved through mediation, by sitting down with workers and working with them to develop a path forward. So it's very disrespectful to tear that up and throw that away and introduce legislation as this government has done. It can lead, as I've already mentioned, to labour unrest, compromised services, and more costly settlements. In fact, many governments that have tried to attack workers in similar ways have found that it has actually cost the government more money in the long run. I'm certain that I and my colleagues will be talking a little bit more about the history of collective bargaining in this province. Having a government that is using the law to abuse their power and to do this to workers is unfortunate, shocking, but not wholly unexpected given the platform that this government did run on.

I know that the workers that are being attacked and are feeling attacked right now will not take it lying down – they are upset; they are angry – after having worked with a government that treated workers with respect, bargained with them fairly, talked to them about the fiscal challenges in the province, and worked with them to find solutions, which I would suggest is a good-faith way of approaching bargaining and something I would recommend to this government.

Now, one of the narratives that is developing through all of the pieces of legislation that this government is bringing forward – Bill 2, Bill 9 – is that they are picking the pockets of workers, going after overtime, stat holiday pay, collective agreements. At the same time we have Bill 3, which was a very big tax giveaway to corporations. We have a government that has given itself a \$4.5 billion hole in its budget, one that, as we discussed thoroughly during our Bill 3 debate, does not begin to even remotely pay off in the form of higher tax revenues or other benefits for the first two years, putting themselves in a situation where now workers are worried that the government is going to try to balance the budget on workers' backs, workers who have done nothing but deliver high-quality public services to this province day in and day out: by being sheriffs, who protect this building; by being firefighters, who are fighting fires right now; by being nurses, who are caring for the sick; by being anyone within the public service, the drafters who are drafting all the ridiculous legislation that's coming in. We appreciate them, too, all of the workers.

Making sure that they are protected is incredibly important, so I will be standing in opposition to the introduction of Bill 9 and speaking to stand up for the workers of this province because this is an egregious act against them and really spits in the face of the collective bargaining process, that agreement, that negotiated partnership. We recognize the fact that workers need an employer, an employer needs workers, but we need to balance how we negotiate, and that's the collective bargaining process.

Now, I need to speak about another piece of Bill 9 that is very concerning. In his introductory remarks the hon. minister made clear an intention, the intention to simply delay to get a handle on the finances and then proceed. What he didn't say is that this bill also includes section 5(c), that gives the government the power to write regulations for anything within the intent of this act. Now, these are broad and sweeping powers: "respecting any other matter that the Lieutenant Governor in Council considers necessary or advisable for carrying out the intent of this Act." Well, what is the intent of this act? The intent of any act can be seen as defined in the preamble. When we look to the preamble we see:

Whereas the Government of Alberta is committed to balancing its budget by the 2022-2023 fiscal year;

Whereas public sector compensation is the largest government expenditure, constituting over half of the Government of Alberta's operating expense.

Just with those two sections, Mr. Speaker, it's clear to me that the case could be made that regulations in keeping with the intent of this act could be wage rollbacks, could be freezes, could be interfering even more with the collective bargaining process rather than just delaying. Why, if this is so wholesome and so simple as to delay, has the government seen fit to include vast regulation-making powers limited only by the intent of the act, and the intent of the act is public-sector workers cost too much? I'm concerned. Public-sector workers watching this debate are concerned. It's clear that this government is attacking workers.

Yes, the government is saying: "Thank you, public servants. We appreciate your hard work." They're saying those words. The Minister of Finance has said in good faith they are doing this. He's used the term "good faith" over and over and over, but I would suggest to you that he does not understand what good-faith bargaining would look like or what it should mean in this context given the crowd of angry workers in the rotunda who were chanting when this bill got introduced. This is not the normal way to do things. This is breaking the law. This is going against contracts. If the government broke contracts with businesses, well, that wouldn't be right. But breaking contracts with workers: it must be done. It doesn't have to be done, Mr. Speaker.

We need to reject these types of tactics from our government because it sends a terrible message to valuable public servants. It's not right, and we already know that we're getting very strong reactions from workers. People are tuning in because this isn't how it's supposed to work. Everyone is supposed to come to the table. We are all Albertans. We all are working for Alberta's success, each playing our own roles. Together we can get there, but attacking one another is not about it. Some of the leaders who came out referred to this as an egregious attack on workers' rights and legally binding collective agreements. They called it authoritarian, ideological, and something that would create labour unrest. They said very clearly that all Albertans should be concerned when a new government uses the power and authority of the state to crush basic rights.

In case someone missed it, I want to make it very, very clear that the Supreme Court through multiple rulings has protected the right to collectively bargain. This is not a little thing. This is a big thing. That right to collectively bargain and that right to be treated fairly, the system of labour relations that has grown and evolved over decades, has the goal of having labour peace, having strong delivery of services. We do not want disrespected public-sector workers to feel they need to begin withdrawing services, to feel that they need to start going on wildcat strikes. Mr. Speaker, if you google Alberta wildcat strikes, you'll get lots of articles. Our province has a history of workers withdrawing their services when employers are not treating them reasonably and fairly.

12:00

We are now moving into a new potential era of relationship with our public-sector workers, and I worry about the approach this government is taking when we know from four years of history that a government that respects workers and sits down at the bargaining table to bargain fairly and freely can get wonderful, productive conversations out of that process. We were able to create some excellent agreements with our public-sector workers that took into account the financial realities our province was in.

But we also need to take into account the financial realities of public-sector workers. I know I heard at least one person say that

there are some workers who've had zeros for six years, no increases. We know inflation hasn't been zero for six years. I'm not going to get into bargaining specifics and estimating what people deserve or what's happening, but I don't think we should go into this assuming that these are all workers who are just in it to get rich, that are in there to make a profit, make a buck. These are people who are dedicated public servants who do important jobs for our province, and this government is angering them. This government is disrespecting them and is disappointing a lot of people.

Again, at the start I said that I am not a labour relations expert. I've never taught a labour relations class. But what I do know is that our province has a history of contentious labour relations when governments have been disrespectful. I know that because, although I was not a member of any caucus at the time, in the fall of 2013, when the Conservative government introduced bills 45 and 46, everybody who was of age probably heard about that. It created a lot of noise. It created a lot of disorder: huge protests outside of the Legislature. In the end, the government needed to back down. They needed to back down because in that time, in that place they were bullying workers.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that several stakeholders have already called this a bullying bill, being used to attack workers and their constitutionally protected right to collectively bargain by tearing up legal contracts and including the clause that allows the government to create regulations "respecting any other matter . . . advisable for carrying out the intent of this Act." The intent of this act makes clear that wage rollbacks and freezes are on the table, especially because it talks about the blue-ribbon panel. The chair of the blue-ribbon panel has been given a very tough job, to only talk about spending reductions, to not talk about anything on the revenue side. The chair of that panel has historically made comments about the possibility of wage rollbacks and, in fact, the recommendations of wage rollbacks to fix the Alberta economy.

With this preamble that we have here in Bill 9, with the vast regulation-making authority granted under section 5(c), you can see where the concern is coming in from our public-sector workers and those who are on the front lines delivering the services.

Now, if there was to be a withdrawal of services, what could that look like? Mr. Speaker, I don't want to contemplate that. We want to have strong, stable public services for all citizens because they are critical, because we rely on them, and because we value the workers who are providing those services. They are our friends and our neighbours. They are our family members. The public service workers in our province deserve to be respected, and that is not what they are getting from this government, and that is not what they are getting from Bill 9, the Public Sector Wage Arbitration Deferral Act.

When the Minister of Finance stands in this House and talks about how this is simply a deferral, I don't believe that he's being genuine, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, is there anyone else wishing to join the debate this evening on Bill 9? The hon. Government House Leader is rising to add to the debate.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 49(2) I move that this question be now put. By moving the previous question, we're ensuring the most effective management of House proceedings. With a robust agenda and soon to be eight bills and three motions currently under consideration, it's important we give enough time for members to debate each piece of legislation. This motion allows for over nine hours to the Official Opposition alone just on second reading for a three-page

bill that simply defers arbitration by four months, which, I think, is entirely reasonable.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) will be available in just a couple of moments to anyone that has a brief question or comment for the Government House Leader.

As there are a number of new members in the Chamber, I think it would be reasonable to just provide a little bit of guidance from the chair. I'm certain that all of you are following along, but the hon. Government House Leader did make mention of Standing Order 49, which is a standing order which he has just used to put the previous question. What that essentially translates to is that all members of the Assembly will have one opportunity, subsequently or ongoing, to speak to the motion. It does not limit your ability to provide content, be it to the fact that the Government House Leader has just put the question or if you choose to speak to the content of the bill. Should the previous question pass in the affirmative, then we would move as a House immediately to the vote on second reading for Bill 9.

The other thing that I might just note is that "the previous question, until it is decided, shall preclude all amendment of the main [motion]." This would prevent any dilatory amendments from now being moved at second reading.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for brief questions or comments if anyone has any.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, I spoke earlier this evening about this government being shameful. Well, this takes the cake. One member of the Official Opposition spoke, a single member, and this government steps forward to invoke closure. My colleagues spoke earlier this evening of the arrogance of previous governments. Well, the level of arrogance that we are seeing here tonight from this government on a bill by which they are breaking contracts and breaking good faith to force unions back from the table at the barrel of legislation – and on that bill, after a single speaker, they are going to invoke closure and force us back from debate.

This is where we've come to in terms of democracy in our province, Mr. Speaker. This is the level of commitment of this government to democratic debate. This is the level of class and integrity. If the public sector, if public servants at this point weren't already disturbed enough by this bill, they can just take a look at the behaviour of this government here tonight. They can take from this that it's pretty clear what they are going to be looking at in terms of how willing this government is going to be to have legitimate debate, to genuinely sit down at the table and bargain in good faith. I mean, I recognize that this government has a penchant already for this. They like to pick fights: they're setting up their war room, they're preparing to go and waste Albertans' money on a constitutional challenge, and indeed they're inviting yet another by introducing this bill and moving this legislation forward. I suppose that perhaps even their intent tonight was to try to provoke us.

Well, that's fine. We recognize that the government has the power to do this. They have the power to be this petty, to be this cheap if they so choose. We will answer it in kind. We will take the opportunities that we have to stand up and debate this bill. We will take the opportunities to put this before Albertans and let them have the opportunity to judge the character and behaviour of this government. I don't think this sets quite the precedent that they hope, Mr. Speaker. I don't think this is going to be quite the success they seem to think it will be.

12:10

As my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods noted, Albertans have a deep-rooted history in standing up to governments

that attempt to bully their workers. Indeed, our caucus has a long history of standing up to governments that attempt to bully their way through this Legislature. I would note, Mr. Speaker, that in our time in government, to the best of my recollection, we invoked closure on a single bill, Bill 6. We never moved the previous motion. We never used such a cheap tactic on the opposition.

I recognize that members here may perhaps be getting a bit tired of doing their job. They may be getting a bit tired of listening to the opposition talk and provide our views on these particular bills, but I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, that I have fond and not-so-fond memories of listening to many of these members who now sit across the aisle do precisely that, with far more disingenuity than I have heard from any of my colleagues on this side of the House. Now this government apparently doesn't have the stomach to actually sit and debate legislation that it brings forward in this House. It is too cowardly to actually engage in direct debate. They need to resort to cheap trickery. They need to resort to shutting down the voices of people who were voted here by Albertans to represent their voice and their perspective.

Mr. Speaker, again, that's their prerogative, and I suppose that if that's the standard they want to set, well, then I imagine that in going forward, in our continuing to work with them, and in our bargaining with them, we'll treat them with as much trust as I imagine most public servants do by the time this bill is done, which is not much. I think we owe it to Albertans to at least have a modicum of respect for how we approach things in this House, how we approach legislation. This government is cowardly.

The Speaker: Hon. members, anyone wishing to debate this evening? The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West is rising.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I rise this evening, this morning, to speak on Bill 9, the Public Sector Wage Arbitration Deferral Act. I've seen a lot in this House, but I've certainly never seen the level of audacity and use and abuse of raw majority power to invoke this sort of closure at this stage of debate on any bill. Certainly, to do this on a bill that's as contentious as this one is just inviting discord and trouble, not just in this House but across the province in general.

More than 180,000 public-sector workers are affected by this potential bill. These are people that include front-line nurses, social workers, teachers, librarians, food inspectors, child mental health therapists, long-term care workers, correctional officers, sheriffs, indeed the guards that are guarding us here this evening. All of these people are under collective bargaining contracts that are legal documents, Mr. Speaker. They are legal documents that have been signed between the government and the workers that provide those services.

To undermine that process by bringing in legislation – and let's not pretend that this is just legislation for pause, as the President of the Treasury Board likes to very not truthfully point out. This is enabling legislation to move through each of the contracts that the nurses and the long-term care workers and teachers and so forth have to honour their work and to run roughshod through each one of those contracts.

We know that the panel that this government chose has a predisposition to an outcome that would cut the wages and benefits of those people that serve us in our public sector here in the province of Alberta. Anyone who would suggest that making a direct attack on those essential services is anything but irresponsible and destructive and contentious and divisive is not reading the writing on the wall.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Here we are with another exclamation put onto that sentence that this government does not bargain in good faith, that it does not trust the essential service workers that we are responsible to through collective bargaining. What just happened here in this Legislature, I think, pretty much can educate the rest of the population on what the true intentions of this government are. This is not a pause, Madam Speaker. It is a direct attack on the collective bargaining process that all of our public service workers here in the province do work through.

I can tell you, Madam Speaker, that when you do bargain in good faith, you're not just doing it for the wages and for the bottom line and the extra 25 cents an hour. You are bargaining for the good faith of the delivery of those services that we need from each of those 180,000-plus workers to run the province. The public sector is a very important element of what makes this province a great place to live and to work, to make sure that health care is there for you and your family when you need it, to make sure that you have an education for your kids, to make sure that this whole public service, from finance to social services to roads and infrastructure, functions to meet the needs of the population. You're not just negotiating nickels and dimes on wages; you're negotiating for the confidence of the population of this province to make sure that we're getting the services we need to raise our families and to run a just and equitable society.

Undermining all of those basic tenets of the responsibility that we are invested with here in the Legislature is profoundly irresponsible, Madam Speaker. It is profoundly short sighted and, as I say, strikes a discord that will take a great deal of time to hope to resolve. Just by when this was chosen to do so, to evoke closure after two speakers on perhaps one of the most important bills this government will debate, once again is setting a tone for a new government that's only a month old that declares war on the public service. I find that to be underhanded. I find it to be despicable. It is not something that will go unchallenged by any means.

You can't underdescribe what exactly the Bill 9 does do because it doesn't just say, "Okay; we're going to put a pause until we get a blue-ribbon panel result" and all of those kinds of things. It provides enabling legislation to wipe clean all of the contracts that all of our public service have and are currently due for negotiation. It undermines the process of negotiating those things. Some people say: well, that's just the cost of doing business, and we have to get our finances in order. These are people who actually provide the medical services that you need for your family – ambulances, EMS, firefighters, environment, parks and wildlife people – literally the largest employer in the province of Alberta. The services that they provide and the cost of that is not just a cost on a balance sheet. It's not just: oh, we can move a few numbers over from the red to the black and everything is put right.

I'm getting a sense of what this government is up to now. The last time something like this happened here in the province of Alberta, it took us a generation to recover, if we ever did, in regard to education and class size and building schools. I had to build 244 schools in the last four years because you know what? The last time the government chose to try to attack the public service through austerity, they didn't build schools. They didn't build hospitals. They didn't build the roads. We ended up with a generational deficit of capital investment, and that's just capital investment. You have to have the people that actually build those things and populate those schools and provide those long-term care services. The list goes on and on and on.

12:20

So if people thought, "Oh, well; let's always think of the best," you know, I think that tonight we got a strong dose of preparing for

the worst, expecting the best from this new government but then with solemn preparation for the worst, of which we can see the first salvo being fired here tonight by invoking closure on this important bill.

There are a lot of contracts that are up, for sure. You know, over the last four years when you're dealing with public service workers, they know that there's a shortage of money. They know that there's a recession on. It's not like you live in a bubble. Their wives and husbands, sisters and brothers working in oil and gas and so forth saw the economic recession due to a downturn in the price of energy, and they really negotiated responsibly. It was tough but fair negotiations that we invoked and that we engaged in over the last four years as government, and we did so in partnership with the good faith of sitting at a table as equals and looking each other in the eye and saying: okay; this is what we've got to do for the sake of the public good and for the sake of the integrity of the services which we are responsible to deliver for the people of Alberta.

When you undermine that level of good faith, Madam Speaker, that's when you really are showing your true colours. That's what we're seeing here tonight – right? – not sitting equally at a table, not looking each other in the eye and looking for what's best but, rather, for a short-sighted attack, I would dare say for ideological reasons, to demonstrate power and raw aggression towards the public service. I know. I was a teacher for 20 years in this province. I know very well what the Conservative government did in 1993 to undermine that profession, to undermine the integrity of class size, of teaching, and so forth, and it was a hard blow. It was part of the reason that I ended up where I am here today, making a choice as a teacher to become more politically active, because I saw that the attack on education, on health care, on my children's education – they were very small elementary students at the time – and for all of the students whom I was responsible for as a teacher was compromised by an ideological attack on the public service. I fear we're seeing the dark clouds forming again in a similar vein.

When we take responsibility to represent each of our individual constituencies and collectively the entire province, we must take that responsibility with a solemn oath to serve and to ensure that we provide the services that our people need regardless. You have to make adjustments for economic circumstances, but the basic investment that you make cannot be compromised.

When we formed government in 2015, at the beginning of the worst economic crisis around energy that we've seen in a generation, we chose to make a choice. Do we double down on the job losses, on the trouble that was associated with that economic recession, or do we make sure that we are still making investments in our kids, investments in education, investments in infrastructure that can provide for a growing population and can see us through an economic downturn? I think it was a difficult decision, but we made that difficult decision to ensure that we provided, for example, the education that our children needed. We didn't compromise that based on the price of oil and energy that happened to be trading on the world stage. I was proud of that decision. It wasn't easy to do. We made sacrifices in other areas to make sure that that whole new generation of seven-year-olds and six-year-olds and five-year-olds who were showing up in our public schools were getting that education that they needed, and we would find a way to make it happen.

You can dig deep and find a way for it to happen. You can dig deep and make innovative solutions, and the first place you look for those innovative solutions to try to solve the problem during an economic downturn is with the partnerships that you have with the public service. You don't go to the table with all guns drawn and say: okay; look, we're going to legislate your wages and your services now. You go there and ask for solutions together with those

people. If you do it with aggression, if you do it through legislation, then you are only making the situation worse, quite frankly. You know, fair warning. That's just the way things can unfold if we don't try to look for a more co-operative, collaborative solution to ensuring that our public services are met and that we're meeting the responsibilities as a government.

With that, Madam Speaker, certainly, there are lots of things that we need to talk about in regard to Bill 9. I think that a lot of people are going to wake up in the morning and realize that the strength that they have to ensure the integrity of the services to which they are responsible like teaching, nurses, law enforcement, and so forth, the integrity of the responsibilities to each of those teachers, nurses, police officers, and so forth depends on them to stand together in solidarity to make sure they fight for what's right.

A contract isn't just wages on a paper as well; it's working conditions, and when you talk about working conditions, you talk about the conditions of the people you are serving as well. Working conditions means having proper staffing levels in the hospital for the patients as well as the nurses. It's to make sure that you have enough support staff and teachers and custodial staff in a school to ensure that the working conditions for those children are met and the learning conditions for those children are met as well. So it's not just about dollars in people's pockets, as I'm sure this government will be tempted to do – right? – but, rather, it's around the integrity of those essential services for which we all depend on.

So think hard about it. Think hard about where you stand in regard to these things. I know that each of the individuals around us in this Legislature must be thinking hard. I'm thinking hard right now. It was a surprise and a shock to see this government invoke closure right from the beginning on a very important bill that reflects the future of where we're going as a province here and where this new government is going, too. It sends a bad message, but worse than that, it'll send confusion and fear as well, which I don't think anybody deserves in this province, especially after everybody worked so hard over the last four years to come out of this economic downturn.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker and to the member for his comments. I can't help but reflect on the fact that I think he is either the longest or second-longest serving member.

Mr. Eggen: Second.

Ms Hoffman: Second-longest serving member of this Assembly right now. I imagine he can probably count on his hands the number of times he's had to deal with closure because it is something that happens very rarely in this place, very rarely in this place, I'd say, for a few reasons. The number one reason is that we all were elected to make decisions and to debate and to engage in thorough representation of our constituents. By moving closure, the House leader is telling all the members of this Assembly that, you know, the voices of the entire Assembly don't matter. I imagine he's probably said to some of his colleagues, maybe all of his colleagues, you know, to just sit in there, keep your head down, vote this through, and that this is what people want.

Well, I doubt many people heard on the doorsteps, Madam Speaker, "I want you to stymie debate. I want you to end debate. I want you to amend the standing orders so that you can abstain. I want you to do all of these things" that I think most people in this Chamber would probably say are an affront to democracy, an affront to having respectful discourse in this place where all voices matter. Not just the Government House Leader's voice matters. All

voices matter in this place because all of us were elected to represent our constituents and have our voices heard.

So I'm hoping my hon. colleague the Member for Edmonton-North West would elaborate a little bit on the rarity of closure as well as why he might believe that the Government House Leader has brought it in tonight and how he expects people might respond in the morning when they learn this news.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Thank very much. Yeah, I mean, I certainly have seen closure being invoked in the past, but usually during the course of the process, almost always, it's after the government is going through some levels of debate, and it feels like there's an impasse somehow. But that's completely logically and physically impossible here because we just had Bill 9 brought forward, with the Treasury Board minister and then the one critic, and then closure, boom, dropped right in. So there's no testing for the tone or the weather in the House as to whether there's going to be productive debate or if it's just going to be stalling.

12:30

Not to make excuses for when I did see Conservative governments use it, but, you know, they saw that the legislation maybe was spinning its wheels, and they've got to move it on because maybe there's an imminent problem if that legislation doesn't pass and so forth, right? But here we are after about – I don't know – maybe 15 minutes of debate or 20 minutes of debate, and, boom, they drop it like a lead balloon on top of this democratic Chamber. Again, sending a message and a tone with that, besides the actual legislation, which I think is derivative and not productive, is just, like, layering on this sense of aggression – right? – and definitely not respecting the workers that this represents, more than 180,000 individuals, but also not respecting this Chamber and the democratic institution which it serves.

Yeah. Thank you for asking me about that, because that's usually the way it goes. Bringing it in straight away – you know, I'm not going to try to get inside the heads of the members opposite because that could be a scary place to be, right? – I think demonstrates fear, quite frankly, fear and a very thin skin, fear of the strength and the capacity of one's own caucus in government to actually bring through something like this in a reasonable manner; rather, just drop in closure, watch the debate happen in the middle of the night, and batten down the hatches. I think that's kind of the overriding message that's being sent here.

Quite frankly, I am a little bit worried about that because when people do hear about this in the morning, they are going to ask a lot of questions. We certainly will use our platform here in the Legislature to ask those questions for them as well. You know, democracy is a funny thing. You can't just depend on the numbers that come out of any given election. Rather, it's a dynamic, living thing that reflects the performance of a government every step of the way, and if you don't perform, you will lose.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other speakers? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate you recognizing me in the wee hours of the evening here while we, I guess, very briefly now, start to debate Bill 9. I must say that I guess I shouldn't be surprised by invoking closure here. There's been a very clear – right from the outset the Premier said: well, we just want to blast forward with lightning speed; we want to limit

opposition. Well, I guess this is you guys limiting opposition. It should be interesting to see what things are like in the morning, when people find out that the opposition that they've brought to this House to debate bills, to propose amendments, things like that, has been taken away from them.

Maybe we should probably have, for those folks that may play this back later on so they understand what happened, a little bit of history, possibly, about this government. To bring a bill like this forward and then close debate after one speaker: if I may borrow a quick phrase from the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs – trigger warning: I'm about to say the word “union” – this is union busting at its finest, Madam Speaker. We've seen members of this current government, when they were in opposition, taking runs at trying to limit, make life harder for, stop, whatever the case may be, unions. It started with such things as, if you remember, the debate about the Rand formula. I mean, gosh, I even heard heckles from the other side: well, the Rand formula; that's never really been settled. You know, it's Chief Justice Rand. So that one was kind of settled. All the different names that I've heard being flung across the House: “big union bosses” and “cronies” and “thugs” and some other very interesting descriptions of unions.

I wonder what kind of descriptions might be coming out of this because, as I said, this is, very, very clearly, union busting, all under the guise of wanting to review Alberta's finances. The problem with that statement, Madam Speaker, is that the Minister of Treasury Board forgot – I can only guess – to give a mandate to this special blue-ribbon panel to not only check about the expenses, but maybe they should have checked about the finances, too. It would only seem to make sense. It would be prudent, fiscally prudent. I figured that word would maybe resonate a little bit more with some of the members on the other side, but I guess not. We're too focused on trying to ram an agenda down over 180,000 people's throats. You know, one minute we're praising them for this job that we so dearly love them doing, and the next minute it's, like: it's going to be our way or the highway. Unbelievable.

The Member for Edmonton-North West was talking about how a move like this is unprecedented; my fear is that we are now about to see more of these unprecedented moves in an attempt to limit or even silence opposition, to be able to move at lightning speed so that we can get our agenda passed, which a big majority of Albertans voted for. Well, it's funny because if you start to actually look at some of the numbers on how that breaks down – you know, kudos: it's a very impressive number – a little over 1.04 million Albertans definitely voted for the UCP. The problem is that as of January 1, 2019, there were 4.345 million voters in this province who didn't vote for you, okay? Now, I know you always love to throw that number around, 55 per cent, 56 per cent. Actually, out of the entire, total population of those that either didn't vote or didn't vote for you, that's only less than a quarter.

And here you are invoking closure after one speaker and making them accept legislation. Quite honestly, I don't know if it's reckless, disrespectful, or just that you haven't even thought this through. When I hear words, Madam Speaker, like “good-faith bargaining,” I can tell you right now that this does not come under the dictionary explanation of good-faith bargaining.

An Hon. Member: What would it come under?

12:40

Mr. Nielsen: Probably it would come under bad-faith bargaining.

I've seen a few of those little manoeuvres in my – here comes that trigger word again, “union”; again, kudos to the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs for providing that. In my union world I've seen these kinds of things, and it usually results in a lot of workers

being really angry because they showed up to the table actually trying to bargain. You want to slow down the process: why didn't you just go to the bargaining table and ask? Pretty simple.

But no. Here we are at 20 to 1 in the morning on a beautiful Monday evening, and after one speaker we're going to shut it down. I don't know if I would necessarily want to be watching your social media feeds come early this morning because I have a feeling they're going to blow up. I wouldn't be surprised if we ended up seeing some more fine, hard-working Albertans come to this Legislature and let us know what their feelings are about this. I'm going to take a wild guess that it's not going to be very favourable because, rightfully so, they're going to start to wonder: what's next? We're already seeing language that's available on how we can roll back their wages without so much as even saying: guess what's coming? It's just going to happen. Very, very dangerous, unprecedented movements being made by this government, Madam Speaker.

I seem to remember getting lectured at length about the fiasco, supposedly, that we created with Bill 6. Well, heads up, folks. You might be facing your own on this one, yet all you had to do was go to the bargaining table, say: "Hey, this is our situation. What can you do to help us out?" You bargain it out. That's good-faith bargaining. This is bad-faith bargaining at its finest – at its finest – and it usually results in a whole lot of labour unrest. There are a lot of Albertans that are counting on services to be provided by these hard-working public-sector workers, and this is the way we're going to thank them, this is the way we're going to commend them for all their hard work? Absolutely unbelievable.

As you can imagine, Madam Speaker, I will most definitely not be supporting this in any way, shape, or form. I'm going to have a very, very hard time going back to my constituents and explaining to them how this piece of legislation has been ramrodded through. I believe I've heard that term several times in the last Legislature, too, around some of the things that we were doing. But as the Member for Edmonton-North West had said, even on some of the contentious ones we at least had some debate around it, not a whole whopping – what was it? – 10 minutes, 15 minutes, and already we're hitting the ejection button here.

I think this government will be placing itself in a very, very difficult position going forward here. I would not be surprised. I guess maybe the labour minister can bring in all kinds of just quick little bits of red tape to try to smooth things out here. I don't know. Maybe we can just ramrod some more legislation if people go on strike: hey, let's just order them back. Why not? It's not a big deal.

Mr. Carson: Don't give them any ideas.

Mr. Nielsen: I probably shouldn't give them any ideas, should I? Yeah. That's probably some good advice.

Madam Speaker, I would very highly suggest to the members in the House here right now that you reconsider this position very, very seriously. You want things to move smoothly in this government. You want this province to prosper. I can tell you right now that this is not the way to go about it. This is going to come back to bite you. But I guess that at the end of the day, when this debate is over, all I'll really be able to say is: I told you so.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Are there members with comments or questions? The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. Certainly, I know that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore has expressed, I think, quite an emotive reaction, as I did just previously, not expecting this

sort of heavy-handed use of parliamentary procedure to invoke closure on a debate that just started.

You know, still thinking about that, I know that the Member for Edmonton-Decore has watched labour action over time, and I was just curious if he could perhaps think back to a good example of using a bargaining table to develop constructive contracts and perhaps a bad example of collective bargaining that didn't turn out so good.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the Member for Edmonton-North West for the question. Well, one of the very first things that comes to mind around the bad legislation: some will remember back to when the former PC government introduced bills 45 and 46, which resulted in a wildcat strike over at the remand centre. For members to get to such a point where they feel they have to, you know, break the rules around how strikes are supposed to be conducted, that's getting very, very serious. My concern is that we might be heading down the same path here. You know, that was probably a very, very easy question to answer around what not to do.

I've seen some very good examples of what to do, which can result in very favourable ways to go here. Now, it didn't start off so well, but before I was an MLA, my own union, UFCW, tried to talk with one of the large grocery stores. They ended up going out on strike for three days, at which point the company realized: maybe we were off base; let's try to work this out. In the past many, many times we've seen the UFCW go out on strike, and they've lasted very significant amounts of time. In this case, because the company came back and said, "Okay; look, we made a mistake; we didn't do things right," they managed to shorten that. After only three days they had an agreement, they were back on track, and people were getting their services: going to the grocery store, being able to get greeted by a very friendly face.

I'm a little concerned that what we might start to see is some of our public-sector workers going to deal with members of the public with this looming over them, and it's going to affect the service that members of the public are going to get. Of course, that's always going to end up snowballing because when people do get that sort of bad customer experience, they usually end up going out and telling a whole bunch of people versus, of course, that when they get a good experience, they maybe tell one or two.

12:50

I'm very concerned that we're starting to repeat history here a little bit around, you know, bills 45 and 46, possibly causing wildcat strikes here. Again, if somebody is getting to that point, where they're willing to take those risks, you have to step back for a second and go: "Okay. Whoa. How is it that we're getting to this point?" You can't just point at them and say: "It's all your fault. It's all you. Everything is on you." You might have to point back and go . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other speakers to the bill? Hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre, I believe you've already spoken to . . .

Mr. Shepherd: No. Not since the question was put, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: All right. The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. This government can play tricks, but they will not silence me. I appreciate the opportunity

to rise and speak after some cowardly actions by this government, who apparently don't have the guts to actually stand and debate this bill, much as they didn't have the guts to actually put this in their platform or discuss this in any way with Albertans or be in any way open and honest about the fact that they intended to immediately, on becoming government, come into this House and break contracts with public-sector workers, to make that assault on constitutional rights for workers in the province of Alberta. They wanted to hide it then, and they want to hide it now, so we will sit here, approaching 1 a.m., and we will have this debate, which I see all members of the government are engaged in with great interest.

You know, Madam Speaker, we've been down this road before. This is a familiar story here in the province of Alberta. Time and time again Conservative governments have decided that their way forward, their way to fiscal balance is to attack public-sector workers in the province of Alberta, to try to make villains out of the unions that represent them, to try to turn Albertans against each other, to try to make us feel resentful towards those who earn their living as doctors or nurses or teachers, social workers, paramedics, or sheriffs here at the Legislature. That is what we see here again with this bill, which is being brought forward to break collective agreements, to force them back from their legal right to be at the bargaining table until such time as this government feels they've generated sufficient cover, thrown enough flak in the air to begin their plans for wage rollbacks.

As I said, Madam Speaker, we've been down this road before. Indeed, not that long ago, a few weeks ago, I had the opportunity to attend the state of the city address with Edmonton's mayor. Members of this House were there. I see some who were there. You know, the mayor spoke about the history that we have seen in this province before with decisions that have been made by previous Conservative governments. He talked about how back in the '90s Edmonton was gutted. Under Premier Klein, as I mentioned the other day during one of my questions during question period, we saw a direct attack on the public service. We saw drastic cuts that led to the loss of many jobs. And the mayor noted that as a result of that, here in the city of Edmonton we saw our economy hit hard.

Unlike the narrative that Conservative governments and, you know, their friends in particular parts of the media or with particular political organizations like to paint, the fact is that public-sector workers contribute back. The wages they earn go to support local businesses. The wages they earn go to pay for their children's daycare. The wages that they earn they pay taxes on, that go back to support your municipality, to support the provincial government. They are part of the community. They are our friends. They are our neighbours. They are our family.

So when Premier Klein targeted those public-sector workers, we saw those cuts, we saw those layoffs here in Edmonton. We saw a significant chunk of purchasing power that got pulled out of our economy. As a result, we saw a real stagnation here in Edmonton. Indeed, not only did we lose those people from our economy; we lost those people from our province and our city. I remember my own family doctor: in the late '90s he picked up and left. It wasn't worth working in Alberta anymore. Countless nurses, countless other health care workers, teachers, educators did the same.

Frankly, if your employer isn't going to respect you, if they are not going to think that you're worth while, well, then, people, like capital, are mobile. They'll go and they'll find someplace where they will. The impact that had on our city and indeed on much of our province is that we found ourselves with an incredible deficit. So when the boom came back, that being through no action of that particular government but by happenstance of chance – the price of natural gas rose; we had money again – it was: okay; well, now that royalties are up, we can invest back in health care and education. Well, at that point

we had skills shortages because so many of the people that had those skills, that were doing those jobs, had left the province. As the mayor noted in his state of the city address, because of that, it cost us 40 to 50 per cent more to rebuild everything that the government had just spent the last few years chopping down.

Now, the mayor went on to say that, you know, although he recognized that that had been the pattern before, he was still willing to work with this government. He figured there were opportunities for collaboration and chances to move forward and do some good work together, and I respect that. But I have to say that when I see a piece of legislation like this, when I see actions like the government's tonight, I have to seriously question what opportunities there are for any form of good-faith bargaining with this government, for genuine collaboration. We saw, with the introduction of this bill, how they approached discussion with the public sector: send a few threatening letters, have a couple of your department staff maybe meet with a couple of people, and then – boom – bring in legislation to force them back from that table. That's what this government considers collaboration. That's what they consider discussion.

At the first opportunity tonight the minister rises, he introduces and opens up the debate for second reading. Our critic for labour has the opportunity to speak, and no sooner is she done than this government invokes closure and says: "Yeah. That's it."

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Hear, hear.

Mr. Shepherd: "Hear, hear," says one of their members. That's his commitment to democracy. Thank you, Member for Calgary-Klein. Glad to know that that's how you feel about democracy in this province. I'm sure your constituents will be proud.

Madam Speaker, another thing I noted when I asked my questions the other day regarding this bill that was being brought forward was that we need the co-operation of our public servants. This government claims that they can take 4 and a half billion dollars out of the budget, that they can go on to make other cuts – they have their blue-ribbon panel determining just where those are going to be – and that somehow they will balance the budget, and they will still be able to improve the delivery of public services. I certainly hope that's the case, Madam Speaker. It is not going to be a pretty scene if they're wrong.

1:00

I will say that if they want to achieve that goal, if they want to pull that rabbit out of the hat, they are going to need the co-operation, the goodwill of those workers on the front line, of those people who know the systems, of those people who understand where things can be changed, how we can improve delivery. But so far this government is showing that they have no intention of listening to those people. No. This government knows better, so best to just force everyone back, shut down debate, get rid of discussion. They've got all the answers.

This government likes to claim a lot of things about what it's doing and why, but when it comes down to it, very little of it often seems to be factual. They claim: this is only about a brief pause, just going to take a moment, just need to catch our breath, and then we'll sit down and we'll talk about this real promise. But then they slip in a clause which says, "But just in case, we are going to grant ourselves the opportunity to do anything that we feel we need to do to accomplish our goal," not through legislation, not through debate in this House, because we've clearly seen tonight how much they value that, but simply by regulation.

Again, it seems clear that this government is too cowardly to actually bring their agenda, their true agenda, to Albertans. They're

not willing to have that discussion in the light of day. They want to have the opportunity at every turn to do this through the back door, under cover of darkness, with utter disrespect for our public service workers and indeed for those who were elected alongside them to serve as the opposition in this House.

I can tell you, Madam Speaker, that I've had the opportunity to speak with many people on the front lines already, had the opportunity to post the questions that I posed to the minister online, and I can tell you that workers are not happy: nurses, teachers, paramedics, these folks that we depend on for these incredibly important public services; people, again, who are our friends, our family, our neighbours; for those of you that run businesses, your customers, your clients, your constituents. This is the level of disrespect with which you are treating them. This is the precedent you're setting for how we're going to move forward as a province over the next four years. This is not the way to move our province forward.

During our time in government we had an almost unprecedented era of labour peace. I had great respect for the work, the incredible work, that my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, when she served as Minister of Health, did going forward, sitting down with doctors in this province and negotiating a new payment system that would save us \$500 million. She did not have to do that at the barrel of legislation. She didn't have to pull any legislative trickery. She sat down at the table and had actual good-faith bargaining, as we did with every other public-sector union in this province, and now this government is going to take that goodwill and throw it away. They've already begun the process of doing so. It's not the best way to open a relationship, Madam Speaker. This is not the way to find balance in how we deliver our public services. This is not the way to approach democracy in our Legislature.

I know there will be other opportunities to speak to this bill. This will be my only opportunity at second reading thanks again to this government's choice to shut down debate.

The Deputy Speaker: Comments or questions under Standing Order 29(2)(a). The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker and to the hon. member for the comments that he's raised thus far. I really do appreciate him talking about the good faith that we entered into with physicians, actually, not just at the time when we were up for contract negotiations; rather, to the contrary, actually. Contracts were signed under the former Conservative government that were so out of step with the realities of Albertans. What we did is that we sat down, and we showed the books. Lo and behold, we were able to have the physicians come back to the table far earlier than what was required by their collective agreement and renegotiate to have those funds turned back to the people of Alberta to be put to use in other areas. So I appreciate that the member brought that up.

I guess this was exceptional given the history with contract negotiations with physicians and what they asked for in places, that there be fair, good-faith bargaining moving forward, that they always be welcome to the table, that they always have an opportunity to engage in debate, and that they always be given an opportunity to reach an agreement before it be mandated upon them. I can't help but think about the contrast between what they asked for and what this government is pushing on them.

I wanted to say that and certainly welcome any further reflection from my hon. colleague with regard to collective agreements with public services. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate those reflections from my colleague and those comments and those thoughts. Indeed, it troubles me: the low regard in which I have seen so many who profess to be Conservatives hold their public-sector workers in the democratic institutions that are their unions, which serve to protect them for precisely this reason, from the tyranny of government that would choose to make them a scapegoat. It's unfortunate when I hear people talk about public-sector workers and say things like: well, they didn't have to feel the pain the last four years when other people were losing their jobs or having their wages cut. Indeed, they were the people that were helping keep their families going during that time when perhaps their spouse had lost their job. They were the ones that were still patronizing the businesses in their communities. This is not something to begrudge. The work they do and the compensation they receive for it is something to be thankful for. That's something for which we should treat them with respect, at least to have the respect to honour the contracts that have been signed with them. But this government is not choosing to do that.

1:10

So, again, the path forward is going to be that much more difficult for all of us, for these workers, for this government. I certainly intend to make this intended path of this government as difficult as possible because the decisions they are making, the direction they are heading is going to harm my constituents. It is going to do real damage to real people, both those who work in the public service and provide those key public services that people depend on and those who depend on those services.

The bill that this government has brought forward, as I said earlier, as much as the actions it has taken tonight, are both cowardly. They are shameful. They are without honour. Members can try to rationalize this, but again this is another thing that they did not run on. This is another thing that they did not campaign on to their constituents, that they did not discuss at the doors, for which they have no elected mandate.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker and to my colleagues for this exciting, very public debate at 1:10 a.m. Just before the motion for closure was brought in, or the notice of closure because, of course, we don't have an opportunity to even debate whether or not it's appropriate to close – thanks for that standing order – I was looking at the AHS North Zone Twitter and saw that due to wildfires in the La Crête area, residents are being evacuated from the long-term care facility and relocated to other health facilities in Alberta. I wanted to start by saying how those folks are on our minds; the folks that are doing the evacuation and, of course, the folks who are being evacuated. These are some of the folks that will be impacted by the proposal to break the law, the proposal to breach their collective bargaining, but here they are. At the same time, the government is bringing in a motion to limit debate on whether or not they should rightfully be entitled to the collective bargaining process that they already agreed to and, yeah, we're calling them to go above and beyond. I know that there are, I think, just under 100,000 AHS employees alone in this province – that's about the size of Red Deer – working for that one employer that will certainly be impacted by this proposal should it move through.

It seems like the Government House Leader, anyway – I don't know if the whole government – seems dead set to move forward with this, full speed ahead, bringing in closure. Again, I want all

members of this House, because it is the entire Assembly that makes these decisions – it's maybe direction from one – all of you were asked to stand and vote at some point, and when you stand and vote, that's on the record, right? That's there for your constituents to call on and say, you know: when it came time to attacking my rights, how did the person that I elected to represent me vote on that issue?

Not to sharpen that point too much, just to reinforce that it's, you know – I think I said this the other day, and I really want to say it again. We will all be asked by people, whether they're our constituents, our bosses, or our friends, or our family: why did you do what you did? It's going to happen. It happens to us all the time, I'm sure. There are one of two answers to that question; it's either I did what I was told, or I did what I thought was right. And there will be times, maybe not yet, maybe so far everything that you were told is what you thought was right, but there are definitely going to be times when that isn't the case, and I will say that there will probably be, seeing the tone that has been set by the Government House Leader, many of them.

It seems like the Government House Leader is intent on running roughshod over this place and making sure he drives through his agenda as aggressively as he sees fit. I don't think that's becoming of a House leader, and I don't think it's becoming of the party that campaigned on doing things differently than its legacy parties. It certainly didn't campaign on building sky palaces and having among the most secretive history of governments in Alberta. I think it's important that I sort of frame it in that way.

I also think of the fact that we've shown over that last four years that you can absolutely have fair and reasonable collective agreements. People say: but our costs are the highest in the country when it comes to staffing. Sure. Yeah. And when did that happen? I'll tell you my experiences of training to be a teacher as well as of an employer of ATA members when I was with the Edmonton public school board. It was the AWE agreement. That was an agreement that was reached I believe it was with Premier Stelmach at the time. I think it was maybe Minister Liepert who sat down and negotiated with teachers: we'll tie your increase to the average weekly earnings. It sounds reasonable, right? If average weekly earnings in Alberta go up, then your pay will go up. It was a collective agreement that they reached.

As a result, teacher pay went up significantly because the price of oil had gone up. While not everyone was seeing the benefits, certainly the average weekly earnings in Alberta were out of step with the rest of the country, so teachers saw a big increase over those years of that agreement. But the government of the day didn't say, "We're going to tear up the agreement," because they knew that they had sat down at the table and they had reached that agreement.

It probably wasn't the best measure to use. They probably should have had something like zeros and a wage reopener, brought to you by the NDP. Everyone says: oh, the NDP is aligned with labour. And a lot of the times we are aligned with working people. But, you know, we certainly didn't write the kinds of agreements that resulted in the kinds of substantial increases that we saw under a former Conservative government. We saw zeros, many zeros, and a wage reopener, which means: we'll come back to the table, and we'll sit down, and we'll talk to you.

Except now, after they take those zeros, the government doesn't want to talk to them. The government brings in a bill that says: "No. We absolutely don't need to fulfill our legal requirements, the law that says that we will sit down and talk to you. We're going to delay that until we get a bunch of reports by somebody who has already said that our wages are out of line. Then, oh, PS: we'll incorporate a clause, a little omnibus clause, that allows us to indeed not even

have a negotiated contract. We can set our own conditions, and we can implement them."

[The Speaker in the chair]

That's what we're being asked to do here tonight, colleagues, through you, of course, Mr. Speaker. We're being asked to give, essentially, a blank cheque to the minister of labour or a designate to write whatever collective agreement, which isn't actually a collective agreement if it isn't agreed upon, to dictate the terms of employment to a lot of folks who, frankly, probably voted for you. Some voted for us; some voted for you. And you're being asked to rip up their contract, take away their rights, and bring that in at midnight so that nine hours later, maybe, whether it's today or another day, after only nine hours of debate, with only one speaker having gone previously, it will all be done and hidden away under the darkness of night.

It does not sit well with me, and I don't think it probably sits well with many members. I doubt that many members got up this morning – like, my favourite thing to always say to my team when I was Minister of Health and still in my constituency office to a smaller team but a mighty team is: we're going to get up today, and we're going to do something to make life better for the people we work for. I doubt that when you got up this morning, you thought: I can't wait to bring in closure, end debate, and legislate contracts. I doubt that that was what equated to you as getting up in the morning and doing something to make life better for the people we work for. So that's frustrating.

There are many, many, many Albertans – I mentioned the roughly 100,000 that work for AHS, but this bill, arguably, will impact almost double that, including, of course, many front-line workers, as were mentioned. I know that we have people who were employed in the public service in previous lives who would have definitely been impacted by this.

I'll tell you that when people ask me, "What inspired you to get into politics?" I usually start with the very first inspiration, which was the 5 per cent rollbacks that both of my parents got when they were teachers in the '90s, which I guess means that Ralph Klein helped to inspire me to get into politics. Certainly, if we hadn't have taken both of those rollbacks, neither of them probably would have talked about politics as much at the dinner table, but it definitely personally impacted our family.

When my dad was dying a few years after that, about a week before he died he said: "You know what? It wasn't just our income for those years. It was my pension." Because your pension is based on your five highest income-earning years, and his weren't the last five years. Those weren't his highest wage-earning years. I said: "Yeah. I'm really sorry about that." He said: "I'm not mad for me. I'm mad for your mom because my pension is what's going to pay her bills. Here I am, knowing I'm going to leave." Because there were legislated rollbacks in the '90s, that's what he was thinking about on his deathbed in 2007.

1:20

The decisions we make in this place have lasting impacts on families. Certainly, I know that probably many of you are being told to be good cheerleaders. Nobody runs for office to be a cheerleader. You run to be on the field, right? You run to be part of the action. You run to make decisions. You want to carry the ball, and you want to help take Alberta from where we are today to a better place. I remember many maiden speeches talking about that. Sitting in this place being good, quiet soldiers and voting to take away something that is put in law, something that has been negotiated and something the Supreme Court has ruled on, I don't think is leaving this place better than the way we found it. I think it's highly problematic.

I think that with regard to front-line workers, they deserve our respect. I think that you can stand in this place and you can say that we respect them, but when you do stuff like this, when you bring in bills, laws, that impact their ability to provide for their families, I think that that is a new level of honesty, let's say. You can say all the members' statements that you want, but people are going to judge you by what you do as well. They're going to judge you by what they know impacts them in their own personal lives.

We've seen an act to pick your pockets, and I would argue that this is probably another variation on that. Certainly, people took zeros for many years, knowing that it was the right thing to do and that they were in this together with government, that they weren't one set of Albertans that has different rights than another set of Albertans, that we are all Albertans, that we are all going to do our part, and they said: "Yeah. We will take all our zeros, and then we want to sit down at the table again." They didn't say, "Then we want a big increase." They said, "Then we want to sit down at the table," and that's what's being taken away.

I would tell you that if I were sitting down at that table the next time negotiations happened, I would have a very, very, very bad taste in my mouth about what I'd already experienced, and it would impact the tone in which I entered the discussion. You know, fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me. If I was planning on entering into these discussions in good faith on the other side of the table and I saw this happen, I would probably be wanting to come to the table in more of an adversarial and aggressive way.

That is a little bit of what I wanted to say about that. I think that, again, when asked, "Why are we doing this?" many people will probably be told to say, "To get our fiscal house in order." I again say to you: when did it get out of order? How did it get out of order? Can you trust the same people who made the mistakes of bringing in AWE to make a decision today about how best to have fair compensation?

I think that all that working people want is to be able to sit down at the table and have a fair and reasonable conversation with their employer. When we talk about minimum wage or when we talk about overtime, the labour minister is very quick to say: well, people can negotiate. They can come in and they can say: "Hey, I know I'm making \$15 now. The law will say that I can make \$13 later. Would you please consider maybe letting me continue to make \$15?" We're saying that it's okay for them to come in and negotiate, but we're saying that it's not okay for the public sector to come in and negotiate? Like, you can't talk out of both sides of your mouth saying different things at the same time. It makes no sense, and that's what this is.

If you say that you want people to come in and negotiate with their employer, then you do that as the employer. You lead by example, and you say: absolutely, we welcome you to the table. And guess what? Sometimes you might get more out of that discussion than you anticipated because the people of this province who elected you are the people who are asking to sit at the table. Shutting them out of that discussion, I think, is really, really disrespectful.

I don't think it's becoming of the responsibilities that we entered into this line of work wanting to do: wanting to get up in the morning and make life better for our bosses – right? – the people of this province; wanting to make life better for the families that are counting on that pension payment; wanting to make life better for folks who know that they don't always have the most glamorous jobs, but they can do them with pride, and they feel respected working for a respected institution. When you disrespect those workers, no matter what lip service you pay, it's going to come back at you, and it's not going to be fun. I certainly wouldn't want to be sitting down at the table to negotiate after something like this got

pushed, somebody ran roughshod over the law, over the legally negotiated terms and conditions of those contracts.

I think that this is a betrayal of what the government said that they were going to do when they were campaigning. I think that they said that they were going to be fair and reasonable. I think bringing in a bill like this is not fair. It's not reasonable. It is certainly a way of squeezing power. Really, not just power from the folks that are going to be impacted by this, but it's squeezing power from caucus, to be quite frank. I doubt that a bunch of you went into your first caucus meeting and said: I think we should bring in closure and talk about potentially rolling back public-sector contracts.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Mr. Bilous: Seeing the time and the healthy debate that's happened this evening, I move that we adjourn for the evening until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members. Hon. members, the Speaker is on his feet. Hon. members. [interjection] Member for Edmonton-North West, surely we wouldn't be making such inappropriate comments.

[Motion to adjourn lost]

Bill 9 Public Sector Wage Arbitration Deferral Act (continued)

Mr. Dang: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: A point of order has been called.

Point of Order Explanation of Speaker's Ruling

Mr. Dang: Under 13(2), Mr. Speaker, to explain a ruling of the Speaker. I believe the Assembly had just decided to actually adjourn debate on this bill. I'd like to know why the Assembly is allowed to then return immediately. The decision has already been made by the Assembly, and you would not be able to retract the decision of the Assembly without unanimous consent.

The Speaker: I appreciate the comments from the hon. Member for Edmonton-South. However, the Speaker didn't make a ruling. The government sets the order in which we are debating, and as such the table has called Bill 9.

Debate Continued

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has one minute of debate remaining should she choose to continue.

Ms Hoffman: Oh. All sorts of transformational things I'm sure can be said in that one minute. Let me start by saying how much I appreciate the last few seconds there, seeing how the Government House Leader is treating the caucus that's made a decision to adjourn debate on this item.

That being said, I'd like to move that we adjourn debate on this motion since I still seem to have 30 seconds. Can we reconsider that, Mr. Speaker? I think it's probably in order.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion to adjourn debate lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 1:29 a.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Bilous	Eggen	Nielsen
Carson	Goehring	Pancholi
Dang	Gray	Renaud
Deol	Hoffman	Shepherd

Against the motion:

Allard	LaGrange	Pon
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Loewen	Reid
Copping	Long	Schow
Getson	Nally	Shandro
Glubish	Neudorf	Toews
Goodridge	Nicolaides	Toor
Gotfried	Nixon, Jason	Turton
Guthrie	Nixon, Jeremy	van Dijken
Issik	Panda	Yao
Jones	Pitt	Yaseen

Totals:	For – 12	Against – 30
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[Motion to adjourn debate lost]

Speaker's Ruling

Debate on Second Reading

The Speaker: Hon. members, if I might just add a brief Speaker's comment with respect to the procedural activities of the last 20 minutes or so and with respect to the Member for Edmonton-South's question. One of the reasons why we were able to continue debate on Bill 9 without moving to another piece of legislation that would be before the Assembly is that the Assembly considered an additional question in the intervening time period. We had initially adjourned debate, and then we considered the question on adjourning the House. That question was defeated, and as such, it would be reasonable to call Bill 9 again. That is exactly where we find ourselves.

Debate Continued

The Speaker: Is there anyone wishing to debate? The hon. member.

Mr. Dang: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I do see a point of order being called.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm seeing all kinds of procedural things that I've never ever seen before. I'm writing a journal, and it's going to be great.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, I think, had some interesting insights in regard to negotiating in good faith, and the key to that – and it's a lesson that I learned as well in the previous four years – is that you move with the presumption of full disclosure and without any presumption besides what is being brought to the table. You know, when negotiating in good faith like that, you can get all kinds of interesting insights on how to improve the quality of the work that's being done in any given workplace, be it a hospital, a long-term care facility, a school, working in almost any part of the public sector. The workers, who know best – they have their ears to the ground and are actually executing the job every day – will have all sorts of high-quality suggestions, that you can even

potentially put into a contract, that make life better for everyone who is using a hospital or a school and so forth.

So I just wanted, you know, to perhaps jog the memory of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora about some of those things that you can negotiate for and that we have negotiated for and that have actually improved the service that the workers and the government are responsible for when we enter into these agreements, thus doing your job better as a government and with people feeling happier about the jobs that they're doing and their quality service for the kids or the people that might be in a hospital, for example. If you could perhaps enlighten us as to some of those things that you've seen, I would be grateful.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. I'm actually going to start on one that I saw under his leadership because I happen to sit on the public-sector compensation committee. He brought forward a recommendation around the classroom improvement fund. [interjection] What? What a great, brilliant idea: let's create a fund. Teachers sat down and said, "You know, we'd like to create a fund to increase opportunities for things like split classes or increased educational assistant support or increased technology, other things that will improve our classroom working conditions," because teachers' working conditions are kids' learning conditions. That was certainly an example of something that I think was creative. It certainly didn't have a net individual benefit to teachers' pockets, but it definitely did have a benefit to their working conditions and kids' learning conditions. That is one example.

1:50

Another one I'll mention: in working with physicians, we developed what used to be RPAP. It was the rural physician action plan, and we expanded it to be the rural health practitioner action plan, expanding the mandate from not just being about one profession. Of course, attracting physicians is great, but if you don't have all the other allied health and nursing supports and complementary health supports, you aren't going to be able to keep those doctors for very long. That was something that we discussed at the table, and we came up with a strategy to expand the mandate for RPAP, and RPAP was certainly willing to pick up that cause and carry it forward with us.

Also, we had negotiations, of course, with nurses, registered nurses as well as LPNs, as well as with exempt hospital staff. Some of the people who are exempt, for example, are the folks who are usually in the basement of hospitals. Medical device reprocessing they call it; they're cleaning the equipment that's used in that hospital to ensure the safety of patients. We saw years ago – it was in Vegreville, actually – where the equipment wasn't maintained, and there ended up being a terrible situation that resulted in putting patients at risk. We, through those conversations with folks that are exempt, made it a priority to invest in helping to bring those medical device reprocessing units, their equipment and their workspaces, up to an appropriate standard. Of course, it was important for patient safety, but it also is important for showing respect and supporting the morale of the people working in those areas as well, certainly areas that you don't always think about in the hospital as being important, but absolutely every member of that team is, and they deserve to have an opportunity to reach an agreement with their employer.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others wishing to speak? I see the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise tonight, or this morning, depending on how you look at it, to talk on Bill 9, the bad-faith bargaining bill. I'm just really disappointed at kind of what's been going on in the House tonight. Having the government invoke closure to stop debate on this legislation after one speaker is just one more way that they are coming after front-line workers in the province. Not only are they breaking the law with this legislation, but they're abusing their power, and that's something that we continue to see over and over from this government.

I can speak to it first-hand when we found out through the media that they were stopping the working of the Conversion Therapy Working Group, a decision that had been made. Then when the media reported on this, the minister had said: no; that's not accurate. So, you know, there was some hope that perhaps the government was going to go back on that bad decision and consider the working group. That didn't happen, Mr. Speaker. They made a decision. They didn't consult with people on that decision. They just came forward and said: no; this is what we're doing. Again, this is something that we see this government doing. They make decisions based on what they want to do, without consultation.

Some other things that they've done in the House because they wanted to was all of the standing order changes, Mr. Speaker. They've taken tradition in this Assembly and just disregarded it. Why? Because they could. They have the power, and they're showing us and Albertans that they're going to use it.

When we look at this legislation, it's quite concerning that they are taking this away from the unions, the right to bargain. We've heard from several union leaders, Mr. Speaker, about their feelings on this legislation, and I would just like to share with you some of the things that are being said. We've heard words like "egregious," "disrespectful," "authoritarian," and "the biggest betrayal by government that I have ever seen." It's concerning.

We have leaders in our province who would enter into bargaining in good faith with the hopes that they would be able to sit down and come up with an agreement. Unfortunately, that's not happening, Mr. Speaker. They're using this legislation to break legally binding contracts, and that's simply bargaining in bad faith.

We have over 180,000 workers that this is going to impact. Who are those workers, Mr. Speaker? Front-line nurses, social workers, teachers, librarians, food inspectors, child mental health therapists, long-term care workers, corrections officers, sheriffs, and so many more. The fact that they're bringing back this old Conservative bullying tactic is just so disrespectful to our front-line workers. I'm not sure what the fear is around sitting around a table with a bunch of big, bad social workers or, you know, those terrifying child mental health therapists, long-term care workers, but what they're doing is that they're creating just an unsettling feeling right now in labour.

Our labour leaders are speaking out about their concerns. Gil McGowan, the president of the Alberta Federation of Labour, said: raving mad reviews as public-sector union leaders call Jason Kenney – sorry – and the UCP's Bill 9 one of the most egregious abuses of power by a government ever seen in Alberta's history. Bill 9, the bad-faith bargaining bill, will see Alberta break its own laws by overriding 24 collective agreements, representing 180,000 public-sector workers, and delaying wage talks until October 31, 2019. This is not about postponing the process; this is a bully bill. They are using the power of their majority in government to break legally binding contracts. It's unfair, inappropriate, and illegal.

Guy Smith, the president of the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees – that was my union, Mr. Speaker – says that this is an egregious attack on workers' rights and legally binding collective agreements. This is authoritarian. This is ideological, and it does nothing but create labour unrest. Albertans should be very

concerned when a new government uses the power and authority of the state to crush basic rights. That is exactly what's happening with this legislation, and the fact that closure has been invoked and is preventing full debate of this is really concerning.

Heather Smith, the president of the United Nurses of Alberta, says: I'm not terribly surprised, but I'm very, very disappointed; even Ralph Klein in the depths and darkness of the '90s didn't use legislation to reach in and violate workers' contracts; this is incredibly unprecedented and incredibly disappointing; it's the biggest betrayal by a government I have ever seen.

These are words of our leadership in our unions that are representing our workers, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to just go through some of these collective agreements that are being affected, Mr. Speaker, to maybe put a face to some of these workers that they are bringing this heavy hammer down on. I'm not sure if that's going to have an impact on the government or not, but maybe if they can identify who some of these people are that they haven't consulted with, it'll have an impact. I know, members of the government, that some of these people are in your communities.

The Alberta College of Art and Design and AUPE: a collective agreement between the board of governors of the Alberta College of Art and Design and the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, local 071/006, July 1, 2017, to June 30, 2020.

Another AUPE and Alberta Health Services, Lamont health care centre, Allen Gray continuing care centre: a collective agreement between the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees – that's auxiliary nursing – and Alberta Health Services and Lamont health care centre and Allen Gray continuing care centre, April 1, 2017, to March 31, 2020.

AUPE again and Alberta Health Services: the collective agreement between Alberta Health Services and the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, general support services, April 1, 2017, to March 31, 2020.

HSAA and Alberta Health Services, Covenant Health, Lamont centre: a collective agreement between the Health Sciences Association of Alberta, paramedical professional and technical employees, and the Bethany nursing home of Camrose, Alberta, and the Lamont health care centre and Alberta Health Services, April 1, 2017, to March 31, 2020.

UNA, Alberta Health Services: collective agreement between Alberta Health Services, Covenant Health, Lamont health care centre, the Bethany Group out of Camrose, and the United Nurses of Alberta, April 1, 2017, to March 31, 2020.

2:00

AUPE, Alberta Innovates: collective agreement between Alberta Innovates and the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, local 060, October 1, 2017, to September 30, 2020.

Athabasca University, AUPE: collective agreement between the governors of Athabasca University and the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees on behalf of local 069, July 1, 2017, to June 30, 2020.

Bow Valley College, Bow Valley College Faculty Association: collective agreement between the board of governors of Bow Valley College and the Bow Valley College Faculty Association, July 1, 2017, to June 30, 2020.

CUPE, a union that I belonged to. It was my very first union, Mr. Speaker, that I was involved with. It was a union that was brought in while I was working in a nonprofit. Unfortunately, we've heard stories in this House before about employers trying to stop unions, and there were definitely some bullying tactics that went on to try and prevent us from bringing the union in. A staff member got fired, actually, for bringing that legislation in. I can say that she went from

working as a child support worker to now being a labour law lawyer because of how she was treated by the employer when she tried to bring in a union.

It's just devastating to know that this government is attacking unions. They're doing the same thing that employers do when they feel that there's a threat or they feel that they're doing something they don't want. They just come in, use their power, and try and make workers' lives as miserable and uncomfortable as possible, and that's exactly what's happening right now. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that workers all across this province are feeling really unsettled and just distressed about what's happening right now. But I digress.

I'd like to continue to try and talk about some of the other agreements that are being impacted. The Calgary board of education, CUPE: Calgary board of education agreement between the board of trustees of the Calgary board of education and the Canadian Union of Public Employees, local 040, September 1, 2017, to August 31, 2020.

Fort McMurray Catholic board of education, CUPE: collective agreement between the Fort McMurray Catholic board of education and the Canadian Union of Public Employees, local 2559, September 1, 2017, to August 31, 2020.

AUPE, the government of the province of Alberta, which I was a member of, Mr. Speaker: master agreement between the government of the province of Alberta and the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, November 4, 2018, to March 31, 2020.

InnoTech Alberta, AUPE: collective agreement between InnoTech Alberta and the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, local 060, October 1, 2017, to September 30, 2020.

Keyano College, Keyano College Faculty Association: collective agreement between the board of governors of Keyano College and the Keyano College Faculty Association, July 1, 2017, to June 30, 2020.

Lakeland College, AUPE: collective agreement between the board of governors of Lakeland College and the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, representing local 071, chapter 004, July 1, 2017, to June 30, 2020.

Lethbridge College, AUPE: collective agreement between the board of governors of Lethbridge College and the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees on behalf of local 071/001, July 1, 2017, to June 30, 2020.

Northern Alberta Institute of Technology, AUPE: collective agreement between the board of governors of the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology and the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, local 038, July 1, 2017, to June 30, 2020.

Northern Lakes College, AUPE: collective agreement between the board of governors of Northern Lakes College and the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, local 071, chapter 009, July 1, 2017, to June 30, 2020.

NorQuest College, AUPE: collective agreement between NorQuest College and the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, local 071, chapter 010, July 1, 2017, to June 30, 2020.

Olds College, AUPE: collective agreement between the board of governors of Olds College and the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, local 071, chapter 002, July 1, 2017, to June 30, 2020.

Red Deer College, AUPE: collective agreement between Red Deer College and the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, local 071, chapter 014, July 1, 2017, to June 30, 2020.

Southern Alberta Institute of Technology, SAIT Academic Faculty Association: collective agreement between the board of governors of the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT) and the SAIT Academic Faculty Association, July 1, 2017, to June 30, 2020.

With that, I move that we adjourn the House. Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion to adjourn lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 2:07 a.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Bilous	Eggen	Nielsen
Carson	Goehring	Pancholi
Dang	Hoffman	Renaud
Deol		

Against the motion:

Allard	Jones	Pon
Armstrong-Homeniuk	LaGrange	Reid
Copping	Loewen	Schow
Getson	Long	Shandro
Glubish	Neudorf	Toews
Goodridge	Nicolaides	Toor
Gotfried	Nixon, Jason	Turton
Guthrie	Nixon, Jeremy	Yao
Issik	Panda	Yaseen

Totals:	For – 10	Against – 27
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[Motion to adjourn lost]

The Speaker: We are on the bill. Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for anyone wishing to make a brief comment or question. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora rising.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have to say how excited I am for your next instalment of procedural video. I'm sure there will be much to say about the situation here tonight. Of course, one thing could be explaining to Albertans how government brings in closure or calls the previous question or the differences between closure and call the previous question. That certainly would be a stimulating conversation, I'm sure, for a video.

The Speaker: Hon. member, while I appreciate your enthusiasm for the videos, I'm not entirely sure how that particular question or comment is relevant to the matter before the Assembly.

Ms Hoffman: Oh, I'll get there, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much. Certainly, I think understanding and explaining to the general public about some of the procedures that the Government House Leader chose to bring in tonight to try to make sure that this be time limited, of course, and stopping after just one speaker – I appreciate that the speaker for Edmonton-Castle Downs was going through some of the various collective agreements that are set to be impacted by the bad-faith bargaining bill, a bill to run roughshod to break the law. Mr. Speaker, I know that when she was going through it, I was thinking about some of the people I know who studied at ACAD and worked at ACAD. One was in the Minister of Advanced Education's riding, I believe. I remember going to a restaurant and the person who was serving the table talking about how she was a prof at ACAD and was so excited that we were moving it towards university status. So I want to thank the member for bringing up that example. It's interesting that not only is her pay likely going to be impacted by this piece of legislation but could very well be impacted by other pieces of legislation that the government is talking about bringing forward, potentially, around server wages and those types of things.

You know, these are, as the member said, not usually people that you expect a government to be scared to sit down and talk to, right?

This was a very pleasant, fantastic server who taught art by day and served tables by night. She is represented by a bargaining unit that made a deal in good faith to take zeros for many years in return for being able to sit back down at the table, no commitment to there being necessarily an increase but a commitment to sitting back down at the table. What's being proposed here tonight, of course, is to take away her right to fair representation and good-faith bargaining. So very troubling. I want to thank the member for mentioning that one example.

I wonder if there are any other collective agreements. It seems like most of them as well, I want to say, expire in about a year. These are collective agreements that aren't, you know, going on indefinitely throughout the term of this government and into another government. This is the term. Most of them are up in about a year. I wonder if the hon. member could share any other examples and if there are any other trends that she's noticing from going through these collective agreements.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'm disappointed that we didn't win that vote. I thought we were close, but we were not. I am delighted, however, to continue to share some of the other collective agreements that are going to be impacted by this legislation, the public sector bad-faith bargaining bill, Bill 9.

I believe that I started to talk about SAIT and their academic faculty association. The collective agreement between the board of governors of the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology, also known as SAIT, and the SAIT Academic Faculty Association: July 1, 2017, to June 30, 2020.

The ATA, Mr. Speaker, which is across the entire province, and the Teachers' Employer Bargaining Association. The central agreement between the Alberta Teachers' Association and the Teachers' Employer Bargaining Association: September 1, 2018, to August 31, 2020.

The University of Calgary and the Faculty Association of the University of Calgary. Collective agreement between the Faculty Association of the University of Calgary and the governors of the University of Calgary: July 1, 2019, to June 20, 2020.

The University of Lethbridge, Mr. Speaker, and the AUPE. Collective agreement between the governors of the University of Lethbridge and the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees on behalf of local 53: July 1, 2017, to June 30, 2020.

Mr. Speaker, those are the hard-working Albertans that are going to be impacted. Like I've said and so many other members in the House, that's 180,000 workers – front-line nurses, social workers, teachers, librarians – that are all going to be impacted. I hope that we do not support this bill.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I do share the opinion of the Member for Edmonton-Glenora when she highlighted the fact that there are lots of procedural activities that have taken place here, and perhaps a video by the Speaker identifying the tools that the government has as well as maybe some that the opposition has also used this evening or procedural tools at everyone's disposal for each of their advantage.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud is rising.

2:30

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is my first time being in the House when closure has been invoked, and I have to admit – it's now been about two and a half hours since that took place – as

I imagine was the intent behind the action by the Government House Leader, that I was quite shocked. I was quite surprised.

I remember having a conversation with a constituent recently where they asked me about debates and filibustering and how it works, and I said: oh, you know, there's always the option for a government to shut down debate by invoking closure, but that rarely happens because that is the antithesis of the democratic process. I actually just had that conversation, and now, well, I guess we're seeing how the next four years are going to look because this government brought in closure after hearing one member of the opposition caucus speak in opposition to this bill.

I admit to having – like many of the members in this House, I'm a new member, and I'm learning the ropes, and I'm watching what's going on. I'm relying on my colleagues who are more experienced and are veterans, but I think I'm learning. I came in and I thought: I have a pretty good understanding of how the Legislature works. I've had the privilege of working in public service. I've had the privilege of supporting, working on bills that have gone through this House. I worked in a constituency office before. I've read *Hansard*. By all accounts I'm a pretty knowledgeable person about the process of what happens in this Legislature, yet I have been completely astounded by what I can only describe as an absolute contempt for the democratic process from this government. From the beginning I kept thinking: "Well, this is just one thing. This is just one thing. This is just one thing." But a pattern is clearly established.

More than anything, when I came in here two and a half hours ago, when closure was invoked by this government, I sat here and I felt like I was looking at the members on the opposite side, wondering if they felt the same shock that I did. Maybe they knew it was coming; maybe they didn't. But at the end of the day, this is setting a tone once again about the rights and privileges that we as members in this House have. We have already seen those rights as members be chipped away. We no longer get to introduce our families in the House. Private members' bills automatically get diverted to a committee first.

We've seen the opportunity – well, frankly, I haven't heard from most of my colleagues on the other side of the House. They certainly don't feel compelled to speak to the legislation that's been introduced by their government. They don't stand up and debate. We've seen many occasions where many members on the other side who sit in the cabinet, on the front bench, don't answer the questions they're asked. Other people answer them for them. Frankly, I don't really know a lot about a lot of the members on the other side because we don't hear them speak very much, and now we're finding out that this government is actually, clearly invoking closure and thinking that, I guess, maybe the very act of democratic debate is no longer necessary in this House.

I certainly found it amusing to hear that the Government House Leader's rationale was because this is only delaying, you know, the implementation of the arbitration hearings and these collective agreements by four months, right? Therefore, breaking collective agreements, breaking the law, bargaining in bad faith: that's no big deal; we don't need to debate that. What I'm actually sensing more and more is that there is a real contempt for the process but also for other views in this House, and I'm deeply troubled by that.

I think that we've made some statements in this House already about how there appears to be a sense from the members on the other side that because they won an election – by the way, this party won an election four years ago as well. Nobody holds the righteousness on being government. Most importantly, what happens is that you don't have 87 seats in this House. You don't. That's actually just – I think you're supposed to be good at math.

You're supposed to be good at crunching the numbers. If you had won all 87 seats, you wouldn't be listening to us tonight.

I already know that some of the members are pretty irritated about having to listen to us tonight. I know that we saw – two weeks ago, when this opposition caucus stood up to defend workers, particularly young workers but a lot of workers who are not having their voice heard, on Bill 2, all we heard was a lot of complaining about the filibuster. Again, I thought this was a government party and a caucus that are supposed to be about hard work, but when they actually have to do their jobs, we hear complaints. Well, I have a job, and I know what my job is, and I stand up here to do it.

But I think that even when I'm doing what I'm supposed to be doing, the government is trying to silence my voice, trying to silence your voices, because that's been the theme. That has been the theme. There is one mandate that's going around, and that's what the Government House Leader and – I don't know who makes the decisions over there; I can only guess. But the theme is: let's shut down the democratic process. Frankly, I'm quite shocked.

I was hoping, when I came in and looked at the members on the other side, that some of them would be a little bit shocked by what happened as well. I'm not sure if that's the case. Like I said, I don't feel like I have a sense that I know a lot of the members on the other side because I haven't heard them speak a lot. I think you're getting a good sense of who all of us are because we're talking an awful lot. I don't know if you're shocked, but you should be. At the end of the day, you were elected by voters to do a job, and that job is to actually debate – it's not to impose, it's not to bring in a fiat, it's not to just simply say that this is the way it's going to happen – because you don't have 87 seats.

Even if you're not in the opposition and you don't have to debate it, I sure hope you know it. I sure hope you know what your government is doing. I sure hope you know the bills that you're passing, that you're imposing. I don't know if you know it because, frankly, I hear nothing. That's just my shock about what's happened tonight in terms of the democratic process. I'm happy to stay up all night and do the work that's important, that I've been elected to do, and to debate, and I'm shocked to hear that the members on the other side don't even feel that that's important. More importantly, I think Albertans will be shocked. They will hear about it. We know that they're already hearing about it, and they'll have their say about that.

Now, on to Bill 9, the bad-faith bargaining act. I do want to say that I think the most important thing to keep in mind, that this government has been doing effectively – and I think they laid the groundwork for this even early on in the campaign – is that they're trying to paint unions and people who are union members as something other than what they are, which is Albertans. People who are part of unions are Albertan workers, and I don't know why their jobs and their work is so undervalued by this government.

I've talked about this before in this House. When I was door-knocking in my riding, a lot of people were two-income families. One member might have been affected by the drop in oil prices – they were in oil and gas or related industries somehow, and they were affected – and the other member of that household was often a public-sector worker. I'm sure that many of your families and many of your friends are public-sector workers. They are not a monolithic union. They are individual employees. They are Albertans who are doing work. For some reason this government seems to have an incredible lack of value for the work that they do.

When the economy went down, when international oil prices dropped – that's why the economy went down, and you should know that because it happened to previous Conservative governments before. When that happened, this government made a

choice. The Member for Edmonton-North West did a fantastic job of talking about the decision. It was a difficult decision to make, but the decision was made by the NDP government to not also further punish Albertans by destroying their public services.

We've already seen that this government seems to be taking an approach of devaluing the service, the public services themselves, by cutting the revenue sources to provide those services at a high quality, whether it be education or health care. Now they've made it abundantly clear, if they haven't already, that they also do not value the Albertans who provide those services.

I'm just completely astounded, because we've got to remember that these are human beings. We're talking about collective agreements. We're talking about wage arbitrations. It can get very easy to get caught up in the rhetoric around that, but these are people who already have not taken an increase for more than four years. They are people who still continue to provide high-quality services to our families, to all of us during an economic downturn. They are sometimes people who were responsible for continuing to support their households when somebody else in the household was affected by the drop in oil prices. These are people who are – we've gone through the list: 180,000 workers, nurses, teachers. These are people we know. These are people who provide things, services that we desperately value and need.

There's such a cavalier approach from this government to negotiations with them. You know, I can put on my labour lawyer hat and say: this is the very definition of bad-faith bargaining. Basically, the bargaining process is driven into the ground when one party doesn't play by the rules. And you know what the rules are? The rules are the collective agreement. These were binding collective agreements on all the parties. There were provisions in there for a reason. If the parties can't trust each other, then it's going to collapse and we're going to see labour unrest.

That doesn't serve anybody because not only, again, does it hurt the workers; it also hurts the provision of services to Albertans. I'm just astounded by why this government seems just laser focused on destroying public services and the people who provide them. Don't we all benefit from those services? Don't we all benefit by having labour stability to make sure that those services are provided when we need them? This is already a shocking action, I believe, to undermine that good-faith relationship in bargaining, which is just going to cause more trouble for Albertans, but to do it in a such a way that it really undermines the democratic process: you know, it really disheartens me.

2:40

This is not why I ran for office. I ran for office because I wanted to represent the views of my constituents, and this government is trying to stop me from doing that. I think that's shameful, and I hope Albertans will hold this government to task for that because that's not what our jobs are. Maybe it's time, when you talk about your laser focus on jobs, that you worry about your own jobs, that you worry about how you're doing your job, because I know that we on this side of the House are standing up every day and doing our jobs really well. We are listening, we're doing the work, we're doing the research, we're representing people who are bringing their concerns to us, and we're talking about the other side of the issue. That's the job that we've been elected to do.

I don't see the other side doing their job. In fact, I see them trying to undermine their jobs. I wish you paid as much attention to your work as you do to trying to undermine the work of public-sector employees in this province, who are delivering the services we need and value.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone has a question or comment for the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Seeing none, is there anyone else wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for St. Albert has risen.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to stand up and talk about Bill 9, the bad-faith bargaining act. Obviously, as my other colleagues have said, this bill is a gross abuse of power and an attack on front-line workers. Although I'm hugely disappointed, I'm not terribly shocked that this government has invoked closure.

I think back to all of the rhetoric before and during the election, and one of the things that always made me laugh a little bit was the frequency that some of the members and, particularly, our now Premier were boasting about how important it was to be humble, just stay humble. Humble. You know, we're going to focus on democracy, do what's best for Alberta. This isn't what democracy looks like. You don't use your numbers and throw your weight around and shut people down and shut them up just so that you can manipulate what happens in this place. I keep count a little bit because every day people are talking about the size of their mandate, as mentioned before. Again, it's not really the size of the mandate but what you do with it. What you've done with it is really lame. You've shut it down because you are unwilling to hear what we're saying.

Let me talk a little bit about St. Albert. That's the community that I represent. Oddly enough, it is actually a fairly established community. It's a really old community. It's a community that invests in a lot of local services, and 1 in 4 St. Albertans are public-sector workers. They are workers like nurses, social workers, teachers, food inspectors, child mental health therapists, long-term care workers, correction officers, sheriffs, and so much more, disability workers. These are people that are the foundation of this province. These are the people that provide essential services to us every single day. These are the people that we rely on every single day.

This is the group that is squarely under attack. I mean, you can say that you're not, but all of the steps that you're taking, all of the things that you're introducing are very, very clear that that is exactly what you are doing. I guess I don't really understand when we're coming out of a time that we're recovering from a recession, when we are facing all kinds of challenges, and one of the first things that this government does is actually attack the workers that are the people that we rely on.

Let's talk about some of those people. There are all kinds of people that I'm talking about tonight. I'd just like to name them, actually, and talk about some of the workers that we rely on, that our kids rely on to provide services. I'd like to mention some of the staff that will be impacted at Albert Lacombe school. These are some of the folks that are going to be impacted, and I apologize in advance if I don't get their names quite right: the principal of Albert Lacombe, Ms Charlene Kushniruk; vice-principal, Mr. Duane Hayes. He's going to be impacted. You've invoked closure, so we don't get to debate fully this legislation that has the ability to impact their lives and our communities. Some of the admin support staff: Mrs. Jocelyn Sigurdson, Mrs. Karen Watts, also admin staff for Albert Lacombe. We have learning services: learning support facilitator Mrs. Leisa Michael.

Our school counsellor here at Albert Lacombe – school counsellors provide essential services, and they're going to be particularly important because of the legislation that this government is going to jam through, that will reduce the effectiveness and the privacy afforded kids that choose to join or

form QSAs and GSAs. School counsellors are really important. Ms Donna Nelson at Albert Lacombe school is going to be impacted.

Let's talk about the sports academy facilitator, Mr. Geoff Giacobbo, and sports academy staff: soccer, Mr. Marc Loiselle; health and fitness, Mr. Massimo Provenzano.

Performing arts: Miss Kimberly Kaplar.

Prekindergarten. Who doesn't think prekindergarten is vitally important? These teachers and these staff are going to be impacted: teacher, Ms Melissa Gibb; educational assistant Ms Heather Cummings.

Occupational therapists. Occupational therapy is vitally important in schools. Mrs. Susan Patterson and speech language pathologist Mrs. Nicole McDougall: really important. Speech language pathology is an incredibly important skill, and these are incredibly important support staff to have.

Then we've got kindergarten; so important: Mrs. Christine Field. I actually met her. She's amazing.

Grade 1: Mrs. Kristie Brahim, Miss Lesley Kenyon. Grade 1 is a really difficult grade to teach. Although I've never myself taught grade 1, I hear it is very difficult. These are people that are going to be impacted.

Grade 2: Mrs. Kerrie Fedunyk. Grade 3: K.T. Jacula, Mrs. Cynthia Osicki. Grade 4: Mrs. Lindsey Pratt. Grade 4 and 5 – I can imagine the challenge of a blended classroom, not easy – Ms Leah Kres. Grade 5: Mrs. Caitlin Nobert. Grade 5/6 split – another very challenging class, I'm sure, as the hormones are raging at that time; I'm assuming they're starting – Mrs. Brianne Tworek, Miss Kim Kaplar. Grade 6, Miss Candace Leis.

Then the librarian – vitally important; kids need librarians – Mrs. Catherine Crothers.

Educational assistants. Now, these are particularly important. Although we have not seen this government's budget yet, we can only imagine. When school boards make cuts because of cuts passed on to them by the government, it is very often things like educational assistants that are the first to go. In a classroom that is packed because perhaps the government is not funding it adequately, educational assistants are not only important to support students that don't have challenges, but in order for inclusive classrooms to really be functional, educational assistants are vital. Especially in Albert Lacombe school they're incredibly vital. Educational assistants in that school currently are Mrs. Rhonda Armstrong, Miss Megan Atkinson, Mrs. Lynne Clayton Newton, Ms Heather Cummings, Mrs. Catherine Crothers, Mrs. Alison Giesbrecht, Mrs. Anna Wallace, and Mrs. Karen Webb. This is a group that will be directly impacted by changes.

2:50

I guess one of the other things that really is so funny to me – well, not funny; it's really weird, actually – is that this is a government that's so willing to take big risks and just plunge right in to do something like blow a \$4.5 billion hole in our budget so that they can give already-profitable corporations a huge tax break, yet they want to slow everything else down because they're not quite sure. They're not quite sure what their little panel is going to decide to cut, and they want to really look at where they're going to save. Let's be honest; we all know where that's going. That's going to be cuts to public-sector workers. That's fairly clear. This invoking closure is just one more signal to this group that, yeah, that's going to happen. If we didn't have enough hints already, this is a pretty good hint. First it was about how we're not allowed to introduce our own guests in this place. Then it was: well, no, we don't want you thumping; we'd rather have you clap. And then private members' bills: we don't want to discuss them here without a committee

dealing with them, so let's introduce more delays. If we didn't have enough signs, we do now.

An Hon. Member: More consultation.

Ms Renaud: Excuse me? You should stand up and speak if you have – yeah.

Let's look at another school: Bertha Kennedy, which is a St. Albert Catholic school. You guys will like this . . .

Speaker's Ruling
Repetition
Relevance

The Speaker: Member, I might just provide some brief commentary, as I would imagine that we are very close to the end of the evening. I think it is important that we are reminded about the rule of repetition and also the rule of relevance. I'm happy to provide some significant citations around that, but given the hour perhaps the member will just take my word for it and maybe not read significant lists to make your point. I'm happy to provide the context if you want, which is very clear here, but in the name of saving some time here, perhaps we might move on.

Debate Continued

Ms Renaud: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Given the fact that 1 in 4 in St. Albert, in my constituency, are public-sector workers, I just felt that it was really important to name some of those people. Not that I can prove that they live there, but they do work there.

I'd like to talk about Bertha Kennedy Catholic school, some of the administration staff. Clearly, these are people that work really hard and don't get a lot of glory. Goodness knows they don't get a lot of pay, contrary to what this government might think, but these are important staff members. Let's talk about Mrs. Anna-Lisa Doll, Mrs. Cindy Pereira, and then of course there is office support staff, librarians, learning support facilitators, and of course the ever-important counsellor. We've got Mrs. Shelley Sadownyk, Miss Maria Pearson, Mrs. Kristi Sware, Mrs. Josie Cancian, Ms Donna Nelson. These are all vital support staff at Bertha Kennedy.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Agreed. Very important.

Ms Renaud: Some of our teachers – which is really interesting. I hear from the other side agreeing that these are really important people, yet they've invoked closure on a bill that has the potential to cause a lot of harm and a lot of damage. This is not in good faith. Not at all. We understand what you're doing.

Let's talk about those teachers that are going to be impacted. Mrs. Kelly Raypold; she's prekindergarten in the a.m., which is not an easy class to do, and kindergarten; p.m. kindergarten is Miss Katherine Watson. Again, not an easy class. We've got the second a.m. kindergarten: Miss Laura Van Hoof. Full-day progressive kindergarten – twice as difficult – Mrs. Julie Bolduc. We've got grade 1B: Mr. Raphael Bonot. We've got grade 2A: Mrs. Dolores Andressen. I might add that Mrs. Dolores Andressen is a woman who also lives in St. Albert, just walking distance from Bertha Kennedy, and she and her husband are quite lovely. I just wanted to add that. Grade 2F: we've got Miss Kylie Field. Mrs. Heather Flynn is doing grade 3R. Mrs. Nina Rawcliffe: grade 4R. Grade 4/5 split – again, not an easy class – Miss Karen Armitage. Grades 5 and 6: Mrs. Debra Kaplar. Grade 6, just straight grade 6: Mr. Curt

McDougall; nice to see a nice blend there, male and female. And then we've got the ever-important music teacher, Mrs. Elaine Groenenboom.

Educational assistants. Once more let me say that these educational assistants are absolutely vital to the health of any classroom and, of course, to the success of inclusion. Contrary to what people might think, inclusion just doesn't happen in clubs. Inclusion takes a lot of effort, and it requires appropriate staffing. That requires appropriate funding, and appropriate funding requires some security to know that you can count on that funding being there. Let me tell you that this kind of work as an educational assistant, particularly in a class where you perhaps have students with disabilities, is not an easy job whatsoever, and it requires a lot of skill. More than anything, you don't want to lose the staff that are doing this job, so retention is always key.

One of the things that I learned when I managed an organization that had a couple of hundred staff was that we had to work at retention. We had to do everything that we could to ensure that we would keep the staff, the good staff, the great staff, that were dedicating themselves to their jobs. We had to do everything that we could to retain them. One of the most important things, contrary to what people might think, was that pay was close to the top but it was job security. It was knowing that they would have a job, that they would be able to count on perhaps a small cost-of-living increase, that they would have good benefits, that they would know their colleagues would also be there, but it was about retention and about security and safety.

I'm sorry. When you have a government that comes barging in – of course, they do talk a lot about their large mandate and their ability to just blow through all kinds of legislation. When they look at this government and they see instantly that although they campaigned on jobs, pipeline, economy, what they're actually doing is taking an aim at working people. These are the people that actually need our protection and our thanks and our support, not to target them because they're public-sector workers. You know, we've heard all kinds of rhetoric from the other side about public-sector workers.

The Speaker: Before we proceed to 29(2)(a), I might just caution the hon. Member for St. Albert. Finally, the rule against repetition has been used by Speakers in various other ways to assist the House in making effective use of its time. Speakers have ruled against the tenuous reading of letters or lists even when they're used in support of their argument. Perhaps she might heed my advice in the future.

Hon members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, is there anyone else wishing to speak to debate of Bill 9? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East is rising.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, thank you to all members of the House. Another good day. Progress all over the place. I love it. As such, I will adjourn until 1:30 tomorrow, where I anticipate we'll get more progress.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 2:59 a.m. on Tuesday]

Table of Contents

Transmittal of Estimates	847
Government Motions.....	847
Government Bills and Orders	
Second Reading	
Bill 10 Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2019	847
Bill 8 Education Amendment Act, 2019.....	848
Division	862
Bill 9 Public Sector Wage Arbitration Deferral Act.....	874, 884
Division	884
Division	887

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