



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature  
First Session

# Alberta Hansard

Monday evening, June 24, 2019

Day 18

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

**Legislative Assembly of Alberta**  
**The 30th Legislature**

First Session

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UCP), Speaker  
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UCP), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees  
Milliken, Nicholas, Calgary-Currie (UCP), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Allard, Tracy L., Grande Prairie (UCP)  
Amery, Mickey K., Calgary-Cross (UCP)  
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Jackie,  
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Official Opposition House Leader  
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Ceci, Joe, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)  
Copping, Hon. Jason C., Calgary-Varsity (UCP)  
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)  
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (NDP)  
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)  
Dreeschen, Hon. Devin, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UCP)  
Eggen, David, Edmonton-North West (NDP),  
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Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (UCP),  
Government Whip  
Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)  
Fir, Hon. Tanya, Calgary-Peigan (UCP)  
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Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UCP)  
Glasgo, Michaela L., Brooks-Medicine Hat (UCP)  
Glubish, Hon. Nate, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UCP)  
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)  
Goodridge, Laila, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche (UCP)  
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Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP)  
Guthrie, Peter F., Airdrie-Cochrane (UCP)  
Hanson, David B., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UCP)  
Hoffman, Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)  
Horner, Nate S., Drumheller-Stettler (UCP)  
Hunter, Hon. Grant R., Taber-Warner (UCP)  
Irwin, Janis, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP),  
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Issik, Whitney, Calgary-Glenmore (UCP)  
Jones, Matt, Calgary-South East (UCP)  
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Premier  
LaGrange, Hon. Adriana, Red Deer-North (UCP)  
Loewen, Todd, Central Peace-Notley (UCP)  
Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UCP)  
Lovely, Jacqueline, Camrose (UCP)  
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)  
Luan, Hon. Jason, Calgary-Foothills (UCP)  
Madu, Hon. Kaycee, Edmonton-South West (UCP)  
McIver, Hon. Ric, Calgary-Hays (UCP),  
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Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (NDP)  
Nixon, Hon. Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre  
(UCP), Government House Leader  
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Orr, Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (UCP)  
Pancholi, Rakhi, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)  
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Phillips, Shannon, Lethbridge-West (NDP)  
Pon, Hon. Josephine, Calgary-Beddington (UCP)  
Rehn, Pat, Lesser Slave Lake (UCP)  
Reid, Roger W., Livingstone-Macleod (UCP)  
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)  
Rosin, Miranda D., Banff-Kananaskis (UCP)  
Rowswell, Garth, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright (UCP)  
Rutherford, Brad, Leduc-Beaumont (UCP)  
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Deputy Government House Leader  
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Schow, Joseph R., Cardston-Siksika (UCP),  
Deputy Government Whip  
Schulz, Hon. Rebecca, Calgary-Shaw (UCP)  
Schweitzer, Hon. Doug, Calgary-Elbow (UCP),  
Deputy Government House Leader  
Shandro, Hon. Tyler, Calgary-Acadia (UCP)  
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-City Centre (NDP)  
Sigurdson, Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP)  
Sigurdson, R.J., Highwood (UCP)  
Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UCP)  
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (UCP)  
Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UCP)  
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP),  
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader  
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Toor, Devinder, Calgary-Falconridge (UCP)  
Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UCP)  
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UCP)  
Walker, Jordan, Sherwood Park (UCP)  
Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UCP)  
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UCP)  
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UCP)  
Yaseen, Muhammad, Calgary-North (UCP)

**Party standings:**

United Conservative: 63

New Democrat: 24

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Stephanie LeBlanc, Acting Law Clerk and Senior Parliamentary Counsel	Nancy Robert, Research Officer	Chris Caughell, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Trafton Koenig, Parliamentary Counsel	Janet Schwegel, Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>	Tom Bell, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms
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Jason Copping	Minister of Labour and Immigration
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Tanya Fir	Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism
Nate Glubish	Minister of Service Alberta
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Adriana LaGrange	Minister of Education
Jason Luan	Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions
Kaycee Madu	Minister of Municipal Affairs
Ric McIver	Minister of Transportation
Dale Nally	Associate Minister of Natural Gas
Demetrios Nicolaides	Minister of Advanced Education
Jason Nixon	Minister of Environment and Parks
Prasad Panda	Minister of Infrastructure
Josephine Pon	Minister of Seniors and Housing
Sonya Savage	Minister of Energy
Rajan Sawhney	Minister of Community and Social Services
Rebecca Schulz	Minister of Children's Services
Doug Schweitzer	Minister of Justice and Solicitor General
Tyler Shandro	Minister of Health
Travis Toews	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
Rick Wilson	Minister of Indigenous Relations

## **Parliamentary Secretary**

Laila Goodridge	Parliamentary Secretary Responsible for Alberta's Francophonie
Muhammad Yaseen	Parliamentary Secretary of Immigration

## STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

### **Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund**

Chair: Mr. Gotfried  
Deputy Chair: Mr. Orr

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Eggen  
Getson  
Glasgo  
Irwin  
Jones  
Nielsen

### **Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future**

Chair: Mr. van Dijken  
Deputy Chair: Ms Goehring

Allard  
Barnes  
Bilous  
Dach  
Dang  
Gray  
Horner  
Issik  
Jones  
Reid  
Rowswell  
Stephan  
Toor

### **Standing Committee on Families and Communities**

Chair: Ms Goodridge  
Deputy Chair: Ms Sigurdson

Amery  
Carson  
Ganley  
Glasgo  
Guthrie  
Irwin  
Long  
Neudorf  
Nixon, Jeremy  
Pancholi  
Rutherford  
Walker  
Yao

### **Standing Committee on Legislative Offices**

Chair: Mr. Ellis  
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schow

Goodridge  
Gray  
Lovely  
Nixon, Jeremy  
Rutherford  
Schmidt  
Shepherd  
Sigurdson, R.J.  
Sweet

### **Special Standing Committee on Members' Services**

Chair: Mr. Cooper  
Deputy Chair: Mr. Ellis

Armstrong-Homeniuk  
Dang  
Deol  
Goehring  
Goodridge  
Gotfried  
Long  
Sweet  
Williams

### **Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills**

Chair: Mr. Ellis  
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schow

Gotfried  
Horner  
Irwin  
Neudorf  
Nielsen  
Nixon, Jeremy  
Pancholi  
Sigurdson, L.  
Sigurdson, R.J.

### **Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing**

Chair: Mr. Smith  
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schow

Carson  
Deol  
Ganley  
Horner  
Issik  
Jones  
Loyola  
Neudorf  
Rehn  
Reid  
Renaud  
Turton  
Yao

### **Standing Committee on Public Accounts**

Chair: Ms Phillips  
Deputy Chair: Mr. Gotfried

Amery  
Barnes  
Dach  
Feehan  
Guthrie  
Hoffman  
Renaud  
Rosin  
Rowswell  
Stephan  
Toor  
Turton  
Walker

### **Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship**

Chair: Mr. Hanson  
Deputy Chair: Member Ceci

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Feehan  
Getson  
Loyola  
Rehn  
Rosin  
Sabir  
Schmidt  
Sigurdson, R.J.  
Singh  
Smith  
Turton  
Yaseen

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Monday, June 24, 2019

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

**The Deputy Speaker:** Good evening, everyone. Please be seated.

### Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

**The Chair:** I would like to call the committee to order.

#### Bill 5 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2019

**The Chair:** Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

**Mr. Feehan:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I just have a few questions that, hopefully, I can get some answers to for clarity on this. To give you some sense here in terms of our supplementary supply estimates that we received, on page 50, to give you a chance to find it, a couple of questions there.

The amount of \$24,324,200 is requested together with \$825,000 made available from lower than budgeted expenses and other programs to provide these monies. I am happy to go back and forth if the Minister of Finance would like to do that, or I can also just lay out a few questions and then stand up again, whatever is convenient for you. I'm just trying to get clarity.

My first question, then, would be about the \$18.5 million for the Lubicon land claim settlement. I'm just wanting to know if that signals the intention of the government to pay out the full land claim settlement in this term or if there's still some work that needs to be done before that land claim settlement will be completed. In other words, does this bring us to the final end of that land claim settlement, or are we just in a step process here? Would someone care to answer that now, or do you want me to ask a few questions first?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** You do know it's supplementary supply.

**Mr. Feehan:** Yeah. This is supplementary, right? For Bill 5, yeah.

**The Chair:** Hon. members, through the chair, please.

**Mr. Feehan:** Okay. Sorry. I'm just not getting an answer whether they want to answer now or later, so I'll go on with some of my questions.

Specifically within that expense, again, still on page 50, there is \$6,667,000 for consultation and land claims. My question. We had recently increased the amount of money provided to First Nations and Métis settlements in November of last year, 2018, an increase in monies available to them for consultation purposes. That was distributed on a six-level system across to the nations. Again, I'm asking something about the intent behind this money. Does this money reflect a continuation of the dollars that they were given in November 2018, and does this reflect an intention of the government to continue to extend those dollars to the nations over time or whether or not there's any plan to make changes on that?

I'll put out one third question now, and then I will sit down and see if I can get an answer, but I'm happy to rise again later to discuss any answers I might get. That is on page 51 of supplementary

supply, under the financial transactions vote, line 7.1, First Nations housing. I see, if I read this correctly, that \$33.3 million has been set aside for First Nations housing, and it appears that that is part of the 2013 Alberta flooding liability retirement. Perhaps we can just have some clarity. If I'm reading this correctly, the information I have is quite thin. I'm curious about the \$33.3 million because this money for the Alberta flood recovery has been spent, well, since 2013.

We know that we previously retired the flood recovery monies for the Stoney Nation after having gone through some fairly significant changes in terms of responding to their needs and the decision to shift who was actually doing the build and so on in their community. I know, if my memory is correct, that that money was resolved and retired previously and that the only monies that were left were monies for Siksika First Nation. That money was originally intended to be resolved by the end of September, but at the request of Siksika, who had made the decision to be the general managers of their own build and who had gone through some dramatic difficulties in getting their build done – obviously, we're talking here six years later, and they're still working on the build.

They had some sit-ins and other things that prevented them from proceeding and some disagreements as to whether or not the houses will be built again on the flood plain or whether they will be built up on the hill in the new community that was being built on the townsite, so that did lead to some delays. However, last year we had come to an agreement that they would attempt to finish it by September. We realized that was impossible – just, you know, the physical build time would not allow it – so my understanding was that that money was merely extended to the end of the year, to the end of December 2018.

If I remember correctly, because I don't have access to the documents that I did in those days, that amount of money would have only been about \$3 million, not \$33 million. It seems to me that somehow in this process flood recovery monies have jumped \$30 million over the last month, so I need to have some understanding and ask some questions about why the amount of money that's put into supplementary supply is so dramatically different than what was previously required by these communities.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Just a reminder to all members that we are in supplementary supply. There's a 20-minute block for any member that wishes to speak, and it's not really that back and forth as we have seen in other stages.

Are there any other speakers to the bill? The hon. Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

**Mr. Toews:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Again, I'd like to remind the member that these were amounts that the previous government spent, and this House has an obligation to approve the amounts in this appropriation bill. Again, the \$18.5 million was related to Lubicon land claim settlements, that, in fact, the previous government had expensed, and the \$6,667,000 was for additional consultation and land claims.

In terms of the question around the \$33,300,000 related to the Siksika Nation, those, again, were funds that the previous government spent, and it was the full amount related to, you know, repairing and rebuilding flood-affected homes in the nation.

**The Chair:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

**Mr. Feehan:** Thank you. I realize that this is money put in previously. But my questions are wondering partly about the intent of the government moving forward, and I just wanted to have some sense of that. With regard to the Siksika rebuild, which is the only

build left, I just wanted to ask: do you have any sense whether or not that build has in fact been finished now or whether or not we're still in the process of completing that build? It's just so that I can get a sense of whether this is something that's finished and accomplished or something that we need to pay attention to as we move forward into future budgets from this government.

7:40

**The Chair:** The Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Toews:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I expect the minister of indigenous affairs would be pleased to provide more information to the member with that specific question.

**The Chair:** The hon. Government House Leader.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

### Bill 6 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2019

**The Chair:** Are there any comments, questions, or amendments with respect to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

**Mr. Shepherd:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to rise today and continue debate on interim supply. We've had the opportunity to have a bit of discussion about some of the numbers that the government has brought forward, had some very fruitful discussion just the other week with the Minister of Infrastructure, and I thank him again for being quite forthcoming on a number of issues that were, I think, of assistance in our discussion. I've had the opportunity to talk some with the Minister of Health and may take that opportunity today to perhaps delve into a few other things that might be involved with some of the numbers that we're looking at there.

For Health, as I recall, we had an amount of just under \$14 billion that's being set aside. Now, we've had the opportunity to get a bit of a clear idea of where this government may be headed in terms of, I guess, that there's the capital spend that's there as well, and the government has made it clear that they, in fact, have decided to cancel the consolidation of the superlab, the Edmonton clinical lab hub, that our government was in the process of building. We know that in the process of doing so, then, they are forgoing about \$23 million that have been sunk into that construction so far. We are going to be looking at additional construction penalties and then costs to remediate the site. To either the Minister of Infrastructure or the Minister of Health: perhaps if they could let us know, then, that within the capital budget that's allotted currently for Health in interim supply, have they calculated any of those costs in as part of that amount?

**The Chair:** Any other hon. members wishing to speak? The hon. Minister of Health.

**Mr. Shandro:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Again, this is not a budget. This is the cash flow for the government to continue until a budget can be determined in the fall. I suppose, first, we can say that with the \$600 million, approximately, that was budgeted for the lab hub project, by that not going forward, those costs would have been budgeted within that amount unless I get any [inaudible]. I don't know if that helps the member with that question, but I'm happy to answer other questions that the member might have.

**The Chair:** Are there any other members? The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

**Mr. Shepherd:** Well, thank you to the Minister of Health for providing a bit of a comment on that. I appreciate that clarification. Recognizing that, as he noted, there was about \$600 million that our government had committed towards that and that, then, a portion of that would have been included in the capital spending for this year. Is the minister saying, then, that there would be a surplus in the capital amount allotted? If they were basing it and working off the numbers that we had put in place, it would have included any amounts, then, for that construction this year. That amount is no longer intended to be spent by this government. Are we looking, then, at a surplus in the capital budget for Health?

**The Chair:** Any members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Toews:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Again, I think I'll reiterate the fact that we've noted here, and that is that, again, interim supply is not a budget. It's simply the cash required to get us until budget time. We will be rolling out a fulsome budget in the fall. We'll look forward to full debate on that budget at that time.

**Mr. Shepherd:** I appreciate that answer from the minister, but I can say, Madam Chair, that I know that when we were on the other side of the aisle and some of the members that are now in the government were in the opposition, frankly, that was not an answer that they found acceptable. There were many times when I heard opposition members, who are now government members, rise in this House and point out that their constituents wanted to know how the government was spending their money, and to choose to simply put out a number and not provide any information or detail on that was, well, tantamount to a bit of an insult to those Albertans. I don't think the suggestion that government should be able to spend without scrutiny is one that these members would necessarily agree with.

Now, I recognize, again, that this is part of the process by which we go through and that part of the process is that these numbers are simply put forward, but the reason we're asking these questions, Madam Chair, is simply so that we can better understand some of the direction and intentions of the government, so I'll continue in hopes that we may be able to perhaps understand that a bit better.

One of this government's platform commitments, Madam Chair, was to undertake a full review of Alberta Health Services – we know that's been announced, that that is taking place – so the minister has announced that he intends to have that completed by the end of this year. I imagine that that would require some additional resources, some additional staff. I don't know if that's a third-party firm or someone else that's conducting that review, but it would be my assumption, then, that within this interim supply would be some dollars set aside for undertaking what should be a fairly substantial piece of work if they are in fact intending to do a full review of all aspects of AHS. To the minister: does this interim supply contain any dollars? Can you give us any sense of how that review is taking place?

**The Chair:** The hon. Minister of Health.

**Mr. Shandro:** Thank you, Chair. Well, first, I would answer the hon. member's first question, about process. Quite frankly, this is not a process that our government decided. The fact that we are now requiring interim supply is a process that was determined by the previous government. The fact that we are not able to determine a budget until the fall: these were all decisions that were – in fact, the

previous government was proceeding on warrants until... [interjection] Sorry. It sounds like somebody else would like to speak. Is somebody else wanting to come up and speak? There's always lots of discussion in the Chamber, and I always want to make sure that the hon. members have plenty of opportunity to speak.

Madam Chair, the second question was about the AHS review. The hon. member might have missed it, but we did have a press release that was on May 30 in which we started an RFP process. The process is fully transparent. The RFP is going to be closing June 30. The amounts in our campaign commitments on being able to do a review of AHS were fully costed and included in our campaign platform. Those amounts weren't necessarily included in the RFP. We're allowing the proponents who are going to be submitting to be able to provide us with what they think would be an appropriate budget. We are looking forward to the RFP closing on June 30 and being able to choose a proponent in July and, as the hon. member said, then proceeding with that RFP and that review of AHS and having it completed by the end of the year.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

**Mr. Shepherd:** Thank you, Minister. I appreciate that clarification and that information. The amounts, then, for this review are not currently included as part of interim supply. You're waiting for the RFP, and at that point you'll have the opportunity to determine what the cost of the review will be. I appreciate that.

Along similar lines, then, the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions has committed to doing a review of all of the current and proposed supervised consumption sites for the province of Alberta. Are we looking at a similar process, then? Has that been included as part of the interim supply, or is that something that is also out for RFP by a third party, and would we assume that the same process would take place?

**The Chair:** The hon. Health minister.

**Mr. Shandro:** Thank you, Madam Chair. The answer, unfortunately, is that this is not a budget. This is the cash flow for the government to be able to proceed until it can have a budget in the fall. Our commitments to Albertans on our spending when it comes to mental health and addictions are included in our campaign commitments, fully costed in our platform. This right now, interim supply, is not a budget. Instead, this is the cash flow for us to be able to proceed until we have a budget in the fall.

**The Chair:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

**Mr. Shepherd:** Well, thank you, Minister. It's unfortunate. It appears he has been given some instruction now to return to the standard talking point which we've consistently been hearing. It's unfortunate. We did have some useful conversation there for a moment, but I will continue in hopes that perhaps we can regain some of that.

Just recognizing that this government is continuing, then, on its work and its plan, perhaps I'll return to the Minister of Infrastructure, who's been most helpful on a number of points of discussion that we've had. Within the realm of Health but certainly also within the realm of Infrastructure we have the child and youth mental health centre, which was committed to be built here in my constituency of Edmonton-City Centre.

7:50

I was very pleased recently to see the opening of the access 24/7 mental health clinic at the Royal Alex hospital. That's something that our government provided funding for to help with the

renovations and indeed to allow AHS to hire up to 20 new staff to provide that 24-hour, one-door access for mental health coverage.

I did have a constituent that reached out to me recently, though, and sort of said: that's fantastic to have there, but we do need youth-specific services and services that are targeted to families. Indeed, we know that's part of what was planned for the child and youth mental health centre. We have dollars that were committed by the Stollery foundation. To the Minister of Infrastructure: within the interim supply, then, currently do we have the dollars to ensure that the initial planning stages for that child and youth mental health centre are able to continue?

**The Chair:** The Minister of Environment and Parks.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Well, thank you, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure to rise on interim supply in Committee of the Whole. It appears that there's still some confusion with the opposition on what stage we are at with this piece of legislation. It's an opportunity now in Committee of the Whole to talk about how we feel about this bill and questions, thoughts, and comments that we may have about this legislation.

I'd like to take a few moments just to express my excitement that we're now moving past supplementary supply, which was brought forward – basically, our government now had to finalize the money that the former NDP government of the day already spent – and instead bringing forward interim supply, that will take us through to the next budget, a budget, Madam Chair, that will see us follow through on the commitment that we made inside our platform to be able to get Alberta's fiscal house back in order, to be able to bring forward a path to balance. I'm excited to be able to debate that when the time comes. I think I'm looking forward to the hon. the Finance minister and President of Treasury Board's budget speech and, ultimately, the opportunity within estimates to be able to have a discussion about what that budget will look like.

I know that the hon. members, particularly the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre at the moment, seem to be excited to already talk about that. Of course, the budget process is not done, but I can tell you that we will maintain that commitment that we made to Albertans, and it will show a path to be able to get to balance. I can also tell you, Madam Chair, through you to him, that it will not have the ridiculous path that the former government had, which was, shockingly, to take this province on a path to \$100 billion in debt and to mortgage my children's and grandchildren's future. That's not the direction that will be coming. I know the hon. member seems to be excited to hear about our budget. I'm glad that he shares that excitement, and I look forward to when that process happens. For the meantime we're here on interim supply, and that's the stage that we're at at the moment.

With that said, Madam Chair, I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Madam Chair, I move that we rise and report progress on bills 5 and 6.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche.

**Ms Goodridge:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following bills: Bill 5 and Bill 6.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Does the Assembly concur in the report? All those in favour, please say aye.

**Hon. Members:** Aye.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Any opposed, please say no. Carried.

### Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

#### Bill 10

#### Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2019

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Toews:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and move third reading of Bill 10, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2019.

I want to thank the members of this Assembly for their thoughts on this technical bill. Alberta's tax laws are typically reviewed and amended annually to maintain the efficiency and integrity of our tax system. As I explained during previous readings, Alberta's income tax system is closely linked with federal legislation. The changes in this set of amendments will bring our legislation in line with federal changes that, for the most part, were implemented in 2018. The opportunity to make these changes did not present itself to the previous government, but they did ask the Canada Revenue Agency to administer the changes on 2018 tax returns and committed to making the necessary adjustments on our end at the next available opportunity.

I will recap the amendments within this bill briefly. These changes will ensure that taxpayers' entire income is included in the calculation of certain credits. The amendments also ensure that certain benefits for Canadian Forces members and veterans are eligible for the pension credit. And this bill will adjust the provincial dividend tax credit rate for dividends paid out of corporate income that was taxed at the small-business rate. Madam Speaker, these amendments will ensure that Alberta's tax system continues to function properly, and they are needed to support the Canada Revenue Agency's administration of our personal income tax system.

I encourage all members of the House to support these amendments. Thank you.

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

Seeing none, Minister, would you like to close debate? All right.

[Motion carried; Bill 10 read a third time]

#### Bill 7

#### Municipal Government (Property Tax Incentives) Amendment Act, 2019

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

**Mr. Madu:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and move third reading of Bill 7, the Municipal Government (Property Tax Incentives) Amendment Act, 2019.

This legislation would help revitalize municipalities by empowering them to offer stronger property tax incentives to business and industry. I want to take this opportunity to thank the members of this House for sharing their opinions on this bill. I was happy to hear all of the different points of view on what I believe is a vital piece of legislation for our province. Municipalities want the ability to provide stronger tax incentives to attract business and

investment. This legislation would give that to them. Municipalities know what's best for the people they serve. This legislation wouldn't tell them what to do; it would give them the power to make their own decisions.

During second reading debate I heard a number of arguments against the need for this bill. Some of my colleagues across the aisle said that the bill doesn't actually do anything. With respect, I strongly disagree. This bill provides clarity and expands on what is currently in the Municipal Government Act. Right now the act enables councils to cancel or refund all or a portion of a property tax or defer the collection of a tax in a specific year for the purposes of providing tax relief in instances of hardship.

If passed, Bill 7 will expand the existing authority in the Municipal Government Act to include broader economic development purposes. The provisions of the act, which my friends cited so often in their debate, are intended to be used for one year only. This is the opinion of the experienced policy and legal experts within my department, and it is the opinion of other municipal legal experts. If passed, this amendment would allow municipalities to provide property tax incentives for up to 15 years. This would give businesses the kind of certainty they need when considering major investment decisions.

**8:00**

One of the other matters the members of the opposition raised was the perceived lack of consultation on this bill. Again I must disagree. Our election platform clearly had this as one of our proposed legislative changes, and Albertans who voted for us as government expect this program to be put in place. Some of the criticisms I heard revolved around an idea that this legislation, if passed, may lead to increased competition between municipalities, Madam Speaker. I will reiterate what I said at second reading of this bill: increased competition is exactly what we are looking for. With that being said, there are many ways that municipalities must work together for the betterment of their overall regions. The Municipal Government Act requires municipalities with common boundaries to complete an intermunicipal collaborative framework by 2020.

In addition, there are metro regional boards in both Calgary and Edmonton and in Edmonton areas that give municipalities a chance to work together on a vision for each of those regions. We can have competition and collaboration at the same time, Madam Speaker. This government was elected on a platform of getting Albertans back to work and strengthening the competitive position of this province. We want to grow our economy, not just manage it. The Municipal Government (Property Tax Incentives) Amendment Act, 2019, is a key part of achieving those goals by empowering municipalities to attract investment, create jobs, and realize their full economic potential.

I encourage all members of this House to support Bill 7. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

**Member Ceci:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to address this. I think I'll start out by agreeing with the hon. minister that there are powers in the MGA that allow municipalities to undertake the work that he is talking about now. He talks about expanding that so there's economic development focus in addition to the ones around hardship, the ones around being able to do these on a yearly basis. I can tell you, from experience, that municipalities already undertook property tax exemptions for businesses. They would do that regularly. They do do that regularly. With respect, I think this bill is not necessary. It's not needed. It is

something that's already in the MGA, and it's already working. With respect, I don't think there's anything new here.

I can tell you that the work of this government in reaching out to municipalities is woefully inadequate. Again, the minister talks about: we put this in our election platform; it's there for all to see. It's true. It is there for all to see, but I would, with respect, say that many people are surprised by this. Frankly, I haven't found anyone in a municipal context who was involved in the discussions on this before it hit the Order Paper here in this House.

Madam Speaker, when this side, the NDP government, was in place, we of course worked closely with the AUMA and the RMA and other organizations. I can tell you that from the 2018 resolutions session of the AUMA they talk about their vision. The AUMA's vision is that all Alberta municipalities "have an enduring partnership with the Government of Alberta that recognizes the shared responsibility" of working together. I don't see the shared responsibility here. I see the government of Alberta and their ideology today bringing forward this bill because they believe it will assist municipalities.

As I said, Madam Speaker, it's already in the MGA, and municipalities, if they want to use it, can use it. They have used it, and they have attracted businesses. I don't see where this gives any more clarity for municipalities out there. In fact, I think there are many damaging things it does to municipalities as a result of this bill coming forward.

But I do want to emphasize that, overall, there is nothing to see here. This is a nothing bill that doesn't need to be taking up the time. In fact, I think it moves the relationship that municipalities have through their associations and individually and through their regional boards backwards, Madam Speaker. It moves it backwards because they weren't involved in the discussions. When we were government, we worked closely with municipalities. As I said, the response to that resolution by the ADM on behalf of government was: we are committed to the development of legislated funding frameworks and have engaged with municipal associations in discussions on this key component of the framework.

Madam Speaker, instead of allowing municipalities, as it was framed here, you know, to compete with one another, we sat down with their associations and we talked about how we can all grow the pie and how it can be shared in a predictable, rational, consistent manner so that everyone benefits. There clearly will be losers as a result of this bill coming forward. I'm not sure there will be the collaboration that has just been talked about by the minister. I see another future, and that future is predictable in the sense that businesses will talk to different municipalities, and instead of looking out for the needs of people, the kind of amenities that exist in municipalities, they'll be looking for the least amount of taxes they can pay. That will of course create that competition so that the metro regional boards, though they are collaborating at this time, may find themselves pulled and rent apart as a result of this bill coming forward. It's not just my opinion; it's the opinion of many, many people.

Now, I do know that the hon. minister had a press conference about this maybe about three weeks ago, four weeks ago. It occurred out in Strathcona county. He had the mayor and a business entity representative there, and he was there, and there were some other MLAs there. They were standing up and they talked about all the good things that might happen. But, Madam Speaker, that's one mayor. If you ask that hon. minister how many mayors have come forward with support and maybe tabled letters of support, I'd be interested in seeing those. I know that recently there was a southeast and southwest mayors and reeves conference down in southern Alberta, and there were dozens of people in attendance. Indeed, the hon. Member for Taber-Warner was there, and the feedback I got

was that he was touting this as a really good thing. There wasn't a great uptake. There wasn't, you know: let's put him on our shoulders and walk around and talk about how great this is. People were questioning the whole thing. They were saying: "Where did this come from? Did you talk to us? What will it do to the relationships we have in southern Alberta as mayors and reeves?"

Maybe there are some municipalities that have a little more ability, a little more flexibility to give up tax money for potentially 15 years from a business, but, you know, it's going to make the less prosperous municipalities kind of lose further or get behind the game.

The mid-city mayors is another organization that probably has a great number of questions with regard to where all of this is going, and they meet in the very near future, Madam Speaker.

**8:10**

You know, the organizations that are out there, the RMA and the AUMA, talk about potential unintended consequences of going forward with this bill, Madam Speaker, and I think that's the kind of overall message I get when I talk to people. They're wondering why this is such an important item on the government's agenda when, in fact, they already have the ability and have used the ability.

The government likes to talk about, you know, consultation, but I would ask: has there been any consultation with regard to this bill, or was the consultation, again, the fact that it was in the platform paper, the platform of this government? Is that consultation? It's something that municipalities already use, Madam Speaker, through their own auspices. They work and negotiate with businesses, and businesses locate, if they're being attracted, knowing they can get exemptions from taxes. True, the municipalities do have to work at this on a regular basis so that those exemptions continue, but it has happened, and it will continue to happen even without this bill going forward. With mayors being shocked by the presence of this on the Order Paper and with mayors already feeling like what they really want to talk about is stable and predictable funds, that's what this government should be working on through reasserting discussions around MSI, and that's not what's happening here.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The other concern that gets talked about – and I want to stress that I don't think this bill is needed, because they can already do these kinds of things – is: who pays the bill, ultimately? You know, if you're a smaller municipality or a smaller county and a business has come and said, "The only way we'll really locate here is if you give us 15 years of tax relief" and the council is kind of feeling concerned that that business will potentially go down the road to another county if they don't fess up and give that tax relief, the concern that I think ratepayers can have on the residential side is that they're going to be picking up the bill for that business, who has kind of argued for getting tax exemptions. Mr. Speaker, that's not fair for residential taxpayers. Again, those are some of the concerns that are brought forward.

Mr. Speaker, we're also, of course, concerned that – and generally the word that gets talked about is the race to the bottom. I think the minister was going to go there in terms of talking about one of the unintended consequences of his bill. The race to the bottom means that, you know, everybody loses. Everybody loses because they're not collecting taxes from a business that should be paying their taxes. The different mayors and reeves out there and their councils should be justifiably concerned about this race to the bottom and what it'll mean for their residential taxpayers or ratepayers, who will potentially have to pay more as a result of this

bill, and the businesses going to mayors and reeves and asking for these exemptions.

This is not the kind of predictable, stable funds they want, Mr. Speaker. They really want to get back to the table, through their associations, to talk about MSI. If this was such a good idea of a bill, why wasn't it talked about? Why wasn't it brought forward by the minister, through the associations, to say: "You know, this is what we want to do. What do you think about these things? Should we do them together?" Then they'd be able to stand with the associations and the organizations shoulder to shoulder to shoulder and say: this is what Alberta needs.

No, Mr. Speaker, I think what we're seeing here is more ideology, believing that if we give tax breaks to businesses, those businesses will somehow magically put municipalities on a more steady basis. I think that mayors and reeves, justifiably, have to be concerned that if they're getting less tax money as a result of this bill, they'll have smaller government, and smaller government will mean less services or it'll mean higher residential taxes for the people who will be paying the taxes.

In Calgary we were able to attract large businesses like the headquarters for CP many, many years ago, Mr. Speaker. As a result of having a good property tax base on the residential, though the nonres has taken some hits of late as a result of the downturn in the economy, we were able to build up available services and amenities in the city of Calgary – roads, sewers, and other things that businesses need – and we're able to attract businesses. Now, that's not the same for smaller counties, I understand, but we're going to make it hard for those smaller counties because there's going to be competition amongst them, and that competition will cause a race to the bottom.

Mr. Speaker, if it was such a good bill, why wasn't it talked about by this minister and by the Premier when they had an opportunity to speak with the associations? They've had opportunity. I know the Premier met with different associations prior to the election. I don't know if he talked about this in his platform, specifically around Bill 7, or what were municipal tax incentives. I think he didn't because, you know, it was a surprise. This whole municipal tax incentive program was a surprise for many, many, many people in elected office at the local level. They wouldn't put this at the top of their agenda of things to do.

As the Minister of Municipal Affairs you only get so many opportunities at the cabinet table to bring bills forward. Why would you bring something forward that no one's asking for in the municipalities and the local governments? I can appreciate that getting cabinet's time to talk about a bill like this might be, you know, exciting. It might be something you think is good, but I can tell you that this is a waste of cabinet's time in terms of asking them to go through this and to support this. It's not something that municipalities are clamouring for. I have yet to speak to anybody who really wanted this to go through, really wanted the government of Alberta to bring forward the municipal tax incentive bill that is before us today, because they already know that they have the opportunity to do these things if they want to do them.

The kind of work that they really need this government to do is around opening up the discussions about MSI because that ends in 2021, Mr. Speaker. They are concerned because they have to bring forward three- to five-year budgets, three years on the operating side and five years on the capital side. When you start to look at where 2021 is, it's right in that wheelhouse in terms of a high level of concern with the kinds of budgets that they have to make available to the government of Alberta and their ratepayers and taxpayers to get things in place to address the requirements in the MGA.

Mr. Speaker, again, Bill 7 is not something they asked for. Bill 7 is in the ideological framework of this government's competition approach. Competition will lead to a race to the bottom. If they want to give tax incentives, they can do that now with the MGA. If they want to attract businesses, they can do that now with the MGA. They don't need Bill 7 that's before them. They need co-operation and partnership, and that's not something that this minister has undertaken with regard to Bill 7.

8:20

When we were government, we worked with Edmonton and Calgary and set a framework in place for municipal funding. We were going to be working with the RMA. We were working with the RMA – it was called the AAMD and C then – and we were working with the AUMA and didn't get it over the goal line because of the election or the term being up, Mr. Speaker. But that would have been work that we would have gotten back to instead of Bill 7, which no one was asking for. No one was asking for it because they don't see the benefit of working that way. They see the benefit of stable, predictable funds and revenue sharing that would occur as a result of getting back to the table and having those discussions.

Of course, the Minister of Finance might say that we're not there yet. We have to wait until the budget is all prepared and ready in October, November before we can have those discussions. But with Bill 7 here I wonder if municipalities are going to be able to have that discussion at all or if the government will just lean on: we gave you something; why don't you go out and see if you can make it work? That's not what they want. It's not what they asked for. In the spirit of partnership, it's not what this government should be bringing forward.

Instead of saying, you know, that there was a platform that everybody could read at their leisure and it was buried in there with two lines or three lines, Mr. Speaker, what they should be saying to municipalities and counties around this province is: we want to hear what you think is necessary to make your lives and our lives together better for the people of Alberta. That's not how this was developed. It's a gross omission of the responsibility of government, I think, to present something as a fait accompli and say: "We'll work things out once we put this in place. You're going to be able to collaborate with each other, we promise, but we also want you to compete with each other. That's going to make things better."

Mr. Speaker, what I hear from leaders around the province is that they want the ability to sit down with this government and talk through the many important issues that are ongoing, particularly: where is stable, predictable funding for municipalities and revenue sharing in the future? That's what I believe should be done, not the bill that's before us.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Would the hon. Government House Leader like to speak to the main bill?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Absolutely, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** That is what is available to you.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** I'm excited to speak to the main bill. I was interested to hear the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo's comments. You know, Mr. Speaker, as I sat not too far away from where the hon. member sits now, over the last four years inside this place, and watched as he was the Finance minister of the then government and watched his then government proceed with their mandate here inside this place for four years, I often wondered to myself how they could be so bad at their job. I often wondered how

that hon. member could have been so bad at being Finance minister that he saw us on the way to six credit downgrades, the largest debts in the history of our province, brought in a carbon tax and put it on the people of Alberta at the exact moment that they were in a recession.

Sometimes, Mr. Speaker – in fact, you and I used to be bench mates – I don't know. I wouldn't speak for you, of course, but I wonder that you must've thought the same thing sometimes over the years: how could the NDP be so bad at their job? Well, I finally heard the answer. It's because they have no idea what they're doing.

That hon. member used to be a city councillor of the largest city in this province. He used to be the Finance minister of this province. He's a two-term member of the Legislature, and he clearly, based on his presentation, has not even read the MGA. A multiple-term councillor of the largest city in this province and former Finance minister who has not even read the MGA, Mr. Speaker.

No wonder this is the only one-term government in the history of our province that's now sitting in opposition. No wonder they were so bad at their job when they were here. No wonder we ended up with the largest debts in our history. No wonder we saw all those credit downgrades under that hon. member when he was the Finance minister. He has no idea what he's doing.

Now, I would not have guessed that when I was on the other side of the House. I thought sometimes that it was just purely ideology that was causing the NDP to get into trouble. I think their ideological beliefs probably did cause a significant amount of trouble, Mr. Speaker, but clearly, based on that presentation, that hon. member has no idea. He just stood in this Assembly and said things were in the MGA that were not in the MGA, said that the ability to do this was in the MGA. It's not. It's not within the MGA.

**Mr. Bilous:** Yes, it is.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** No, it's not. Mr. Speaker, again, a multiple-term councillor.

There's another former cabinet minister heckling over the way. They should take the time to read the MGA before they stand up inside this place and say such ridiculous comments, Mr. Speaker. They deserve better researchers. I don't know; maybe that's what's going on. Maybe they need some research help. Though I'd still have to say that a former multi-term councillor of the largest city in the province and the former Finance minister, you would think, would have taken the time to read the MGA before he got up and said those ridiculous comments.

In addition, the hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* had some other comments to say about consultation, and he spoke a lot about the fact that mayors would be upset about this. You know, I have not seen the hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* often leave Calgary or Edmonton. I certainly have not seen him, when he was Finance minister, spending much of his time talking to communities like where I represent or where you represent.

Now, on the weekend I had the privilege of going home to the great riding of Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. Of course, you know it well; it's where all the constituents of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills come on vacation, where we have the eastern slopes; west-central Alberta, one of the most beautiful places in the world. I have the privilege of representing, as you know, lots of towns and counties. This weekend when I was home, I got to be in the great town of Sundre, my hometown. I also spent some time in Rocky Mountain House, Clearwater county, Mountain View county, and a little bit of time in your city, too, Mr. Speaker, in Olds. Made it all the way up to the north as well to the great communities of Bluffton, Rimbey, spent some time in Bentley, Ponoka county, Lacombe county, down in Eckville, and a little bit of time in Benalto, just for

the heck of it because, you know, we were moving around pretty good on the weekend. It was rodeo weekend in many spots, Mr. Speaker.

I had the privilege of spending lots of time this weekend with many municipal leaders of all of those municipalities that I have the privilege of representing in this Chamber. That's just a fraction of the towns that I represent. As you know, just like yourself, I have close to 200 elected representatives in my constituency, municipal and school board representatives, that I have the privilege of representing in this Chamber. I can tell you that every one of them said: "Thank you. Thank you so much that your government is now in charge. Thank you so much. In the period of eight weeks we've seen more ministers come and help us with our communities than the entire time that that hon. member was the Finance minister of this province." Not one municipal leader approached me and said: "Well, we don't feel like we're being consulted."

Now, Mr. Speaker, of course they would not say that because, as you know because you represent a lot of small towns, the former government could not be bothered with rural Alberta. In fact, I only saw one or two cabinet ministers ever come to the constituency of Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre during their time in government, a handful of them, very rarely. Often when my communities had to come here for meetings with cabinet ministers, they would be cancelled. Sometimes even after they'd travelled all the way to the capital and spent a night in motels, all of a sudden the meetings were cancelled. Famously, we had a former environment minister, my predecessor, tell this Chamber that she'd met with municipal leaders when she had not met with municipal leaders. That happened inside this Chamber.

For that former Finance minister, the hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*, now to even have the nerve to rise in this House and somehow say that he was in a better spot to consult with communities, over this side of the House, currently this government, is an absolutely ridiculous thing for him to say, Mr. Speaker. I know your communities would agree with my statement when it comes to that.

Now, the reality is, though, as the now hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs said in his excellent presentation as he moved third reading on Bill 7, there has been consultation on this bill. It's called an election, Mr. Speaker, something that this side of the House... [interjections] Now, the Premier often points out how angry the NDP are. I'm sure the Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* is just as angry as the rest of them because he's usually the one heckling almost the loudest over there. I know he's mad with Albertans. He makes it very, very clear. He was always part of the fear and the smear and the ideological beliefs of the NDP and that approach to politics that most Albertans just disdain. That was what he was always a part of.

What is new now, Mr. Speaker, is that he's also part of Team Angry. He's mad because Albertans cast judgment on him on April 16. He was the Finance minister of the government that they cast judgment on. He was the Finance minister of that government that Albertans cast a clear judgment on when they fired him. [interjection] I understand why he's so upset and yelling at me. I would probably be just as upset if I was the Finance minister of the only one-term government in the history of this province. That would probably hurt, but that's what he is.

Oh, sorry, Mr. Speaker. I didn't see that you'd stood up.

8:30

### Speaker's Ruling Relevance

**The Speaker:** Thank you, hon. members. I might just see if I could encourage the hon. House Leader to perhaps inform the House

about some of the content of Bill 9 as opposed to what the former Finance minister did or didn't do as those sorts of comments often lead to a lack of decorum inside the Chamber.

### Debate Continued

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Well, Mr. Speaker, given that Bill 9 has passed the House, I'm assuming you want me to go to Bill 7. I just want it clarified.

With that said, Mr. Speaker, this is very important for Bill 7, particularly when you look at the presentation by the former Finance minister in this Chamber, who was debating Bill 7. These are the points that he raised, and we as a government and myself as a member of the government are responding to the concerns that he raised in regard to this legislation, but I'll go back to Bill 7.

My point is this, Mr. Speaker. Unlike the former government, the one-term government, the one-term NDP government that we have sitting on that side of the House, that that hon. member was the Finance minister of, this side of the House did consult with Albertans. The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs articulated very well in his presentation to the House today how this fit into our election platform, and while the NDP may continue to want to spend their time being angry at Albertans for casting their judgment on them, this side of the House and the hon. Municipal Affairs minister ain't gonna waste our time on that. Instead, we're going to come here and we're going to continue to move the agenda forward inside this House. [interjection]

I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo still heckling away at me, Mr. Speaker, and that's my point. I understand that he's part of Team Angry now. I understand, Mr. Speaker, through you to him, that he's mad at Albertans because they made him be the Finance minister of the only one-term government in this province's history. I get it. What really matters is what the Minister of Municipal Affairs is trying to do.

This is what I reject, and this applies to Bill 7, Mr. Speaker, because of what it means for our communities. That hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo also said that there are no other communities that basically would need this. That shows, again, the core of why he's part of a government that was fired, because he's clearly never been to communities like Drayton Valley. He's clearly never been to communities like Hanna. He's clearly never been to communities like I represent and you represent, Mr. Speaker, who are hanging on, barely, because of the NDP's ideological policies and – we find out tonight – incompetence. They don't even know what the MGA says. He's clearly never been there. He's clearly never left his bubble.

If you watch, Mr. Speaker, the actions of the opposition, you could see that they basically suffer from what Ralph Klein would call dome disease, living within a bubble in their own echo chamber of people that keep telling them that they got it right.

Well, I was home again this weekend. I was happy to be there at one of my favourite events of the year, the Sundre parade. I just love it, Mr. Speaker, as you know. I know you've had the privilege of being in the Sundre parade. It's a great parade and a great rodeo. It's been a good rodeo weekend there, and to watch hundreds of people lining up all along the streets – you know what they were yelling at us? They were yelling: "Keep going. Stand up for us. Keep doing what you promised. Keep doing it. Keep going all the way." That's what they said.

They said: "Go and tell the Premier that we're with him one hundred per cent. Ignore the NDP." They actually said that in the middle of a parade on rodeo day, Mr. Speaker. You have people yelling out, "Keep going; don't stop; ignore the NDP," because they gave us clear instructions on April 16 to ignore the NDP, to get the

job done. I'm with the Minister of Municipal Affairs. That's what we're going to do inside this House. It does not matter how much Team Angry yells. It does not matter how much Team Angry calls us names or tries to bully our members inside this Chamber. The United Conservative Party is going to get 'er done.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Seeing none, are there any others wishing to . . .

**Mr. Bilous:** Mr. Speaker, I believe I was to my feet fast enough for 29(2)(a).

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview is rising quickly to make a brief question or comment under 29(2)(a).

**Mr. Bilous:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure. It's always interesting to listen to the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. Again, the term "interesting" I chose very, very carefully.

Now, it's interesting that, you know, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Environment and Parks talks about this side of the House as Team Angry, yet for the most part, for 10 minutes there, much vitriol came out of his mouth talking about the Member for Calgary-Buffalo. I'd love to ask the member if he's read the MGA. As a former Minister of Municipal Affairs I doubt it. It's the second-largest piece of legislation that exists on the books in government. It is extremely comprehensive.

I think the point that the Member for Calgary-Buffalo is trying to raise is that section 347, I believe, of the existing MGA gives municipalities the ability to lower property taxes, to create a business zone or an industrial park in order to attract business, so I'm not sure why exactly the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre felt like he had to berate the Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

The fact of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, that I think it's a little rich, especially when the Government House Leader talks about us throwing stones, yet he is grabbing them by the handful, saying that we're Team Angry. You know what? Our job is to hold the government to account and to ensure that whatever legislation they bring to this place has been given its due attention, that they've spoken with municipalities. I disagree that the government has carte blanche to do whatever it wants without any type of consultation. I also disagree that winning an election – an election is not consultation. They're two very different things. Does the government have a mandate? Yes. Did the majority of Albertans vote them in? Yes. Is that and does that replace consultation? No. That's really what our municipalities were reaching out to us saying: we had no idea the government was going to bring this in. They just wanted a little time, which is what I think was the Member for Calgary-Buffalo's point.

Again, I appreciate that many members in this place are brand new, but those that have been here for at least a term know that on almost every single bill that we brought forward, the former opposition wanted it sent to committee, talked about more time, more time, more time. In fact, if they had it their way, there wouldn't have been a single bill that passed in the four-year term. Now, we're not proposing the exact same thing, but time is needed to ensure that stakeholders are adequately consulted. You know what? I'll be the first to stand up and say that we accepted amendments from all parties in the House in our four-year term. I mean, some of them, no, but reasonable amendments we did accept. We accepted some from the Official Opposition because, again, as legislators, you know, we want to ensure that we are passing the best possible bills.

You know, I mean, really, I'm rising under 29(2)(a) to ask the Government House Leader: why is he so angry at the fact that the opposition is trying to do our job, asking legitimate questions? I'd love to hear the minister respond. In the previous version of the MGA section 347 does, in my opinion, what the minister is proposing to do in this bill. I'm happy to hear how this new bill changes the existing powers that municipalities had. I encourage the minister to do that in a way to answer the question because I think that it's a legitimate question. I'm not trying to score partisan points or jump up and down. It's a fair question to say: if you're bringing forward legislation that is going to give municipalities more tools – okay? – well, please outline them for me. Section 347 gives them the tools that I've read in this bill.

I've outlined my concern before, Mr. Speaker, which is, really, that the work that we did to encourage municipalities to collaborate, to work together to form agreements, whether it's intermunicipal collaboration agreements or others, again, looking to municipalities that have done an amazing job coming together to say, "How do we attract industry to our area . . ."

**The Speaker:** Others wishing to speak to Bill 7? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

**Mr. Sabir:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak to this bill. I also listened to the Government House Leader's – I don't know – comments. They were not about the bill at all, and many opinions contained in it were presented as facts. As the saying goes, you're entitled to your opinions but not to your facts. I don't think that my colleague the MLA for Calgary-Buffero said anything that was not factually correct. Since I didn't have any earplugs or anything, I was listening to my colleague very carefully, and I think there were three themes that my colleague tried to elaborate on. One thing that's clear for this government is that municipalities are looking for a real plan, real leadership, and that's not what it is.

8:40

The Government House Leader was challenging whether the MLA for Calgary-Buffero has looked into the legislation. He was a five-term councillor. I think he certainly has. He has this Municipal Government Act that he has graciously given to me. I'm looking at the section because the Government House Leader was saying that there is no such power in the legislation. Section 347: I do want to read it one more time into the *Hansard* to just clarify, I guess, that this authority exists in the existing legislation. Section 347(1) reads:

If a council considers it equitable to do so, it may, generally or with respect to a particular taxable property or business or a class of taxable property or business, do one or more of the following [things], with or without conditions:

- (a) cancel or reduce tax arrears;
- (b) cancel or refund all or part of a tax;
- (c) defer the collection of a tax.

Subsection (2) of 347:

A council may phase in a tax increase or decrease resulting from the preparation of any new assessment.

That's right from the legislation. That's the law as it stands now. I think that's what my colleague from Calgary-Buffero was mentioning, that what the government is claiming is that somehow this piece of legislation is giving municipalities powers that already didn't exist. Based on this provision, based on my understanding of the Municipal Government Act – also, I do have a background in law – the way I read it, I think that authority exists and that the MLA for Calgary-Buffero is exactly right in saying that whatever Bill 7 is trying to do, that already exists in our legislation.

I think we can talk about what it's trying to do. If we listen to the mayors, listen to the leadership in municipalities – plus, I was at RMA – I think their number one issue was not Bill 7. For sure, their number one issue was MSI, their future funding, the predictability of funding for municipalities, and I do not believe that this bill addresses any of that that we heard from municipal leaders as a priority. Many of the concerns with this bill outlined by my colleague are the ones that are coming from the municipal leaders across this province.

For instance, Mayor Nenshi from Calgary said, and I can quote as well: I would be very interested to see if we can actually use these regulations to accomplish what we are trying to do, which is to give small businesses looking at huge tax increases a break; we want to make sure that this doesn't lead to a race to the bottom with different jurisdictions who are competing for businesses to start giving them tax breaks and tax breaks and tax breaks. End quote. That's a direct quote from the mayor of Calgary, who is also sharing the same concerns that are articulated by this side, that were articulated by the MLA for Calgary-Buffero, that it's not giving them new powers. There is a concern that it may just get them into competing with each other in a race to the bottom.

Similarly, the mayor of Edmonton has also shared similar concerns, and I quote: I think we have got to have a conversation in our region on how to use these tools to grow the regional economy because selective use by one of us to undermine the other could be one risk here.

A couple of things, I think, are clear as concerns coming from the mayor of Edmonton. Here they are trying to collaborate with each other and make development plans in collaboration with the surrounding municipalities. Clearly, this bill has the potential to start a competition among various municipalities and jurisdictions. Again, it's that same thing: it's a race to the bottom. That's exactly what, I guess, this side of the House has outlined. These are legitimate concerns coming from municipalities, municipal leaders. Like, more than 50 per cent of the population of Alberta lives in just these two cities, and both mayors of these cities are warning you that these are unintended consequences, that these are the consequences that can follow from this piece of legislation.

The second thing is that every bill they come up with has the same kind of speaking notes, that it will somehow create jobs and that it will kick-start the economy. That was, I guess, their campaign platform, that they will create jobs, that they will build pipelines, that they will kick-start the economy. But there is nothing in this bill that gives us any indication that it will lead to the creation of jobs. In fact, so far what they have done is that they have reversed the carbon levy, and they have given almost \$4.5 billion in a tax break, all in the name of: it will create jobs.

I represent Calgary, and we know that people in Calgary are still looking for jobs. Despite these policies that when in opposition they always described as killing jobs and that that was the reason the jobs were not coming to Calgary, we saw in the last couple of weeks Repsol laying off 30 per cent of the staff from Calgary in their regional Alberta offices. If those were the recipes for job creation, I think we would have seen otherwise. There should be some more investment. There should be some positive job numbers. But, no, their policies, whether it's Bill 7, whether it's their corporate tax break, whether it's their repeal of the carbon levy, are not the solution.

In fact, I have been asking about oil-by-rail contracts for the last few weeks now. When we were in government, we got credible advice. We got advice from the public service that it would create 120,000 barrels of capacity per day and that it would give the province 2 billion plus dollars in revenues. Now somehow they're saying: "No. It would have cost the province \$1.5 billion in losses."

That's exactly the kind of project, that's exactly the kind of initiative where we worked with industry. They told us that we needed takeaway capacity, and that would have created takeaway capacity, but we don't hear anything about that, where we have a real chance of getting some jobs, getting some activity in the economy. We don't get any answers, and now we are, I guess, supposed to believe that somehow Bill 7 is kick-starting this economy and creating jobs. It's not.

The other thing, I guess, relates to when I was talking about the general themes, that my colleague talked about, with respect to consultation. If there was proper consultation with the municipalities, I think the number one issue, Minister, that you will hear will be the MSI. They're not looking for anything that's already in the legislation. They're not looking for further clarification of section 347 of the Municipal Government Act. They're asking for something completely different, and that's their future funding arrangement with the province. They're looking for something that we started with Edmonton and Calgary. They're looking to build a relationship, a sustainable relationship, with the province so that they can serve their communities. This in no way, shape, or manner helps our municipalities.

8:50

The third thing. Not only does this power exist in this legislation; there are numerous examples of when cities relied on this section and did exactly what that side, the government side, is describing that this bill will do, that they will be able to defer taxes for multiple years, that they will be able to give tax breaks. Sure, there are many examples. The most recent one, again, was from Calgary. There was huge concern with respect to taxation. Small-business owners were worried about it. There was some vacancy in the downtown. There was a rally as well around that. Council met with business leaders, and they agreed on a tax break of \$130 million, I believe. That's exactly the kind of thing that we heard that this bill will do, but municipalities are already doing exactly the same kind of thing.

There are other examples. In 2015 Lethbridge did exactly the same thing. They established a TRIP, a targeted redevelopment incentive policy, to promote new construction or major renovation of medium- to large-scale commercial retail in mixed-use building projects that generate significant and ongoing expansion to the assessment base in the downtown core. Clearly, there is that ability, and clearly that section, that provision, is already working. Municipalities are relying on these powers and provisions to serve their constituents and to serve their municipalities.

Chestermere in 2019 relied on similar provisions and brought forward a cancellation for nonresidential commercial developments and seniors' housing and multifamily housing in the form of three- to four-storey apartment buildings. The city provided an example of a \$10 million building that qualified for the amount. The developer used municipal taxes, and the taxes were waived so that they could receive a refund. Clearly, Chestermere has used that provision and has used the powers that are already in the Municipal Government Act to create those kinds of incentives. If businesses are struggling, if there is any need to reduce taxes or even refund taxes, they're already doing it.

Calgary has done it before as well, where they cancelled the taxes owed by the Royal Canadian Legion in Kensington in the amount of \$94,000.

Not only do these powers exist in our Municipal Government Act, the current legislative framework, but these powers are used by municipalities for exactly the kinds of purposes that this government described that Bill 7 will achieve. So Bill 7 is clearly a redundant piece of legislation and a redundant authority because this authority already exists, and municipalities have been using it

that way for a long time. I think that authority is working, and we never heard that any municipality was looking for that, as I mentioned previously.

When I met with municipal leaders, I think the number one issue coming from municipal leaders was that they want a sustainable, predictable funding relationship with the province so that they can set their priorities on their budget cycle and planning cycle, and they are clearly not getting that from this government. They are rightfully worried about that, too, because for everything we ask government about – funding schools, funding programs, even when we ask about numbers in interim supply . . .

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

**Member Ceci:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you very much. I was listening to the Member for Calgary-McCall, and I just have a couple of things that I'd like him to expand on. The first is that I know he had some really difficult files when he was the minister of – was it human services?

**Mr. Sabir:** Community and Social Services.

**Member Ceci:** At the end it was Community and Social Services, but before that it was a more expanded ministry. He had a number of difficult files in that ministry and just couldn't move forward unilaterally. There were many stakeholders, interested groups, quite vocal, and he had to work with his ministry officials to design consultation approaches. So one question I would have is: what did real consultation look like to you as a minister? I know that the government keeps relying on the fact that they won the election. "The platform said that we would bring in municipal tax incentives. So there you go. Here it is."

The last thing I have to ask you about is that when you were a minister, when I was a minister, when the former minister of economic development and trade was a minister, you only get so much time around the cabinet table. You have to work closely with the policy co-ordination office to bring forward bills, and there are a number of committees you have to kind of work with that are subcommittees of cabinet to see what the economic implications are, to see what the social implications of your bill are, et cetera. It can be quite, you know, attractive to get in front of all of those different committees and to push your bill. The question I have is: did you ever find yourself in a position where you were pushing back on administration and saying, "No; this bill is not ready" or "It's not the right kind of thing we're bringing forward; we don't need to bring it forward at this time; let's revise it"?

I'd just like to know what your experience was.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

**Mr. Sabir:** Thank you for the question. I think I can start off by saying that, yes, Community and Social Services, or human services, is one of the most important files in that pretty much on a monthly basis it deals with almost a quarter of a million people. Oftentimes these are Albertans who find themselves in circumstances where they need the government to step up and help them address issues facing them.

I can say one thing with absolute, I guess, confidence. My colleague the MLA for Calgary-Buffalo was the only Finance minister who I can say saw people behind those numbers. Those numbers on these budget documents were never just the numbers; he could see people behind those numbers. I was able to make progress on many different files; for instance, Bill 26, that ties the rate of income support, AISH, seniors' benefits to the consumer

price index so that over time, with the rising costs, the value of the benefit doesn't erode. Certainly, I have a lot of respect for the member and the work that he did as Finance minister.

With respect to consultation, when I became minister, the first file that landed on my desk was with respect to safety standards that were brought forward by the previous government. Clearly, some good suggestions with respect to safety were in there, but they were brought forward without consultation with the stakeholders in the persons with developmental disabilities program. The first thing that they shared with me was the slogan Nothing about Us without Us. Even though in that regulation there may have been some things that were critical to their safety, the way those things were brought forward – they never weighed in on those things. They never were consulted on those things, and their viewpoint was that they're the ones who know their safety the best. That's why we went into consultation. For the first time in the history of this province more than 2,000 people from that program . . .

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

Seeing none, would the minister like to close debate? The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

**Mr. Madu:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to close debate on Bill 7. Again, I have listened to some of the comments made by my colleagues on the other side. They talked about consultation, about no need for the bill. They talked about MSI. It really is rich coming from the members opposite. It strikes me that they don't understand what it would require to undo the damage that their four years did to this province. They talk about consultation. They brought in a multibillion-dollar carbon tax that they did not even mention to the people of this particular province, a carbon tax they had no mandate whatsoever to impose upon this province, that has devastated families and communities.

9:00

Madam Speaker, you know, debt and deficit were the order of the day in the last four years that the NDP presided over this province. They took a province that had a combined debt of \$12.9 billion to nearly \$60 billion, projected by their own fiscal quarter announcement sometime in March 2018. That particular debt is likely projected to be more than \$100 billion. They presided over a province where there are more than 200,000 of our fellow citizens out of work across this province.

You know, again, it is rich that they don't understand that this is one part of our entire package to reinvigorate our economy, to get those 200,000 people back to work. Madam Speaker, they presided over an economy that saw businesses fleeing this province in record numbers. It used to be the case that investors saw Alberta as a destination of choice for investment. In the last four years that they have presided over Alberta, we saw a record flight of investors. They caused so much lack of investor confidence in our province that investors were so scared to invest in our province. This province used to attract workers from across this country and across the globe in pursuit of opportunity. In the last four years that the NDP presided over our province, we saw a record number of people leaving our province because they could no longer conclude that Alberta was that land of opportunity. That was the extent of the damage that the NDP did to our province and economy, and it is what we have inherited from them that we are now trying to undo to kick-start our economy.

The property tax incentives that we are proposing, Madam Speaker, would help in that effort. You know, MSI: what I've heard from them is a presumption that MSI is not on the table. We have

been consulting with our municipal partners. When I was sworn in, my first task in the last one week was to reach out to reeves and mayors across this province. There are 352 of them, and I am still on that particular task. I don't want us to confuse MSI, which we are going to have to deal with, with what we are discussing here today.

Again, this is one part of what we need to do to rebuild our economy. I have had the opportunity to discuss Bill 7 with our municipal partners, Madam Speaker. In fact, I have travelled to many of the regional meetings of the AUMA to discuss this particular issue, and I can tell you that there's a lot of support for this particular bill, contrary to what the members opposite would like you to believe.

With that, Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to close debate on this particular bill.

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a third time]

## Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

### Bill 8

### Education Amendment Act, 2019

[Adjourned debate June 17: Mr. Shandro]

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

**Mr. Nielsen:** Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate you recognizing me to further the debate here on Bill 8, which, as we all know, should be aptly named Bill Hate. I want to focus on that because I know I've got concerns around other parts of the bill, things like that, but this is the one that I have very, very serious concerns about. I keep hearing from the government benches about how: "We won the election. We have a mandate to move our agenda forward. Oh, my gosh, we even had . . ."

**Member Ceci:** You've never heard that.

**Mr. Nielsen:** Unfortunately, I have heard that. Yeah. You know, as early as this evening the hon. Government House Leader was talking about listening to cheers and telling him to move his agenda forward.

Well, the problem that I have, Madam Speaker, is that I don't believe that the Education minister consulted the one stakeholder that this directly affects, and that's the kids that are in the GSAs and QSAs. I don't believe that. If you did, prove it to me. I'm willing to stand here and eat humble pie, more than happy to do it. But I don't think you can because I've stood outside schools, and students are outraged. I stood outside on the steps of this Legislature, and people were outraged. If so much consultation went into that section, why are we seeing these protests? Why do we have students who couldn't vote in the last election, couldn't have their voices heard – I'm betting if they could've had their voices heard, they would not have been voting for this on this one simple point.

Words mean a lot, Madam Speaker, language. Maybe I would suggest that some of the hon. members might want to take a good, old-fashioned union course on simple language because when you look at the language around GSAs, it is not some of the most comprehensive. It is not some of the strongest in the country. What we have right now is, and that's why you're seeing all of these protests because even the kids can figure it out. They're the ones that this affects. I am happy to give the government benches a chance to re-examine this, a chance to go back, consult with the ones that this affects, the ones that couldn't vote in the last election.

With that, Madam Speaker, I have an amendment that I will pass to you and await instructions.

**The Deputy Speaker:** This will be known as REF1.

Hon. member, please proceed.

9:10

**Mr. Nielsen:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is a pleasure to be able on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-North West to move that the motion for second reading of Bill 8, the 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 but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

Here is your chance to consult with the single-largest stakeholder that this bill affects, the membership of the GSAs and QSAs. You are able, through the committee, which we have seen all of our private members’ bills sent through because it was so important to get that feedback – here is our opportunity now to send this to committee to be able to consult with the students that are affected by this, get their feedback. My bet is that once you hear that, all of the clauses that you see around this bill with regard to GSAs: there won’t be an amendment that can come fast enough to get rid of it.

We have seen so many protests across the province from our young emerging leaders that want a safe space to be themselves. They just want something to belong to, and the language in here currently as proposed will put that at risk. Rules requiring posting of details around the supports for GSAs. Policies won’t be able to use the word “gay.” I don’t understand what the problem with the word “gay” is, but for some reason we seem to have to address it. It’s like we have to somehow reinvent the bicycle wheel here.

So I cannot stand here in good conscience, Madam Speaker, allow this to go through as is. We need to send this to committee. We need to get proper consultation. I’ve heard about how so much work has been done in the first 25 days, 21 days. I know, hon. member, you think it’s kind of funny, but the kids certainly don’t. They don’t find it funny at all. If you’ve been able to move so fast to do so much in such a short period of time, it should take you no time to get this done, no time whatsoever. Go out; consult with the kids that are directly affected by this. I bet you’ll be surprised to find out what you hear. I don’t know how in good conscience we can vote this through knowing full well the risk that this will put our kids at. I’ve made mention of this before. I’ve seen tweets that have said: I would rather have a dead son than a gay son.

**Mr. Nally:** Table it.

**Mr. Nielsen:** I’d be happy to do that.

We’ve had discussions in here about that one is too many. Well, is that one too many? Is 10 too many, Madam Speaker? A hundred? A thousand? At what point do we have to stop and say, “It’s gone too far. There’s too much risk. We need to back up. We need to rethink our position?” So here’s our chance. Here’s our chance to pause the process, step on the brake, send this to committee, consult with the stakeholders that this affects directly, the kids. I would strongly urge all members of this House to support this amendment. Don’t put any of these kids at risk before you talk to them.

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

**Mr. Schmidt:** Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore for bringing forward this

amendment. I think it’s an excellent idea that we send this bill to committee and consult with stakeholders because, clearly, the government hasn’t done this.

I’d like the member from Edmonton-Decore to give me some comments. I know that he received a bit of a rough ride from the members opposite. Of course, the Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain was trying to shout him down as he was bringing forward this amendment. Obviously, he didn’t like the idea of consulting. Perhaps he’s, you know, not too concerned about the welfare of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered students in his riding, which is a real shame, Madam Speaker. I can tell that member that we are deeply concerned about those students, and that’s why we’re working so hard to protect them.

I saw the Member for Morinville-St. Albert encourage the Member for Edmonton-Decore to table a tweet in which the tweeter said that he would rather have a dead son than a gay son, as if the Member for Morinville-St. Albert doesn’t even believe that it’s possible in this day and age that parents would be outraged and horrified that their children came out as homosexual.

Madam Speaker, that’s the very problem with this bill as it is. Those members opposite will refuse to even acknowledge that this is a problem that needs to be solved. It’s my hope that by sending this bill to committee, we can actually hear from people who will be negatively affected by the very proposals that this government is putting forward so that those members for Morinville-St. Albert and Spruce Grove-Stony Plain can hear from people who will be affected by this and wipe the smirks off their faces.

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

**Mr. Schmidt:** Yes. I appreciate that, Madam Speaker. It’s a little bit upsetting to me when the members opposite sit there, you know, grinning like little children who have just filled their pants at the thought of sending this bill to committee and the thought of parents actually kicking their children out of their houses because they’ve come out as gay.

I’d like the Member for Edmonton-Decore to tell us what he’s going to likely hear from his constituents when he tells them that the members for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain and Morinville-St. Albert sat here smugly denying the problem, that is very real and that many students in this province are struggling with.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Nielsen:** Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. The member is quite correct. You know, we didn’t even have to see some of these displays this evening. I’ve already heard from students that were quite angry that this bill has been brought forward and without even allowing them a chance to have their say on it.

I recall speaking with one group, and this part is going to be very hard for me, Madam Speaker, because I get very emotional about it. The student looked at me straight in the eye and asked me: “Why is it that they hate me so much for being who I am?” I didn’t have an answer. I said, “I don’t know.” The student said: “I just want to be who I am. I just want to have friends like everybody else. I just want to be treated normal, but because I’m a little bit different looking, I have to potentially get subjected to stuff before I’m ready to tell people about it.” It was very, very difficult for me. Very, very difficult. I promised that person that I would not go quietly on this.

9:20

We need to consult with these kids. We need to hear the fear in their voices, because they are scared. Like I said, I’ve certainly seen examples where the parents have been absolutely accepting and

loving and have promoted that. My gosh, I've seen a close friend of mine from high school whose daughter has become an incredible . . .

**The Deputy Speaker:** Are there any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today in support of the amendment brought forward by my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Decore, that amendment, of course, to refer this matter to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities for further consultation.

What I'd actually like to talk about today is something that I think has been remarkably absent from our conversations around Bill 8, and that's largely because I don't think much consideration or, frankly, thought has been given to this by the government that's brought forward this bill. I'd actually like to speak to the other pieces of the Education Act, the legislation that this government is seeking to proclaim, because I think it's important to remember that there are quite a few other provisions in the Education Act, although largely unsubstantive and not achieving the intent which the Minister of Education has suggested they will achieve, which I think will further go to show that this is really a smokescreen for bringing forward provisions to roll back protections for LGBTQ students and weaken GSAs.

However, I'd like to actually speak to some of the other pieces of the Education Act. I think my fellow colleagues – I've already spoken a fair bit about it, but I will continue to speak about it, and I know my colleagues will as well. But I have a bit of an advantage here, which is, as I've mentioned before in this House, in this Assembly, that I worked on the Education Act in my period of time while I was a civil servant in Alberta Education. In fact, between the periods of time of 2009 and 2013 that was some of the primary work that I did, work with three former ministers of Education under Progressive Conservative governments on the consultation, on the drafting, on the revisions around the Education Act. So I do have a great deal of experience and knowledge with this act.

It is actually a bit of a disappointment for me that a project that I'd worked on for many years, which I had sort of accepted was no longer current or appropriate legislation even despite the good work of the many people who worked on it – I'd long ago let go of that since it has been over seven years since this legislation was passed. But now to see it brought forward: the irony is that it's being brought forward, I believe, only to weaken GSAs. That's a little bit heartbreaking for me, I have to say, as somebody who worked so hard on those former pieces of legislation, but I will talk a little bit about it.

The first pieces I want to talk about. I mentioned in this House that the Education Act came as a result of a long consultation on overhauling the education system as a whole, and that consultation was called Inspiring Education. It was led by then minister David Hancock, and a great deal of resources and money, frankly, were spent on that consultation with Albertans to talk about how would we envision education for the future in this province. The Inspiring Education document, which is still available – you can do a Google search and find that – while it's a great piece of information and a great document outlining what was heard during the Inspiring Education consultation, what unfortunately did not come out of it was a great deal of detail in terms of how to revise one piece of education, which is legislation. Legislation is only one way that we influence and impact and develop our education system.

There wasn't a lot of detail that came out of Inspiring Education, but one piece that did come out was a conversation around the

importance of allowing learners, students, in the future to be able to learn at their own pace and to have a more flexible understanding of the environments in which they'd learn and the pace at which they would learn. To support that in legislation, the Education Act made a number of changes to what was currently in the School Act, and those are changes around the age of access. With that, Madam Speaker, what I'm referring to is that under the current School Act and the School Act at the time there was – you know, children between a certain age have a right of access to education in this province. That means that if they approach any school board within that age, they are entitled to receive an education program, and their resident school board is required to provide them an education program that's consistent with the standards that are set out by the ministry. For the longest time that has been that by September 1 of any given year any child who is six years of age or older or younger than 19 years of age was entitled to receive an education program. That's what was in the School Act at the time. That is what's still in the School Act. What the Education Act did was propose a change to raise the maximum age of entitlement to an education program to age 21. That meant that any student who was 21 years of age as of September 1 was entitled to go to school and receive an education program by their resident school board.

That was important because what we heard was that here was a significant concern amongst the government at the time, the ministry at the time, about encouraging kids to complete high school. For a lot of kids having a longer time within which they were entitled to go to school would be key to them completing their education, particularly students who might have come to Canada at a later age. Maybe they were English language learners for the first time when they came to Canada. They needed a little bit more time to complete high school. The government at the time felt it was very important to encourage kids to do that because, of course, having a high school diploma is key to being able to access so many more jobs, skills training, postsecondary. It's a basic. It's a fundamental. I think we can all agree that we want to encourage kids to complete high school. Increasing the age to 21 was meant to do that.

Now, I do want to point out that at the time and even currently, now, the Alberta Education funding manual will fund students up to the age of 20, so this was actually only extending the age of access by one year. I mean, that was the intent. We've heard the Minister of Education rise in this House and say that the purpose of proclaiming the Education Act was to modernize the school system. That was one of the key ways that the government at the time when the Education Act was drafted meant to achieve that goal, to actually say: okay; if we're going to modernize, we're going to let kids attend school for a longer period of time. Unfortunately, though, that is one of the key pieces in Bill 8 that has been repealed. The government is not actually moving forward with that piece of transformation which was in the Education Act, which was to extend the age of access of education. They've rolled it back to what's currently in the School Act.

Now, I'm not going to, you know, dispute that the previous NDP government also did not adopt that. They still had the School Act. They were under no obligation to take that on, but they didn't extend the age of access either, and the reality is because it does cost money. To provide kids' education for a longer period of time means you've got older kids who are going to be going to school. They're going to be funded students. School boards would have to find spaces for them. That, realistically, does cost money, but the NDP government was at least honest about the fact that by not raising the age of access, they were doing so because they couldn't afford to at the time. I know that will shock some of the members across the aisle because they seem to believe that the NDP did not

make any decisions based on fiscal responsibility, but – ha, ha, ha, guess what? – they did.

The other piece about this. Another piece that was brought forward as part of the Education Act was increasing the age of compulsory attendance at school. Again, the current School Act states that right now a student may drop out, essentially, from school at age 16, so beyond the age of 16 kids are not required to stay in school. Certainly, because of the age of access they can stay in school longer, but they're not required to beyond the age of 16. Again, the original intent behind the Education Act as was drafted in 2012 is that the government wanted to encourage kids to stay in school. They didn't want to make it easy for kids to drop out. Some kids could turn 16 before they even start grade 11, so some kids could, honestly, have dropped out of school in grade 10.

There was a thought: let's encourage kids by requiring them to stay in school until the age of 17. They had to stay in school. This is another piece that, yeah, I guess I'm not even really sure if it actually could cost more money. It could in theory because, you know, I don't think any government is banking on kids dropping out of school early as a way to save a buck. In theory, I guess, there are some kids who would stay in school longer. Again, I'm disappointed to see that this was a very actually common-sense thing to do, to encourage kids to stay in school, to actually require them to do so, but this government under Bill 8 has once again not gone forward with that change either, which I think is disappointing.

So what changes will the Education Act as proclaimed if Bill 8 passes by this minister – what changes will happen? Again, I don't think that much light has been given to any of these issues. I think they speak to the need to refer this matter to a committee because these are things that nobody is talking about in this House. We're not hearing about it, and I'm not even confident – I'll be quite honest – that the government members across the way even know about some of these changes.

### 9:30

One of them is that under the Education Act school boards will be permitted to operate alternative programs outside of their boundaries. During the time that I was in Alberta Education, there was certainly a plethora of private schools that sought to become alternative programs operated by public and separate school boards. There are a lot of reasons for that. School boards were willing to take these programs on as alternative programs because they would get funding for the students who are now enrolled in these alternative programs. For private schools, it also allowed for full funding. The operating body that operated the previous private school saw advantages to being part of the public system as well because, again, these kids would get full funding. Often transportation would be provided. So it was seen to be an advantage.

Now, there were many, many, many examples when I was with Alberta Education – and I can say this continued on well past that; I worked for another five years directly for school boards – where there were many former private schools that became alternative programs that still continued to operate as if they were private schools, with the giant exception of getting full funding, which is hugely problematic. For an alternative program, the school board should be responsible for operating those programs.

One of the things that we saw happen in the early 2000s, which the Education Act was looking at, was the fact that there were school jurisdictions that were operating as alternative programs, programs that were outside of their jurisdictions. Now, we can have philosophical discussions about whether or not we agree with that. The situations that arose that led to this piece of the Education Act were because there were some school boards that

were operating alternative programs, like, across the province from where they were. This is not just in the neighbouring jurisdiction. It was far across the province, and it was largely because the private school that operated that former alternative program could not convince their local school board to take them on as an alternative program, so they shopped around until they found a school board that would.

In my view, this is a very problematic provision. The Education Act is now going to expressly allow for school boards to operate programs outside of their jurisdiction. That's a problem, in my view, because school boards are locally elected bodies. They are elected by the electors in their jurisdiction to represent their interests, just as we all are. They are locally elected to operate programs that serve their students in their jurisdictions and respond to the needs of their communities. When school boards are operating programs outside of their jurisdictions, they're actually acting outside their means. It would be the same as one of us trying to affect policy in another province. We were not elected to do that. We have our jurisdictions, we have our boundaries, and that's who we're meant to serve. We're not intended to serve residents or electors outside of our boundaries.

Frankly, I think it was very problematic, and it allowed for an undermining of the very foundation of what locally elected school boards are supposed to be about because they're now serving in a community where there's no elected representative in that jurisdiction on the school board. They're serving students that don't belong there. They're serving parents who can't vote for those trustees. I think that's problematic, but at the very least that's my view on it.

I think who'd have a very strong view on this are school board trustees. Again, we've mentioned in this House a few times that over 50 per cent of current sitting school board trustees were not around when this Education Act was passed in 2012. They haven't had the opportunity to express what they believe is an appropriate role of a school board trustee should they be operating programs outside of their jurisdiction. As I've indicated, I don't agree with it, but certainly I'm sure – and I worked with many, many school boards – some might; some might not. But that is a discussion that those school board trustees should have an opportunity to have. That's one of the reasons why I believe this referral to the committee is important.

Another amendment to the current School Act that the Education Act would bring in is a requirement that all school boards have audit committees. Specifically, it will set out that all school boards and charter schools will be required to appoint an auditor – they're already required to do that – but must also establish an audit committee consisting of public members. The audit committee will recommend the appointment of an auditor to the board, review the audited financial statements, and report to the board.

A comment I have on this one is just that, in fact, many school boards already do this. They already have an audit committee where public members get to review the audited financial statements of the jurisdiction of the school board and comment on it. This may be an unnecessary change. I certainly don't object to it. I think everybody should agree that public bodies such as school boards, who are almost primarily publicly funded, should have their books open and reviewable by the public. I don't think anybody would disagree with that. Again, I'm not even certain if that's the kind of revolutionary or transformational change that the minister is looking to achieve by bringing forward Bill 8. It's a nice administrative change – I certainly think many people might like it, might not like it – but you wouldn't even need to pass legislation to do that, really.

Honestly, the minister has significant authorities already under the School Act around audited financial statements. We've seen ministers do it. Previous Progressive Conservative ministers . . .

**The Deputy Speaker:** Any comments or questions under 29(2)(a)?  
The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

**Member Irwin:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm just, as always, very impressed by the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud's knowledge on this topic. I know she's got a great deal more that she can share, so I would ask her to please continue with her thoughts.

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

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Audit committees. I will end on saying that I just think it's a fine change, but to require it by legislation could be characterized by some to be a little bit of red tape and just unnecessary, frankly. School boards should be held accountable, but I don't think it's necessary to do it in legislation.

Actually, another change that I think a lot of school board trustees would have a lot of things to say about is the establishment – not a requirement, but there is an establishment – by the Education Act that all school boards will be required to have a trustee code of conduct. Now, the NDP government already under the former Minister of Education did bring in changes to the School Act to require that school boards have trustee codes of conduct. In fact, most of them should have had that in place already by September 1, 2018. What's key about what's being proposed in the Education Act is that not only must each board have a trustee code of conduct and that trustee code of conduct must set out sanctions for breaches of their code of conduct, but the Education Act will allow for sanctions that lead up to and include disqualification of a trustee from a board. That means that a school board, if there is a dysfunctional member on their board, could in theory disqualify one of their own members.

Now, again, that's a good conversation to have, but some might argue that an elected official who is a school board trustee should not be able to be disqualified by its colleagues. I actually say this knowing that there are certainly some situations where I've worked with school boards that have had one or two very problematic and disruptive trustees, who can really hamper the functioning of the board. That can be very problematic, but I think that even more problematic is the idea of an elected official being disqualified by a majority vote of their colleagues. I think we would all as elected officials be very troubled by the idea that any of us could be disqualified by our colleagues.

There are already clear provisions in the School Act and in the Education Act where there is automatic disqualification for certain, you know, breaches of conflict of interest, breaches of the Criminal Code, and those are all very standard and should be necessary for all elected officials. But the idea that a board of trustees could disqualify one of its own: again, I can guarantee you that the 50 per cent of current school board trustees who were not around when this change was presented might have thoughts on that. They might have a lot of thoughts about the idea. We know that sometimes school boards can be fractious. Sometimes there can be factions. There can be all of that, as happens in elected bodies. I'm sure a lot of them would have some very strong views on that, which is yet another reason why it would be important to refer this to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities to talk to school board trustees about what they think about the idea that one of them could be disqualified by their colleagues.

These are just examples. I can tell you that I'm certain there are going to be plenty of opportunities for me to speak to the other

changes in the School Act. I bring this forward because I think it's very important for the members on the other side to really know what it means to proclaim the Education Act. I'm not saying that all of these changes are good or bad. I have very strong views about the changes that weaken the protections for GSAs, but there is a lot of other content and material in this bill that we need to be cognizant of. It's not simply just rubber-stamping something. It was seven years ago. A lot has changed. Many of the members in this House have changed since then. Therefore, I think we need to give very real thought to the implications.

More importantly – I highlighted this the last time I spoke to this bill – there is a significant amount of detail that still governs the education system, that will continue to govern the education system under the new act, that the government is trying to proclaim, that is set out in regulation. We are sitting here at the end of June, and the government intends to proclaim this as of September 1.

School boards and charter schools and private schools and parents and home educators need to know the rules by which they are operating. Schools don't just begin operating on September 1. There is a great deal of planning that goes into that. Whether it be transportation or fees or financial accountability requirements or charter school operations, those are significant pieces of information that I think the school system requires to be able to function efficiently and smoothly. I know this government believes in efficient functioning of government bodies and public bodies – and I agree with you – but we need to give the system time to do that.

Thank you.

9:40

**The Deputy Speaker:** Are there other members to speak to the bill?  
The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

**Member Loyola:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's always a privilege to rise in this House and speak to everyone. But before I do, I'm hoping that you'll grant me some leeway tonight. Someone very special to me is watching from her home right now. Through you to her, I just want to say: Adriana, I love you. A little bit unconventional, I know, but she's watching, so I just wanted to let her know.

Privilege. I wanted to specifically focus on why it's so important for this bill to go to committee. The reality is that we all have a certain level of privilege. Now, there are very few people in this House who can actually say that they've lived their lives from the experience of someone who identifies as LGBTQ-two-spirited. Very few people in this House. Number one, we have to check the fact that we live with the privilege of not having gone through the experiences that people who identify as LGBTQ-two-spirited have to live. We don't know the realities that they have to live.

Luckily, on this side of the House we have a member who's very vocal about her experience, and I've learned so much from her on the realities that she has had to live with here in the city; not only that but also coming from rural Alberta and what that experience was like, growing up in rural Alberta and going through the reality of having to first understand the reality that they were living and then also being able to identify as someone who's LGBTQ and sharing that with the rest of the world when she thought it was necessary to share that reality with the world, not when somebody who she thought she could trust could actually go out and out her to the rest of her community or her family.

Now, by no means am I saying that I know everything that there is to know just because I've spoken to one person. I would never claim that. But what I am saying is that I do have the privilege of not having to actually live that reality and the discrimination that

comes along with being someone who has come out and has decided to share their sexual orientation with the rest of the world. I don't believe that many members of this House do. This is why it's so important.

I thank the Member for Edmonton-Decore for actually bringing forward this amendment to Bill 8 so that it can be referred to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities specifically for this reason. Then we have the opportunity to actually hear from members of the LGBTQ-two-spirited community, that we can potentially invite to actually speak to the committee. Now, what better way to consult on the bill than to provide those people with a voice? Let me please remind all the members of this House that . . . [An electronic device sounded] Thank you for the musical accompaniment. I really appreciate it. Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. member, perhaps take it outside.

**Member Loyola:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

As I was saying – as I was saying – not only do we have the privilege, but we also have the duty, because I'm pretty sure that every member in this House has constituents that identify as LGBTQ-two-spirited that actually live in their ridings, and it is our duty to represent everybody in our ridings, not just those that we are closest to or our family members or our close friends. It's our duty to actually reach out and speak to as many constituents as we can make possible throughout our role as representatives and MLAs, to actually get out there and speak to people and ask them about the realities that they are living, the issues and the concerns that they have.

I know that this is not new to the members in this House – I know – but it's very easy to have blinders on when you're always meeting with the same constituents and the same stakeholders and you're listening to similar issues and similar concerns on the regular, and you're not getting out there and speaking to people who perhaps don't share your same views. I've often said this to constituents of mine who don't necessarily agree with me ideologically: “Yes, I do have my own political ideology. It's mine. I grew up with it. I was educated in it. I learned as much as I possibly could about my own political ideology. But my role in this House is not only to represent that particular ideology; it's also to get out there on the doorsteps and meet with people, talk to them, and also listen to their perspective and, hopefully, be able to learn from that perspective as well.”

Now, I've shared in the House before my cultural background, the fact that my family came to Canada fleeing violence from the September 11, 1973, military coup, and because of that, I had the honour and privilege, even though I came from that reality, that violence and was now here, of then learning and standing up for human rights and about the atrocities that were being committed all over Latin America at the time. I've spoken before of the discrimination that even my brother had to endure when we first came, because, of course, I came as a child – I only came as a two-year-old – and the fact is that I wasn't in school when my brother went. My older brother experienced discrimination at that point because we were the newest newcomers to Canada at the time, like many other newcomers have had the experience since.

Like I've mentioned before, the majority of Canadians and Albertans are very welcoming and very nice and always extend a hand, but it only takes one to create that doubt in one's mind if this is really home or not.

Now, I'm very happy that I've had the privilege to come from that reality, that refugee experience, and now stand here in this House and be able to come and share that refugee experience with the rest of Albertans as we continue to make legislation or, in this

case, voice our concern with this particular legislation so that we can make sure that this bill actually goes to committee. That's what solidarity is about. When you have a certain perspective and you can see how your human rights have been trampled upon, when it comes to other people's human rights, it's not only sympathy that you have, but you actually empathize with that person because you've actually had to live an experience where you know – now, you're not living the same experience.

9:50

This is going back to the whole issue of privilege that I was talking about. We have the privilege of not having to live the experience of someone who identifies as LGBTQ-two-spirited. We have the privilege of not having to suffer the same discrimination while we are in public. But through other experiences we can gather that – and in my case it was racial discrimination. And because of that racial discrimination and the fact that I was a newcomer to Canada and my family all came as newcomers, having experienced that discrimination, I can only imagine the discrimination that people who identify as LGBTQ-two-spirited are going through, but at least I gather that they're going through it.

Therefore, it's a responsibility, when one has this privilege, to then make sure to extend through solidarity the fact that we need to make sure that all people that are suffering discrimination here in this province don't have to go through it. That's what this amendment is really about.

As I've explained before when getting up to speak to Bill 8, GSAs and QSAs are about creating safe spaces in our schools. Now, the school is a hub for the community, and many times what happens is that the school is a starting point from which information and education actually filter out into our communities. I see this all the time, and I'm sure that members on the other side of the House see it, too, when they go and visit the schools in their ridings. You have that opportunity to actually go into the schools and speak to the children, the students who are actually sitting in those schools, and learn what they're talking about.

I've had the opportunity to meet with so many students. You know, they're not students who actually identify as LGBTQ-two-spirited, but they get it. They get why GSAs and QSAs are necessary within our schools. I bet that if you go into any school right now, Madam Speaker, any school in this entire province right now, and you speak to students, they're going to share with you how aware they are about antibullying policies and how important it is to treat each other with respect and dignity, which is what GSAs and QSAs are all about, an opportunity for people who are questioning and are going through a process of coming out and identifying as LGBTQ-two-spirited to have that opportunity and have this safe space where they can have the support from their peers within their school so that they can share what they're going through and not have to fear being outed to their parents.

If someone is going through this process of questioning, the last thing that they're going to want to do is to share that with people who could potentially, as I said before, kick them out of the house, like the Member for Edmonton-Decore was sharing. He actually got a tweet from somebody, and I don't want to put words in his mouth, so I'm not even going to try to repeat what the tweet said because I can't remember. I just remember that it was horrendous. It was along the lines that a child would – oh. Now I remember. It was: I'd rather have a dead son than a gay son.

GSAs and QSAs would be weakened by Bill 8. Now, I know that the minister has stood in this House several times and has said the opposite. I respect the minister and the minister's opinion, where she's coming from, but in my humble opinion, I can't agree with that. In my very humble opinion, I cannot agree with it because I

know that the legislation would actually weaken GSAs and QSAs. The fact that not all educational institutions across this province would actually have the responsibility of making sure that when students request a GSA or a QSA, they would actually have to implement it within their school. That's part of the problem here.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika.

**Mr. Schow:** Why, thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate this opportunity to rise in the Chamber today under 29(2)(a) and to respond to the member opposite, the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, against this amendment. I must say that I am slightly disappointed when the member opposite asked for some leniency. I thought we were going to hear maybe another verse, another track from his poetry. My disappointment was furthered when the Member for Calgary-McCall started playing some music, and I thought we were going to hear a nice rendition of Jodeci or something. But I digress.

You know, we've talked a lot tonight about this amendment, and I need to speak out against it and speak in favour of Bill 8 because I do believe that Bill 8 is one that intends to protect students, keep them safe, and that is exactly what the Minister of Education has intended to do. It should not come as a surprise, Madam Speaker, with Bill 8, given that in our policy platform on two separate occasions, that I was able to come up with very quickly, one on page 48, it says:

- Education will be strengthened by working with parents, teachers, principals, and trustees to protect school choice, improve accountability, and deliver the best possible outcomes for our children.

And on page 60, in proclaiming the Education Act, 2012, to take effect on September 1, 2019:

- 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.

There's been a lot of talk about the concern for bullying, and I wanted to maybe mention quickly the definition of bullying – I don't usually do this – and thought I'd read it out: the blustering, quarrelsome, overbearing person who habitually badgers and intimidates others. Oftentimes sitting in this House, listening to this debate, I find that we are getting just that from the members opposite. In particular, I remember hearing the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie on June 12 say: I tune out sometimes because I don't agree. The purpose of this Chamber is to represent our constituents, not to bully each other or do as the member said. He said that he goes out and knocks on doors and listens to others' perspectives. Well, he has now contradicted himself.

Madam Speaker, I contend that the purpose of this bill is in fact to protect children, and we have also said that schools cannot disclose a student's membership in an inclusion group as there are student privacy considerations that trump other legislation. But the members opposite have been very creative with the things that they have said. If they spent as much time talking to constituents as they do in creating new names for the bills that we introduce in this Legislature – something like the pick-your-pockets bill, Bill Hate, or the bad-faith bargaining bill – they might actually listen to other constituents who actually don't agree with them, constituents like those in Cardston-Siksika; constituents who believe that parents, not legislators, know what's best for their kids; constituents that believe that our job as a government is also to pass legislation that keeps their kids safe. And kids need to feel safe in schools. That is paramount.

**10:00**

The legislation that we're debating today respects the hard work done by Albertans over the years of consultation, and I wanted to highlight that briefly, specifically the work that began in the mid-2000s to replace the outdated School Act, which has been in place since 1988. The '80s were great years, but it's time to replace the bill. The world and, you know, school officials and students along with the education system are changing, and we needed legislation that reflected that.

Though the Education Act never came into force after the 2015 election, it was our job to do just that, and we'll proclaim the Education Act of 2012 to ensure that kids are safe in schools, to ensure that they get the education that they deserve because, frankly, Madam Speaker, all kids deserve to go to school and get a world-class education in a safe environment.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Are there any other speakers wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

**Mr. Feehan:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this amendment. I would very much like to see this bill be referred to committee for a number of reasons. I doubt, in my short 15 minutes, that I'll have a chance to elucidate all of them, but I will begin and see how far we get and try to add a bit more in our further discussions and further readings of the bill. I think there are a lot of complexities within this bill that have implications that are unrealized by the government side of the House. I'm very concerned about the unintended consequences of a bill of this nature.

I know that there has been a lot of focus on the GSAs – and I will get a chance to speak to that, hopefully tonight or, if not, the next time we get together to speak – but there's one part of the bill that I have previously asked some questions about and that I think it's very important that we get a chance to get an answer on, because I really haven't heard an answer at all to some of my concerns in this. It's because I haven't heard those answers that I really think we need to accept this amendment and refer it to committee, because we need to get the answers. To simply, you know, have serious concerns brought up by this side of the House and then just dismiss them and move on really is a betrayal of the concerns that our constituents bring forward. As a result, I'll take an opportunity to kind of address the issue again that I previously raised and talk about it a little bit further because I think it's a complex issue.

The last time I was up, I was speaking about the fact that there are a number of things happening at the same time in this bill, and it's the interaction of those things that becomes very problematic. Now, as had previously been mentioned by the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, who, as we all know, actually helped to write some of the education bills over the last number of years and has great, detailed information about the thinking that went into the construction of these bills, some of the things that she was concerned about hadn't been properly addressed, and some of the things that she's very concerned about continue to reside inside this bill.

One of them that I want to point out, the third point that she had mentioned, was that this bill in its present form will allow school boards to operate schools outside of their own jurisdictions. Now, she had a moment to speak to the fact that that's very problematic in the sense that it means that people who attend a particular school in a particular jurisdiction will not be able to vote for or vote out members of school boards, then, who have influence over their school, if that happens, which is truly an undermining of democracy. I mean, the right to representation is well known as the

centre post of democracy, and the fact that we would cavalierly just throw that out without taking the time to recognize the implications of that is pretty dramatic, and I think we should be sitting down in sober second thought and having a conversation, you know, with people who are going to be influenced by this.

I want to address this in some particularity and talk about where I'm concerned about the potentiality for problems. I've had the very wonderful opportunity to speak very closely with First Nations across this province about some of their concerns around the school system and some of the things that they find problematic.

One of the things that has been addressed with me on a number of occasions is that if you live on-reserve, you are not able to vote in municipal elections because you're not considered part of the municipality. But we put our school board elections in the municipal elections. That means that not only are they not voting in the municipalities that they happen to live beside – that, as you know, is interesting because now we're saying that somebody can run a school board in a jurisdiction that's not theirs – but you can't vote for somebody who is outside of the jurisdiction. So you're doubling down on the problem that they've already articulated. It means that their kids are in schools that they have absolutely no input on in terms of the electoral process right now.

Now, you are doubling down on that in the sense that their kids will be in schools that may not even be run by the local municipality; that is, they had no vote so therefore no influence over the school from an electoral point of view. But they did have some influence by virtue of being part of the community and could talk to other members of the community and express their concerns and so on. Now if the school is being run by a jurisdiction far away, they don't even have that influence. They can't even talk to their neighbours. They can't actually address concerns they have either fundamentally through democracy or through relationship, and that means they're disenfranchised. What you're suggesting here is that people will be sending the kids to the school and not have any ability to control what happens in that school. This is a very serious problem for some.

Taking one particular example, when I was up in Beaver First Nation, I learned that the band office is on the south side of the major road, and on the north side of the major road is the school that all of the children go to. It's literally just across the street. They have serious problems as a result of that. One of the problems is that while a hundred per cent, and one should never say a hundred per cent, the vast majority of their students go to that school – in fact, they did tell me that the school population is over 80 per cent Beaver First Nation students – they are unable to vote for anybody on that school board. They have no control over what happens, and it's literally across the street, no farther than I am sitting across from the members of the government side of the House right now.

Now you're suggesting that a school board down in, let's say, Cardston-Siksika or somewhere else along the way can actually take on that school and turn that school into a charter school, which is one of the things that is being enhanced in this particular bill here, and make that charter school consistent with whatever belief system they have, whatever world view they have. In no way will these First Nation students have any ability to vote on any matters, to attend the school in any way and reflect their First Nation's concerns. It means that you could essentially have a school board in southern Alberta create a charter school in northern Alberta and functionally make the public schools around it become nonviable because the number of children that are in the charter school undermines the ability of the public schools nearby to stay open, because they don't have enough kids.

I know that's not a concern in a major urban area. There are always alternative schools maybe 15 or 20 minutes away or even

an hour away. You can hop on a bus and get there. That's not a reality for Beaver First Nation. It's well over an hour's drive to the next major town or city, and if that school across the street, that's only a few, maybe a dozen yards away from their band council office, suddenly becomes a charter school, their children will then be attending a charter school because they have no other choice.

#### 10:10

One of the things that we hear from the government side of the House all the time is that they'd like to increase choice, but in this case they're forcing people to attend a charter school because there is no choice. Now, I know that wasn't the intention. I don't think that they want to force all First Nations into schools against their will. We've been through the residential schools. We know that the outcome of that is devastating and terrible. But I think they don't realize that if you increase the charter schools and you allow somebody from another jurisdiction to be able to have control over it, you have no local input then. You cannot vote in the election, and you cannot go to the school and say, "I don't like what you're doing," because the charter school is following the world view of the community on the other end of the province. It's coming into the jurisdiction because it's trying to create a charter school that reflects their value system, not because it is responding to the values of the local community.

I think this is very problematic. I think it undermines the very nature of what we have done well in western democracies, and that is that we have reflected the needs of the local community and created opportunities for the average person to have influence over the institutions that govern their lives, and in this case it's the school board.

I'm very concerned that we have set this situation up and that we are not responding to it at all. What happens if a charter school undermines the viability of local schools? I don't have an answer for that. Nobody has stood up and responded to my questions as I asked these questions a few weeks ago. So I'm asking again. Of course, I know I won't get an answer, so what I'm asking, then, instead is: can we refer it to committee so I can ask the question? Maybe you have a reasonable answer. Maybe there's something I don't understand in terms of how you would respond to that dynamic that I've just outlined. If you do, I'd love to hear it.

I am more than willing to listen, to open my ears and hear what it is that you have to say about how you would respond to this kind of dynamic so that I can go back to the chief of the Beaver First Nation and say: "Look, you don't have to worry. You're going to have some control over what happens here. You're going to be able to have your values as a First Nations person reflected in the school system." I'd love to be able to do that. I'd love to give him assurance, because I can assure you that Chief Mercredi is very concerned about this and has addressed it with me on a number of occasions.

So I would like an opportunity for Chief Mercredi to come and speak to the members of this House as well, to come and sit at this committee and to talk about what it's like to have all of your kids go into a system that you have absolutely no input into, even when that system is literally across the street from your band office and the community, of course, all around the band office, and have an opportunity for him to share about the needs that he has to have a school that reflects First Nations beliefs, values, and traditions.

That's what I'd like to see, and I would love to have the opportunity. I will do the work. I will phone the First Nations chiefs and other members and say: "I'm inviting you down to committee. Come on down and tell us a little bit about what it's like and talk to us about how we can create a circumstance for you to be able to

have input into the school system that almost all of your children go to, the school system in which your children at present constitute about 80 per cent of the children involved. I'm offering that. I'm offering to work with you to sit down . . .

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 64(4) we must now proceed to Committee of the Whole to vote on the appropriation bills.

### Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

**The Chair:** I'd like to call the committee to order. Pursuant to Standing Order 64(4) I must now put the following question. Does the committee approve the following bills: Bill 5, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2019, and Bill 6, Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2019?

[Motion carried]

**The Chair:** Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 64(4) the committee shall now immediately rise and report.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

**Mr. Jones:** Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 5, Bill 6.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Does the Assembly concur in the report? All those in favour, please say aye.

**Hon. Members:** Aye.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Any opposed, please say no. So carried.

### Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

#### Bill 8 Education Amendment Act, 2019 (continued)

[Debate adjourned June 24: Mr. Feehan speaking]

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

**Mr. Feehan:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to finish my time and to talk a little bit more about some of the other issues that I think are very important with regard to this particular bill and why we'd like to have the referral.

I think I've articulated my concern around the school boards and parental choice that is being eliminated by this act, at least for First Nations people or, I imagine, for other small community members. I think the potential is there for real problems in those kind of smaller communities. I think it can be fixed, by the way. I mean, the hope in making the referral to the committee is that we would be able to look at those kinds of dynamics and look at the situation that I described coming up and eliminate that problem by going to the committee. Of course, we'd be doing it in relationship with the people who are most greatly affected, in this case the individuals from the First Nations and Métis settlements that I'm talking to. But, again, I'd be more than happy to make some phone calls to some of the smaller communities and invite them in.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members wishing to speak to the amendment? Sorry; 29(2)(a). The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

**Mr. Nielsen:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was wondering if the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford could speak a little bit around, you know, from his experience as a former Minister of Indigenous Relations around how our peoples found consultation in the past around these kinds of subjects. Did they feel that they were always fully consulted, or did they feel that they never were consulted? I was hoping – his experience having been the first minister to travel around to every single nation in the province, and some of the things that he might have heard around this subject.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

**Mr. Feehan:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Thank you very much for the question from the MLA for Edmonton-Decore.

The issue of consultation actually speaks to kind of a larger problem, I think, that is expressed by the indigenous community here, that their experience with the school system is that they have had little to no involvement throughout the years. That has been a pretty deep frustration for them because for them it's not simply a matter of, you know, having a chance to have a voice in things. It's also attached to a traumatic history. The history of residential schools in this country is one of deep pain and trauma for the indigenous community.

10:20

The experience of having people with a particular world view open up schools in their community – and, of course, in those days it was a situation where that world view was such that it told the students that they, first of all, must come to the school. They had no choice, or an RCMP officer would show up at their door and take those children away. In fact, many of them talk about the day that their children were taken away from their homes and brought into these residential schools, where they had no choice as parents to speak to any aspect of it, and talk about living in a small community and seeing the float plane come in in early September and land on the shore and them all being required to walk their children out to the end of the dock and say goodbye to their as young as five-year-olds and six-year-olds and put them on a float plane and tell them: I will not see you again until next summer. Literally, you have children as young as five being separated from their parents at that tender age, being absent from their family homes for 10 months of the year.

Of course, what was worse about the residential schools – not that it needs to be any worse than being separated from your own family – but in addition to that was the fact that in the residential schools there was a particular world view which was very antagonistic to the indigenous world view, and that world view required a number of things to happen.

One is that children were brought into the schools, and they were stripped of all of their clothing. Anything that identified them as First Nations was taken away. Their hair was cut off because that was part of the indigenous world view but not part of this school system's world view. They were severely punished for speaking the language that they were raised with in their communities, and the punishment was severe. We are talking very serious consequences such as the beatings and so on, and all of those implications were terrible.

Now, of course, the trauma for First Nations goes even yet again beyond that because it wasn't simply a difference of two world views that were in collision and that weren't talking to each other

and so on, which is probably more likely to be the thing that they would object to today, but in those days the trauma was much deeper. The reason why I'm speaking to it now is because that trauma really influences their feelings about not having control over the schools that their children are in now because in those days not only was it the beatings for speaking languages like Blackfoot or Cree or Dene or Nakota Sioux or any of the other languages; it was also that the children often experienced serious trauma leading even to death. So the amount of physical abuse and sexual abuse that occurred in those residential schools was very high.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Okay. We will now seek speakers to the amendment. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. First of all, I want to thank all of my hon. colleagues for their thoughtful interventions on this matter. It's clear from listening to the speeches of all of my friends here on this side that not only do we know a lot about the pitfalls of the Education Act, but we're able to articulate quite clearly a number of the concerns that our constituents have brought forward with respect to the proclamation of the amendments to this bill.

I want to share some personal stories, I guess, if I may, about why we would want to send this bill to committee, Madam Speaker. It's truly my belief that if we consult adequately, we will be able to change the hearts and minds of the very members who are proposing this bill in the first place, particularly with respect to the amendments around removing the protections for gay-straight alliances in our schools.

I want to share a couple of stories with the members of the House through you, Madam Speaker. When our government brought forward Bill 24 to create the protections that currently exist for gay-straight alliances in our schools, I had a mother and her son – I believe he was about 10 years old – who was home-schooled, come in to talk to me about their concerns around the bill. This was part of his education around provincial government. He was studying the grade 6 curriculum at the time. He was being home-schooled, so his mom, who was also his teacher, thought that it would be a good idea to come in to my office and talk to me about my role as an MLA and what we were up to at the Legislature. Then he would be able to express some of the concerns about legislation that was before the House at the time.

Of course, he had some concerns about Bill 24. You know, he asked me a simple question. He asked me why I thought it wasn't the right of parents to know whether or not their kids are in a gay-straight alliance. I looked at that little boy, and I told him that I know that his mom loved him very much and that I'm sure that regardless of what he did or said, he could count on his mother loving him and taking good care of him for as long as she needed to do that because he was lucky enough to grow up in a home where he was supported for being the person that he was and that most of us are fortunate enough to grow up in those kinds of situations. I said: but just a few blocks west of my constituency office there is the Youth Empowerment & Support Services building. It used to be called the youth emergency shelter. They've changed their name, Madam Speaker. I told him and his mother that if they were to go to the youth emergency shelter that day and ask the kids there how they ended up there, more than half of them would say that they had been kicked out of the house because their parents found out that they were gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transsexual.

When that young home-schooler heard that story, his eyes got as big as saucers, and his jaw dropped, and so did his mother's because neither of them had any idea that coming out as gay or being outed as gay was the leading cause of teenage homelessness in this city.

They had no idea. It was completely out of their realm of experience. They didn't know anybody who had gone through that. They had certainly never heard the stories before. Just by sharing that information with them, I think I moved them along the line of changing their minds around whether or not these protections for GSAs that were in Bill 24 were necessary. I can't say for sure, Madam Speaker. They didn't tell me that they were going to support my vote for Bill 24, but I could see on their faces that they were genuinely shocked by the story.

Certainly, if you go to the youth emergency shelter in my riding – and I would extend the invitation to all members here to come with me on a tour of the youth emergency shelter in my riding – you will hear these stories from the young people who have been kicked out of their houses by their parents because their parents found out that they were gay. Like the Member for Edmonton-Decore said, there are a shocking number of parents out there who would rather have a dead son than a gay son.

[The Speaker in the chair]

So these poor souls are left on the streets to fend for themselves and occasionally pop in to the youth emergency shelter to get a night out of the cold or a night out of the rain and a free meal and sent along their way, and simply because they are gay and their parents found out about it, these kids are often forced into a life of poverty. It's an experience that is so traumatic that it leads them down the path to drug addiction, Mr. Speaker, because being rejected for who you are is such a painful experience that these kids will do anything to numb the pain, including using drugs to kill the pain if only for a little while.

10:30

Of course, these poor young people have difficulty finding a job. It's awfully hard to get a job without a high school education, Mr. Speaker. You know, certainly, we know that the Member for Calgary-Varsity is keen to make sure that even if you do get a job as a young person, you certainly can't make a living at it. You can't support yourself from it. I'm disappointed that not only are we looking at a government who is forcing young people into homelessness, but we are also taking away their ability to fend for themselves by lowering the minimum wage to which they are entitled. So maybe by engaging with some of these young folks who find themselves at the youth emergency shelter, not only could we get the members opposite to have a change of heart with respect to the portions of this bill that take away the gay-straight alliance protections, but maybe we could have them have a change of heart around their minimum wage reductions as well.

Hope springs eternal, Mr. Speaker, and I am nothing if not a hopeful person. I am certainly, as many here, a big believer in salvation. Maybe by listening to the stories of these young people who are negatively impacted by this government's proposed policies, the members opposite will have a change of heart and take back, because it's not right that any person should be thrown out of their home and onto the streets into a life of drug addiction, abuse, being prone to trafficking, including sexual trafficking, just to make ends meet simply because they're gay.

You know, I have also heard from students at Hardisty school in my riding, Mr. Speaker. It may be of interest to note for many of the members here that Hardisty has a Christian education program. Hardisty also provides their students with a gay-straight alliance. When I was at the Hardisty school a couple of years ago talking about the provisions of Bill 24, I had a young girl in grade 9 get up and talk about how the gay-straight alliance saved her life. She was at that age where she was realizing that she was gay and was surrounded by a lot of negative thoughts, objections to her

orientation. She didn't think that she would be able to make it, but she found friends and support in the gay-straight alliance in her school, and she credited that gay-straight alliance with saving her from suicide. She also said that it was her choice as to whether or not she came out as gay to her friends and her family and didn't want that choice taken away from her by the government. That protection that was offered to her as a member of a gay-straight alliance in her school was the key ingredient to saving that young woman's life.

So it's my hope that by being able to hear these stories, these very powerful stories, about how important the protections that currently exist for gay-straight alliances are for our students, the significant, horrible consequences of being outed to friends and family before you're ready, it will change the hearts and minds of the people here in this Chamber who are proposing these hateful amendments right now.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, from personal experience that there is a significant electoral price that will be paid if the members opposite refuse to back down from these proposed amendments. I know that from personal experience, because the reason I'm sitting here is largely because of the failure of my predecessor, the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, David Dorward, to stand up for gay and lesbian students in his riding.

Just to remind everybody, in April 2014 before this House was a motion that a Liberal MLA brought forward calling on the government to protect GSAs into law. That motion was voted down by a majority of PC members but not all PC members. There were some PC members in the Edmonton area who voted in favour of the motion. I believe Dave Hancock was one of them. I would have to check. But one of them who didn't, Mr. Speaker, was David Dorward, the MLA for Edmonton-Gold Bar at the time. I can tell you that he received an earful from his constituents because he was so far out of step with where the citizens of Edmonton-Gold Bar were on the GSA issue that they sent him letters, they phoned his office, and they protested in front of his office. They gave him a very rough ride and eventually voted him out in 2015, in large part because they realized, through his vote against this motion, how significantly out of step with their values he was.

Now, did that give him pause to reflect? No, Mr. Speaker, it did not, because when these issues were before the Legislature during our term in government – of course, we were talking about the protections for GSAs. We were also talking about guidelines for making schools safe spaces, which included some discussion around washrooms. Of course, there were a lot of ridiculous things said by many people around the issue of washrooms. The former Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, even though he had been kicked out of office largely because of his refusal to stand up for gay and lesbian students in his riding, didn't pause and reflect to see whether or not his views were out of step with his constituents and insisted on making up stories around transgender people and their use of washrooms to sexually attack young children in schools. He claimed on Facebook to have personally known people who masqueraded as transgender individuals for the sole purpose of victimizing young children in schools.

Now, I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that at the public forum that was held in Edmonton-Gold Bar during the 2019 election, Mr. Dorward received a big earful about that as well, about his history of failing to stand up for lesbian and gay students and his willingness to make up stories to victimize transgender people in defence of some imagined conspiracy to make schools safe havens for pedophiles. Young people, old people, people from all walks of life were at that forum, and they all gave him an earful about this. On election day, of course, he faced defeat again at the hands of the

people of Edmonton-Gold Bar because he was so far out of step with their values.

So I urge the members opposite to reconsider this if not only for the lesbian and gay students but for their own electoral fates.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Government House Leader has risen.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Nothing ceases to amaze me anymore when it comes to the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and his comments in this place. His ridiculous behaviour is well known. I mean, you have had to call him out on it many times before. But to try to call out former members inside the Legislature who can't defend themselves inside this place is, quite frankly, a new low for the hon. member.

But what is even worse is to listen to the hon. member continue to misrepresent what Bill 8 actually is. I had the privilege of being the executive director at the Mustard Seed street ministry inside Calgary for many years. My father, of course, was the founder, as you know, Mr. Speaker, of the Mustard Seed, and I had the privilege of growing up, as did the hon. Member for Calgary-Klein, with the very kids that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is speaking about. What he is correct about is that a tremendous amount of youth and adolescent homelessness comes as a result of kids that are in situations where, quite frankly, they have not been able to live at home anymore because they are LGBTQ, which is completely inappropriate.

*10:40*

I can remember standing at the door of the Mustard Seed in Calgary, right in the main Centre Street doors, in my younger days, when I still worked downtown in Calgary on the front lines of the streets, with young people who have been in that exact situation. Unfortunately, sometimes parents don't treat their kids right. Sometimes parents go way too far and hurt their children and put them in horrific situations where they end up living on the streets, having to resort to substances to try to deal with their pain, as the hon. member said.

What the people in those situations are not served by is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar continuing to misrepresent the facts when it comes to Bill 8. The reality, as we have said in this House many times, Mr. Speaker, is that Alberta will continue to have the strongest statutory requirements when it comes to GSAs in the entire country. That's not what the hon. member is speaking about. In fact, he is doing a disservice to people in those situations by continuing to tell them that they will not have GSAs or that GSAs will not be protected inside this province. It's disappointing, and it takes away from the important issue that should be discussed, obviously, in the context of reality. The situation that the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has presented to this House as far as the past that has happened in this Chamber is also unfortunate. The former Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar voted for Bill 10, as did almost every member of both legacy caucuses that make up the current government, something that the hon. member either continues to forget or deliberately forgets. It's disappointing, and he does a disservice to the very people that he pretends to help.

The reality is that he's not here to help those people. Instead, he's here to use them as political props. He's here to play a political game. He's here to provide misinformation to them. It's shameful, Mr. Speaker. That hon. member should be ashamed of himself. He is absolutely acting shameful in this place over and over as he continues to be part of a caucus that is focused on Team Angry, that is focused on fear and smear. That member in particular, who is one of the biggest fear-and-smear members of that entire caucus, has had a record in this Chamber of having to apologize over and over

for his behaviour. Why any Albertan would take what he says seriously would be beyond me because he continues to stand inside this House, misrepresent the facts, mislead people, LGBTQ adolescents, who do not need to be misled, who need to be helped and supported, not have a member of the Legislature continue to stand in this place and mislead and misrepresent facts inside this Chamber. That hon. member should be ashamed of himself. He does a disservice to the opposition.

**Mr. Bilous:** Point of order.

#### **Point of Order Accusations against a Member**

**Mr. Bilous:** Standing Order 23 (h), (i), and (j), Mr. Speaker. You've ruled on this a number of times. The Government House Leader keeps saying that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has misled and misleads the House. You've been very clear in your rulings that members may speak to the government or the opposition but not to individual members accusing them of misleading the House, so I call upon the Government House Leader to apologize and withdraw.

**The Speaker:** I might just suggest that perhaps the hon. Opposition House Leader would wait for me to recognize him before he speaks, but either way, I'm happy to hear from the Government House Leader.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Speaker, I would be happy to withdraw that comment.

**The Speaker:** I was going to encourage you to do so.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** The reality is that the hon. member belongs to an opposition caucus who continues to misrepresent the facts inside this Chamber, and he should be ashamed of that. He should be ashamed of participating in that, Mr. Speaker. He should be, quite frankly, ashamed. I know I would be ashamed if I was him.

**The Speaker:** I appreciate the Government House Leader's comments. I just might suggest that when members of the House directly speak to members, saying that he should be ashamed, that he should do that, that she should do this, that she is doing that, the likelihood that it's going to create disorder inside the Chamber increases, increases, increases after each accusation that is so close to the line of what's appropriate and what isn't appropriate inside the House that inevitably we end up here.

In the 30 seconds or so that the member has left, I encourage him to govern himself accordingly.

#### **Debate Continued**

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Well, Mr. Speaker, it could create disorder, obviously. I respect that point. If you're the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, you're great at creating disorder. I will close with my opening remarks, and that is that the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar should be ashamed of his behaviour in this Assembly because it's unbecoming of the opposition.

**The Speaker:** Anyone else wishing to speak to the bill, Bill 8, on the amendment? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has risen.

**Member Irwin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak to this amendment. It's funny. I said to myself the other day that the next time we debate Bill 8, or Bill Hate, I wasn't going

to speak to the GSA aspect of it because there are so many other pieces that I could talk about given my background in education. I thought, you know, just because I'm the ML-gay in this House, that doesn't mean I need to speak to all the gay things. Then the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud spoke, and she did very well. I can't compete with that. Truly, my mind, I guess, my heart keeps going back to GSAs. It's a battle that we're fighting, and it's an important one despite some of the rhetoric that we're hearing. I'm going to return to GSAs. I'm going to speak to them a little bit.

I want to share more about sort of the personal side of things. We know that mental health, in particular, is a huge issue for many in the LGBTQ2S community, folks of all ages. I know this first-hand. I know what it's like to struggle. I know what it's like when you feel like you can't talk to anyone. I know what it's like when you feel like you have to pretend that you're someone else. I came out as an adult after I'd been a teacher in rural Alberta. I was in my late 20s, in fact. I came out late, and it was really, really hard. I can't – I can't – honestly imagine what it's like for some of these young people and the experiences that they're going through. We saw last week hundreds and hundreds of kids, parents, teachers, allies all out in the rain to stand in support of GSAs and the people that they care about.

GSAs, we know, offer a safe space for kids. They offer a place to talk about these things, to hear others' stories of struggle and of success as well, to talk about their worries if they do come out, you know, whether it be with their parents, their faith community, whatever it might be, and to talk about mental health and to talk about strategies to address any issues that any of them might be experiencing.

Just this month the Trevor Project, which is a suicide prevention and crisis intervention organization for LGBTQ youth, released a report addressing the mental health of queer young adults. These are American stats – I'll tell you that – but the results are pretty horrifying. Nearly 1 in 5 LGBTQ youth aged 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 per cent of LGBTQ youth surveyed had seriously considered suicide in the past year. As Scott Fenwick pointed out in a recent article in the *Edmonton Journal*, "the truth is [quite] simple," and it's quite clear. "GSAs reduce teen suicide" for both LGBTQ folks and their straight counterparts.

A 2014 University of British Columbia study found that among Canadian high schools that had a GSA, the odds of suicidal thoughts among sexual minority students were cut by more than half. Further – and this is fascinating – straight boys in schools with GSAs were also half as likely to attempt suicide. Researchers believe that this is because homophobic bullying is used by boys to sort of perpetuate and reinforce masculine behaviour and status, so having GSAs combats that.

You know what? I saw this first-hand as a teacher in rural Alberta. I know I've shared this before. I've shared my own guilt and my own, you know, shame in not calling out what I saw were homophobic actions and behaviours. There was just such a culture of homophobia and of shaming it and of calling people names, and it was so entrenched at some of the schools that I taught at out in rural Alberta. Again, that just shows how critical GSAs can be in combatting this.

#### **10:50**

Stats from the same project, the Trevor Project in the United States, show that two-thirds of LGBTQ youth reported that someone had attempted to convince them to change their sexual orientation or gender identity, and 71 per cent of respondents – again, this is very recent data – said that they had experienced

discrimination because of their orientation or identity. They point out in this article that it is important to note that LGBTQ youth are not at higher risk of suicide just simply because they are LGBTQ. They are at a higher risk because they face harmful rejection and discrimination from friends, families, and communities, which can make them feel like their lives are worth less than their straight or cisgendered peers.

This is why, you know, we need to offer that space in schools, that free space, where students can access it without having to communicate it with their parents, where they can go to an administrator and won't have to worry about delay, delay, delay. As we know, any sort of delay could mean a young person's life when you're struggling that seriously. GSAs offer youth just that. They offer that idea that they know that they're not alone. So let us consider mental health as a paramount consideration as we tackle this issue. We keep hearing that these protections are the strongest and that we're going to continue to be a leader. But what are the motivations behind these changes, then? If things are fine as they are, if the protections were the strongest, then why bother changing? Why introduce this at all?

Last week I had asked the Education minister who she was consulting on this bill other than groups like Parents for Choice in Education, who have been known to have espoused anti-LGBTQ views. The script was then going after me, asking for me to retract my statement. Of course, I won't. You know, the minister herself hosted an event with this organization last year, and I haven't seen a shift in their attitudes or in their beliefs. So I ask: what is she hearing from groups like those?

We've heard things like this fear of the gay agenda. You know, I could tell you a little bit about my gay agenda. It's one I'm quite proud of. I get up in the morning. I drink some coffee. I go to work. I fight for the constituents of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. I come home. Sometimes I mow my lawn, not often enough. Sometimes I clean my house, also not often enough. These are all parts of my grand gay agenda, and I am surrounded by friends in my neighbourhood, in my community, who are married, who are raising kids. They're doing all the same things that our straight friends are. If that's a gay agenda, then, yes, we are very much guilty of that.

You know, I've shared a lot of personal stories here, and I've got more. I've had a lot of young people reach out to me. In some cases they have allowed me to share their stories publicly. In other cases I won't share, but I'll hold those stories. I'll take them to heart, and I'll take them seriously because they keep me motivated to continue fighting here in this House and beyond. So I want to share a story that a young person shared with me just last week. I'm not going to share his name, but I do have permission to share it with you. He says the following:

So growing up I moved around a lot from town to town, during which time I was struggling to discover my identity. At the time (around age 14-15) I only knew that I wasn't completely into or attracted to what family, school, or community told me I should be, and there was no queer representation in my small town. It wasn't until I was in high school in [my town – I won't name it] that I discovered that I identified as homosexual. Unfortunately for me that school and town environment was highly homophobic and embedded in abusive conservative Christian values. I truly did not feel like I belonged and for a long while actually felt that there was something wrong with me, as homophobic slurs and insults were the norm with students, teachers, and parents. I remember waiting until I graduated and left for university here in Edmonton until I came out, to make sure I was safe first to do so.

He said:

It wasn't until university did I discover that GSAs and queer culture were a thing, and many of my . . . peers told me stories

about the work their GSAs did to support other queer folk and raise awareness. I remember feeling incredibly let down that I wasn't given the opportunity to feel safe and welcomed growing up in school. So instead, I spent 2-3 years in university to volunteer for LGBTQ+ support centers and groups to learn more and give back to those who were in similar situations as I was. Many stories I heard were either about how folks' GSAs were so supportive of their journeys or how, like me, a lack of GSA or any queer representation was truly oppressive and, in some cases, fatal. One thing was clear: the presence of queer representation created an environment of safety and belonging. If anything, stories told to me showed that GSAs are a huge part of representation.

He continues:

Fast forward to today, I am thankful and lucky that I was able to discover my own identity and am now in a place where I feel safe to belong. I run my own business which I make my mission to be as queer safe and inclusive as possible . . . and I'm happy to be able to hold safe spaces for my queer friends who need a zone to exist. But at the same time, I'm aware of what's happening politically. Queer kids' lives are being put on the line by a government who calls us "whatevers." I've got homeless youth who come around talking about how their wages are being cut for working while being in school. And students, parents, queer communities, and allies are marching in opposition to the changes [that this government] are making that will put youth lives at risk. It's not right.

He says:

It's a scary time to be queer at this moment, and we are fighting hard to change that, but seeing leaders like yourself standing up for our queer kids and communities is inspiring and it shows that we haven't been forgotten about.

And he says:

Keep fighting that good fight . . . [and you're giving us] hope that we have the right to be safe and feel like we belong.

You know, his story is the story of many. I can tell you that I'm not exaggerating when I say that I've had a lot – a lot – of folks reach out to me on Facebook, on Instagram, on Twitter, in person at events. I know I'm not alone. I know that my colleagues have heard from many people as well. The Member for Lethbridge-West was at Lethbridge pride this weekend, and she said that she had hundreds of people speak to her and express their concerns but also their support for the work that we are doing. I was in Red Deer this past weekend, and I had a number of people come up to me with their concerns as well. One woman from a rural community shared with me that as a queer woman she's worried for herself, for her community, and for her family.

I don't think that we can minimize these experiences. We're talking about a lot of young people. We're talking about a lot of kids, a lot of families, and a lot of folks who are worried and who are affected by the possible changes that this government might make.

Now, again, I've got a lot of stories, because I've shared mine a few times in this House already, and I think it's important that folks in this Chamber realize that while we're talking about a minority, we're talking about a pretty significant minority. As I've said, we've heard from a lot of youth, for sure, but I've also heard from a lot of teachers. As a teacher myself I take teachers' professional judgment seriously, and I take their concerns seriously when I hear from teachers who say things like that they're worried their administration will dither if asked to create a GSA.

Keep in mind that we've got a lot of schools who are doing incredible things across this province. We've got a lot of schools that have really strong GSAs, QSAs that have been in place for a long time. But we've got other schools. Like I said, I taught in parts of rural Alberta, where I know there's work to be done, where I

know there are kids currently who don't feel safe. They don't feel safe at school, they don't feel safe at home, they may not feel safe in their broader community, and that's a worry for me.

What I would like to do is share the story of another young person. I actually spoke with this young person not too long ago as well, and he actually shared his story more publicly. He, Ben Angus, shared it in the *Red Deer Advocate*. I'm not going to read his whole story because I actually think some other folks in the House have already shared this. What I found interesting about his story is that he talks about his experience in a Catholic high school, and this is the concern that I've touched on a few times. He notes:

I approached my school's administration in hopes of starting a GSA. In response, I was told that if the school were to tell students "of that lifestyle" ("that lifestyle" meaning being queer) that it was OK to live the way they do, but they were not accepted at home and were to self-harm because of it, the burden would rest on my shoulders.

As he says:

This is an absurd burden to place on anyone, let alone a 17-year old who had only recently come to terms with his sexuality.

Now, I'm going to – I see that my time is going to run out.

11:00

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore has risen under 29(2)(a) to make a brief question or comment.

**Mr. Nielsen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood for her words but, more importantly, her advocacy. It is at a level that's absolutely stunning and something that I certainly aspire to. I know that this amendment is very, very important, and I was hoping that she might be willing to continue to explain why it is we need to move this to committee.

**Member Irwin:** Thank you to the Member for Edmonton-Decore. I'll finish with just sharing this young person, Ben's, concern.

As I started to say there, it's an absolutely absurd burden to put on a young person, that he would be responsible for any reaction to a GSA being instilled in the school. Now, what he says on Bill 8 – he actually gives a really good summary of it.

This is done by not guaranteeing the usage of the words "gay" and "queer," and forcing vulnerable students to have to appeal to the school board . . .

Put simply, this is . . . extremely problematic.

He says that he tried to fight for a GSA and that it led him to being outed to the school's administrative team before he had the opportunity to tell his own family. As he points out:

This was all legal and perfectly acceptable before [Bill 24 had passed] . . .

Those protections are so important: students need to know they won't have to fight to protect their own privacy.

The point is that there's still very much that concerns. I know there have been conversations around the privacy legislation, FOIP and PIPA. Again, we've got examples of schools – and I know there were examples when the former Education minister spoke with schools – where students didn't feel safe with their administration, and they were very much concerned about being outed with some teachers as well. Again, this is not to smear. I was a teacher. I was an administrator. I get it fully, and I get that often you're put in compromising situations, but there need to be extremely clear guidelines in place. I've heard my colleagues speak to some of the intricacies around the privacy legislation and whatnot. It's complicated. It's complex. For any teacher or administrator working day to day, that's a lot for them to try to navigate. I worry that Bill 8 won't be clear enough to protect our young people.

To get back to the member's question about why we need to amend this and move this to committee, I think that will give an

opportunity for us to delve more deeply into some of these really important conversations around privacy, around potential outing of students. I'm still concerned about the removal of the immediacy clause. As I said, I think that in some cases you may have school administrators who aren't dithering on purpose, they're not delaying on purpose, but they're trying to maybe, again, navigate the legislation and figure out how they can do this to still protect young people. Without that immediacy clause, we're talking about lives potentially being at risk here. That's not hyperbole at all.

I can tell you that I think it's really important that we take an evidence-based approach to this as well. We've brought in some of the stats. Myself and other members in this House have shared data that says that we're talking about significant issues with mental health. We know what happens, and we've got young people who have shared their stories in writing and have told me that we can share them publicly, that their lives are at risk here. I don't know what else we need to do. If it's not the countless stories of young people, I don't know what else we need to present to the folks opposite to convince them that this legislation needs to be further studied and needs to be referred to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities so that we can investigate some of these things a little bit more closely.

I do and I want to believe and I know that people in this Chamber have good intentions and have good hearts. I think we just need to take a step back because, as the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud talked about as well, there's a lot more to this than just the GSA piece. This is obviously something that is impactful for me, and it's something that makes me emotional, but I could go on ad nauseam on some of the other pieces around here, you know, whether it be the concerns for school boards about implementation because even if this bill . . . [Member Irwin's speaking time expired] I'll continue at another time.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, we are back on the amendment. Anyone wishing to speak to the amendment? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview has risen to join the debate.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise in support of this amendment referring the bill to the Committee on Families and Communities. Certainly, I know that we have heard from the minister herself, saying originally that Bill 8 had the best protections in Canada for LGBTQ kids. That has been revised as time has gone on. Now it's sort of among the strongest protections. But if this bill was referred to the committee, which I am highly recommending – I am on that committee along with many of my learned colleagues – we would be able to do some deep dive into it and be able to look at all of what is needed, indeed. It seems like the intent is that they do want to have the strongest protections, which, of course, we did have under our government, and we would like to, you know, help that process to continue, so I think that this referral makes a lot of sense.

Mr. Speaker, there are other aspects besides the significant focus on GSAs, which we all, certainly, on this side of the House believe are very important. Also, there has been a tremendous lack of consultation. School boards really haven't been part of this process in developing it, and really they should be a part of it. We know that with our Bill 24 we provided more than six months' notice before its coming into force and for some parts of it more than a year of lead time. You know, I find this quite ironic because that was something that was so important to the Official Opposition when we were government. Consultation was de rigeur. It was so important that that be done, and if we dared move without a very robust consultation process, that was reason for condemnation.

Unfortunately, now that they are in government, they don't seem to have the integrity of their previous words. I think that's a

concern, and I think it is a concern for the community, too, because they are just ramming this bill through. Referring it to committee would give us additional time to actually look more deeply at it and to see, maybe, some of the issues that it does bring up and that are, you know, needing to be addressed because I think it does put specifically LGBTQ students in a precarious situation.

We know that, certainly, many of us in this Assembly are parents. I know that, myself, I have three sons, and I care deeply for them, as parents do. But sometimes there are parents who are misguided. I must say from a professional stance also – I have been a social worker for 30 years – that I have worked with families who have significant challenges. Those challenges prevent the parents from really making good choices on behalf of their children, and I don't feel that it's because they are cruel or malicious. I feel that sometimes they have their own very significant mental health or addiction issues. They could have had their own experience of abuse. It could be exacerbated by poverty. There are so many things that get in the way, so these are often multiproblem families. As the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar said, children oftentimes who are homeless may identify as part of the LGBTQ community.

**11:10**

I guess I just wanted to be on record saying that these GSAs are really oftentimes very important safe havens for children who cannot safely be who they are in their family system, and that is such a tragedy. But when our government brought in Bill 24, that changed things significantly. I'm very concerned with how this new Bill 8 is actually now making it, you know, not support kids not as much, because if a student does ask for the creation of a GSA, there are really no timelines for implementation. You know, the principal doesn't have to – I mean, people have used the word “dither” – move forward on that. Having some time, a mechanism so that they have to respond in a timely manner, I think is very important because these kids need that support now. They probably needed it yesterday or the day before that. I'm very concerned that now it can kind of be put off for some time.

You know, when my middle son was in elementary, when he was probably in grade 4 or so, he was bullied. I didn't know that he was being bullied. He was sort of a shy, timid young fellow, and I didn't really find out about this until a couple of years later; therefore, I couldn't have been there to support him. I know how much that has affected him in his life, even to this day, and he's a 20-year-old young man. I can only imagine if he would have had to deal with his sexual identity being not part of sort of the dominant sexual identity, a heterosexual male, and how much that would have exacerbated things for him.

I'm speaking already of, you know, a young fellow who had been bullied, but for someone who is struggling to find their place in the world, who doesn't have these kinds of supports, it is, I think, just the wrong way to go. Therefore, referring this to committee would actually give us some opportunity to review it further and look at how we can make this stronger. It seems like that was the intent of the minister. She very clearly did proclaim wanting it to be the strongest in Canada. The committee could certainly do that work to support that.

My colleagues have spoken for some time about the efficacy of gay-straight alliances and referred to various research. I'm just going to refer to some further research that does talk about it and just the benefits for the whole school system. You know, it's really quite a tremendous shift that happens when gay-straight alliances have been established. Oftentimes it is a cumulative effect. When they first come in, people are getting used to it, but when they've been in for one, two, three years, the schools have found that the whole community becomes inclusive, much more acceptance for all.

I'm just going to refer to some research here from B.C. It says: we know that LGBTQ students are at a higher risk for suicide in part because they are more often targeted for bullying and discrimination, but heterosexual students can also be the target of homophobic bullying; when policies and supportive programs like GSAs are in place long enough to change the environment of the school, it's better for students' mental health no matter what their orientation. So it's beneficial for all. It just shows how important these are and how important it is to have them established over a period of time.

I just, again, would like to support acceptance of this amendment so that we can make sure that the legislation for GSAs in our province is the strongest in the country, like it is, actually, now and was brought in by our government.

I also want to talk a little bit about a young man that I know. He's in his mid-20s, maybe going towards his later 20s now. When he went to school, there were no gay-straight alliances in his high school or junior high. Now this young man has an undergraduate degree. He has a responsible job, he takes care of himself and pays all his own bills, and he has lots of great relationships with many people. But he's never come out to his parents. He's never told them that he is a gay man. He's still afraid despite, you know, the maturity of age. So I just would like the members to think about how students are in junior high and high school, how terrifying it would be for them. It isn't part of sort of straight culture. If you have parents, likely they're straight because, obviously, they have a heterosexual relationship if they're your biological parents. So even older adults are afraid to come out despite having many other successes and supports.

This is something that is just really sort of a humanitarian thing to do: to make sure that students are protected, that GSAs can be created quickly to support, and that the whole school, both gay and straight kids, can be included in that. All benefit because there's a much more broad acceptance of difference, and difference is okay. We don't all have to be the same. I think that this is, you know, a very important piece of legislation and something that we shouldn't be cavalier about. It is something that will protect children and will protect lives, and we've talked about that for such a long time.

Mr. Speaker, you know, I guess I'm just focusing on sort of two aspects of it. One of the aspects is something that I feel like the opposition lectured me on substantially when our government was in power. It's really incumbent on them to be responsible and to be consulting with the community, with school boards, with teachers, and with students themselves so that they're getting a good understanding of the decisions that they're making when they're creating this legislation, Bill 8.

We also know that, really, the last consultations on the Education Act were back in 2012, so half of the trustees currently elected were not elected then, were not part of that consultation, and don't know anything about it. So it's just good process. It's really supporting people, to be able to have their input and to make good decisions, you know, barring that we go back completely to the drawing board on this bill, that it be referred to the Families and Communities Committee so that we can look at making sure that it has those best protections, that we understand members on both sides of the House want in this bill. I'm just cautioning the government to be careful about moving forward too rapidly on something that is really a very serious matter and that makes a huge difference in children's lives. We want to make sure.

Even though we know that parents, you know, love their children, they sometimes make poor decisions regarding them. As I've said previously, as a social worker I know that first-hand. It doesn't mean that those parents are cruel. It often means that those parents aren't very healthy themselves and that they need assistance and

support. Children live in environments that may be unhealthy. This haven of a GSA in a school, especially for a son or daughter, a child, who is struggling with their sexual identity, which is extremely confusing for them and hard for them to understand, would go a long way to supporting them.

**11:20**

I mean, many of the hon. members on this side have spoken about the very tragic situation of a student contemplating taking their own life or actually taking their life. We know that children who are part of GSAs, who have the support in their school environment even if they don't in their family system, do oftentimes make better choices in terms of their own mental health and caring for themselves and don't do extreme things because they feel so desperate that they don't know what to do. They feel strange. They don't fit in anywhere. That's what a GSA can provide to them, acceptance in those places.

So, Mr. Speaker . . .

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore has risen to ask a brief question or comment under 29(2)(a).

**Mr. Nielsen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the member's comments. I hope to tap in a little bit to her profession as a social worker when we're talking about consulting fully with all our stakeholders, including our students. When we look at potentially bypassing that, not giving the largest stakeholders, the members, the kids, that partake in these GSAs, when we deny that, what kind of impact could that have on things like their mental health going forward? What kind of example is that setting for them, that as legislators we would be clearly failing at?

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Well, thank you very much. Certainly, when policy is created, you know, we as legislators come together, and as we've talked about previously, sometimes there's consultation; sometimes there's not. But what happens oftentimes when there's not is that there may be unintended consequences. Those unintended consequences aren't necessarily something that the legislators, obviously, because they're unintended, meant to create by putting forward the legislation, but indeed they're doing it anyway because they're not doing the full job of proper development of legislation. So it's not only the people who will benefit from GSAs, like the students themselves, but it also should be the teachers, the principals, the school boards, certainly families, parents, professionals in the area. It should be a robust consultation because then you get the best policy.

You know, earlier today, Mr. Speaker, we had the passage of a bill, a private member's bill. Certainly, I'm on the private members' committee with other members, and one of the things that our caucus wanted to do was to do some consultation on that bill. We wanted to make sure of some things that we might just innocently not know, because we're not necessarily experts in that area or we don't have the lived experience of people who will be impacted by this, and unfortunately we were sort of voted down in that committee, and there couldn't be any consultation.

Then there was an amendment today that actually was from some stakeholders that, you know, members on the other side did speak to, and then they decided to amend it themselves. So good for them. But it just kind of made me scratch my head because I thought: well, isn't that what we wanted? We do want to talk to those people who have that lived experience, who have to implement it, who are the professionals who are working in that area.

You know, it is just kind of part of a healthy process in development. Sometimes it's not just when it's created, but it should also be along the time of implementation because we may find out some things that nobody realized along the way. It's kind of like a living policy so that we want it to most effectively serve, you know, students, for example, in this case.

I think that point was made, was sort of proven earlier today, when the government did decide to accept some feedback from stakeholders. I think that when we start making assumptions about what's right or what's wrong or what we should do, we are doing a disservice. You know, we're not really doing the job of our position. If we think that just because we have an experience, just because we're elected officials, that transcends everyone's experience, I think that we're sadly mistaken. I feel like that can cause grave issues for people who are impacted most directly by that policy.

Certainly, those sitting at the table: are those people around that table who are giving feedback a diverse group of people, or do they all have the same backgrounds? We know that that makes a significant difference, Mr. Speaker, in terms of how good and how appropriate policy is. I know, you know, from my many years of living, that a lot of times I didn't get to be at the table and that people made decisions for me that often were not beneficial.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, is there anyone else wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Government House Leader although I'm not sure that you haven't already spoken to the amendment.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** I checked already with the Clerk, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Wonderful. That was very wise of you.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Just thought I'd get ahead of that for you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Government House Leader.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Always happy to help.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak on the amendment, which is a referral amendment, I believe, to send Bill 8 to committee. Mr. Speaker, it's interesting to listen to some of the comments that we've heard tonight. You know, the reality is that Bill 8 is a piece of legislation that does not refer to the issue that the hon. members of the opposition want to continue to spend their time talking about rather than the content of Bill 8.

I'd like to talk briefly, in my time on this referral amendment, about some of the comments that were made by the Official Opposition in regard to GSAs and also in regard to some of the comments that have been made about consultation and the need for this legislation to go to committee. There have been a lot of comments made, Mr. Speaker, by the opposition, today and other days during debate on Bill 8, in regard to the fact that somehow Alberta will no longer have protection for GSAs if this bill was to pass.

Now, the hon. the Education minister has done a great job presenting to this House why that, in fact, is not true, as have many other members of the government in question period and members of the government caucus who have spoken about this bill during debate. Now, for her trouble in expressing that, she's been continually bullied by the Official Opposition, which is disappointing. But that's the approach that they seem to want to take. The problem, Mr. Speaker, is that if they continue to do this, they continue to lose the trust of Albertans. What they're talking about, in fact, is just not reality when it comes to this legislation.

You're probably interested to know, Mr. Speaker, what steps will be taken in regard to GSAs if Bill 8 was to pass in this Assembly sometime in the near future, and I think it's important that we state this for the record.

Step 1: a student or students will ask a staff member at a school to start a GSA. That will still take place.

Step 2: the principal will permit the GSA. That will still take place.

Step 3: the principal designates a staff liaison to support the GSA.

Step 4: the students – this is very important because the hon. members in the opposition continue to either not understand or the opposition continues to misrepresent the facts on this very important issue – select a group name. Very different, Mr. Speaker, than what the opposition continues to say in this place.

Step 5: if the principal cannot find a staff liaison, the principal informs both the board and the minister, and then the minister appoints a responsible adult.

Step 6: as a student-led group the students, with support from the staff liaison, plan the next steps such as meeting dates, times, and activities.

Mr. Speaker, six steps, and then a GSA is formed, with no difference between how it is today and how it will be after Bill 8 is passed in this House if that is what this Assembly decides.

I understand if the members opposite – actually, Mr. Speaker, I don't understand anymore why the members opposite continue to have trouble understanding this. This has been discussed inside this House significantly. The Education Act is clear. The legislation guarantees that students are entitled to create groups, including GSAs and QSAs.

**11:30**

That is a direct contradiction of what the Official Opposition continues to present inside this place, Mr. Speaker. I find it quite appalling, the approach that the Official Opposition has chosen to take with this legislation, refusing to even discuss this important piece of legislation in this House, instead focusing on something that is not reality and implying to this Chamber and, worse yet, implying to LGBTQ kids and adolescents and children that are in schools that GSAs will not still, in fact, be in place after Bill 8 passes. That is not a reality, and it does an extreme disservice to students and to people that are counting on GSAs going forward. I find it quite disappointing, and I'm sure that students will, when they realize after Bill 8 is passed that nothing has changed, be quite disappointed in the Official Opposition's behaviour.

Now, in addition to that, there have been a lot of points brought up by the Official Opposition in regard to consultation and that somehow this was not spoken about. I have read the platform inside this Chamber during other portions of Bill 8 debate when it comes to that very fact, and as you know, Mr. Speaker, because I'm sure you had to campaign on it in your own constituency, our platform is very, very clear that we would be going forward with the Education Act. That is not a secret. That is a pretty broad form of consultation that ended up with the people of Alberta speaking in record numbers on April 16, giving a clear mandate to the United Conservative Party, who is now government, to go forward with their plan on Bill 8, which is exactly what the Education minister is doing.

Mr. Speaker, I know the Education minister. She's not going to blink just because the Official Opposition bullies her and comes to this place and misrepresents facts. That's not what's going to happen to the Education minister or anybody in this government. The people of Alberta spoke on April 16 and sent us here with clear instructions on how to proceed.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I do understand that the Official Opposition continues to not want to accept the judgment that Albertans cast on them on April 16, which was a clear – you know, clearly, they fired them, overwhelmingly. I know that in constituencies like yours and mine people lined up for hours just to be able to cast their votes on the very first day. In my constituency I had people as far away as the United States, who were working, drop their work just to come back in person to vote, travelling all that way because they wanted to make sure their ballots were counted on election night. They did not want to risk it being counted in advance polls or advance ballots. That's how much they wanted to fire this former government.

Now, granted, in my constituency 82 per cent of people voted for the Conservative Party, and only 18 per cent voted for other parties. Mr. Speaker, yours was similar. I think you may have been about 60 or so votes behind the great riding of Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, but it was pretty clear in the places . . .

**The Speaker:** Who's counting?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Yeah. Who's counting? Absolutely, Mr. Speaker.

. . . that we represented that there was a clear mandate from Albertans to be able to proceed with this. That's not just in rural Alberta, where we come from; it was in rural central Alberta, I should say. It was in northern Alberta. It was in Calgary. It was in the greater Edmonton area, where there were clear instructions that the NDP had to go.

It was interesting. I talked a little bit earlier in my other speech tonight on Bill 8, Mr. Speaker, I mean under 29(2)(a), about the reaction to the Sundre parade this year. As you know, the Sundre parade is one of my favourite days of the year to be able to travel through the community of Sundre and enjoy the rodeo and our pancake breakfasts and see all my friends and neighbours. But it was pretty clear, even at the parade as the crowds kept telling us, me and the hon. minister of agriculture, who was travelling with me through the Sundre parade this weekend, to continue to implement the agenda that we promised, to continue to not let the NDP bully us. They made sure it was clear that they were with us a hundred per cent, as they were with us on April 16. That's the mandate that we'll bring through this Assembly despite the fact that the NDP continues to be Team Angry and angry at Albertans as a result of that or, more importantly, as the Premier has rightly pointed out, to have no humility, to continue to not understand the mistakes that they made.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview laughing, Mr. Speaker. That's exactly what I'm referring to, just no recognition of the fact that when they were in government, they made so many terrible mistakes that they went on their way to become the only one-term government in the history of this province. The only one-term government in the history of this province: I don't think that's something that I would be very, very proud of. I think, at its core, that comes down to the fact that they continue, because of the behaviour that you see now and even when they were in government, to completely ignore the people of Alberta, to come to this Chamber and misrepresent facts then as government, now as an opposition, and expect Albertans to fall for it. Well, they didn't fall for it on April 16, and they're not falling for it now. The Official Opposition should try to do a little better. I know they're struggling with it, but I wish them the very best as they go through that process, because the Official Opposition has an important job. It ain't this, though.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

It's not to come to this place and misrepresent facts and to scare LGBTQ children and youth that they're not going to have their GSAs, which is all that this opposition has spent their time doing.

Madam Speaker, good to see you tonight.

As I said earlier, it's shameful, and unfortunately it's what it appears the Official Opposition has become inside this province. That's disappointing, but our government will head a different way.

With that said, Madam Speaker, I will move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

**The Deputy Speaker:** The House stands adjourned – oh.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** One more step to go, Madam Speaker. I appreciate your enthusiasm, though. With that, I will move to adjourn the Legislature until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:36 p.m.]





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